

OF  
GREED  
AND  
GLORY

E. A. OLIVIERI

## Content Warning

Death, murder, descriptions of violence, gore and torture, descriptions of battle and killing, discrimination, alcohol use and addiction, on-page sex and sexual acts, depictions of mental health struggles and PTSD.

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In the spirit of reconciliation I, E. A. Olivieri, acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. I pay my respects to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

This book was written on Whadjuk Nyoongar Country.

**OTHER TITLES BY E. A. OLIVIERI**

*Tales of Carynthia*  
*Ashwood and Brimstone*

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# CARYNTHIA





# A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE LAND OF CARYNTHIA

Before the humans and elves ruled Carynthia, there were only goblins and fairies. Created by the Mother and Father before all other beings, and gifted with Their magic, they lived in a kind of peace for a time, before the goblins grew angry with the fairies.

For fairies were creatures of chaos, much like their Mother, and did not respect the autonomy of others.

The Goblin Queen, sick of dealing with fairy meddlings, ordered an item to be made and enchanted to ward against fairy magic. Word of the enchanted object spread across Carynthia and into the ears of fairies.

Enraged by the resistance against their magic, the fairies declared war against the goblins.

The war raged for years, bloody and unforgiving, but the tide began to turn in favor of the goblins after they constructed an army of stone creatures enchanted to hunt and kill fairies. In an act of desperation, the fairies called upon a new race, a foreign race—elves.

They lived in a land across the sea, a sea filled with monsters that was too dangerous to cross without the assistance of fairy magic; but with it and the promise of great blessings, the elves crossed the sea and helped the fairies in their war.

The goblins' stone creatures stood no chance against the onslaught of the elves. Many lives were lost, the goblins dwindled in numbers and, in the harshest of ways, a new race was born—Orcs. Loathed by all, they served as a terrible reminder of the cruel happenings of war.

As payment for their services, the elves were given dominion over the land of Carynthia; four elves were chosen by the fairies to receive their blessing. The fiercest warrior, Osira, was gifted the power of death; her brother Isidan, a knowledgeable healer, was gifted the power of life. Sillesse, a proud farmer whose hard work had kept the armies fed, was gifted the power to imbue her crops with magic so that they would never fail and, because of her caring nature, was also gifted

the ability to speak with all manner of land beasts. Last was Callan, the Master of Ships; he was gifted gills, allowing him to breathe underwater and the ability to speak to sea creatures so that he should never fear sailing the waters beyond.

The fairies' triumph was short-lived, however. For when the Father looked down on his wife's creation he wept at the abuse of their powers and banished them to the dense woods. In retaliation, the Mother took the goblins' enchanting magic away but took pity on their dwindling numbers and left them free to reside in the mainland.

The four elves would go on to spread their magic through their lineage until we are left with the Carynthia we know now, ruled by humans and four new races of elves.

At last, after millenia of on and off war, the land of Carynthia had stumbled into the semblance of peace. The seemingly endless fighting between Isidia and Osiria had halted for the first time in centuries. The Queen of Isidia took this moment of quiet to marry the Prince of her longtime ally, Carracalla, solidifying the relationship between the two lands. Not long after, the union was blessed and a baby was born.

The new King's family and all high ranking Isidians were invited to celebrate the blessing of the new Princess; a sacred occasion beseeching the gods to grant their favor to this child and aid in the establishment of a new dynasty that would change the very fate of Carynthia.



# CHAPTER ONE

I broke through the pile of cushions, sucking in a much-needed gulp of fresh air.

The sun was shining harshly through the open window and I winced as the noise from the docks below echoed inside my pounding head. My stomach turned and I feared I would lose its contents before I could make it to the window—or a chamber pot. I pulled myself up through the mountain of mismatched silk, tassels, and frills, being careful to climb over the pale, naked bodies and limbs of the Isidian paramours that had kept me company the night before. I might have still been legless, but that wasn't going to stop me appreciating the sight of bare breasts and buttocks in the morning. A body to my right rolled over and grabbed my ankle.

“Bellona, where are you going?” he asked. I couldn't remember his name, had we picked him up in the tavern or on the street?

“To piss and throw up, want to join me?”

He groaned and rolled back over. “Not into that.”

I shrugged and continued on.

We'd started at the palace, a dinner with Eevan and Islina, then I left with some servants and headed into town, unable to stand the disapproving looks from my sister-in-law any longer. We'd drunk in the tavern for hours, smashing down tankard after tankard. I was then led to a back alley den where we smoked some strange Aurali substance that left us senseless for only the Mother and Father knew how long, and then we'd ended here—the only whorehouse in the whole of Lonthia.

I sighed as I relieved myself over the chamber pot, my stomach settling a slight amount as the pressure on my bladder loosened. I stood for a moment, getting a feel for how my stomach was handling the abuse I'd inflicted on it the night before, trying to decide whether or not I should force myself to throw up to make myself feel better. I decided I was fine and turned around to assess

the damage to the room. There almost always was some kind of damage after a good night, especially when I was involved.

The Isidian brothel had multiple rooms, each one decorated to a different theme; the room we'd chosen last night was the Sillessian room. There was no bed, just hundreds of beautifully embroidered pillows, bright coloured curtains lined the walls and ceilings, mimicking the inside of a tent. What little furniture there was had been made in the same raw-style that real Sillessian furniture was. Like the chairs carved out of tree stumps that, from the back, still looked like a regular old stump; it was the same with the vanity toward the back of the room, where an Isidian elf was fixing her black hair in the dirty mirror. I frowned at the reflection in the mirror—I didn't remember her either. I usually made it a point to remember everyone I slept with, but the last night was a blur. All I could recall were flashes of limbs and the glorious sounds of pleasure.

The Isidian gave me a sour look through the mirror as if I'd offended her somehow, but I was sure she hadn't thought that last night when I'd most likely had my face buried between her slim thighs.

My head rang as the bells from the temple sounded through the city, echoing painfully off stone buildings and walkways. A collective groan sounded from everyone in the room, followed by more heads bursting up through the mass of cushions, a few curses as some realized they were late for work or would be found missing by family or spouses. People began frantically dressing and leaving the room. I simply lit my pipe and lounged on the open window, watching the chaos unfold.

"For fuck's sake, Bellona."

I choked on my pipe smoke and reached for the nearest curtain to cover myself "Darius! What the pit are you doing here?!"

"Looking for you in the only place you could be." My brother's eyes were fixed to the ceiling of the room. "You're late, hurry up and get dressed. Eevan is pissed."

"What for? I'm enriching his economy," I said, taking a drag from my pipe.

"And missing his daughter's blessing."

Fuck.

I pushed off the window sill and dug for clothes, any clothes that I could find that were half suitable for a blessing ceremony. If Eevan was pissed, Islina would be murderous, and I was already on her shit-list after leaving halfway through dinner last night. I threw on the first shirt I found, it was too tight on my arms and shoulders, the pants I found too big. Somehow in the mess I managed to dig up my own boots. I dashed past Darius in the doorway, smoothing my hair back with the layer of grease that coated it from my hard night.

"You look like shit," Darius observed.

"Gee, thanks," I shot back.

We raced up the winding stone paths to the temple, the streets thronging with people longing to be included in the affairs of the royals, and pushed through the circle of guards keeping the people back, both of us breathless and covered in sweat.

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I pushed the doors of the temple open and they slammed back against the thick marble pillars, the noise echoing through the sacred space. Every person in attendance spun to face me: Isidian courtiers, pale, black haired and green eyes; and my own people, Carracallan, gray skinned, black eyed and blue haired.

My shoulders sagged.

I offered a small smile to my brother and his wife, standing centered over the altar, their newborn nestled in their arms. I could tell Eevan was furious—then once he took in what I looked like he looked as if he wanted to laugh, at me or the whole situation I didn't know. Islina was seething, I was glad that we were in a sacred place, otherwise I truly believed she would have killed me.

Darius and I slipped up the side aisle, past rows of people seated on carved stone benches facing the white marble altar. The priest had resumed spouting his bullshit to the congregation, my brother listening intently to the ritual for his precious child.

"Bellona Glenon, you will make this up to your brother," my mother hissed as I sat beside her on one of the uncomfortable stone pews, pain shooting through my rear. Whatever alcohol or other substance that had remained in my system this morning had started to wear off, and I was beginning to feel the aftermath of last night. I shifted my hips so that I was sitting more on my left cheek.

"I know, I know." I waved her off. My head was pounding, sweat trickling down my brow.

"You smell horrendous, where did Darius find you? Actually, I don't want to know." She held up her hand, as if I'd planned on answering.

I rolled my eyes. I would never live this down.

"With this water, I bless this child under the watch of the Father, and with this fire, in the name of our Mother, the Mother of all and the Father of all. May they keep this child healthy and safe under their watchful gaze for as long as she may live."

My eyes began to flutter, my hands shaking. The priest's words began to muddle together in my head. I couldn't keep track of what part of the ceremony we were up to. It had been so long since I'd been to worship, it wasn't something we did in Carracalla, our connection to the sea meant more to us than the gods, who may have created it but had no control over it. I tried to chant with the other attendees, but found that I'd forgotten the words. I stood when I should have kneeled, and sat when I should have stood.

I struggled not to laugh at myself and Peverell, my other brother, sighing with frustration beside me every time I got something wrong. Islina's shoulders were rising higher and higher with each one of my mistakes, until they were practically touching her jaw.

No, this family event would not end well for me.

The ceremony ended with Eevan and Islina placing the baby's hands in a bowl each, one of cold water, which had shocked the babe into crying, and one warm, each symbolizing the Father and the Mother. The Priest said his last blessing over the baby and the congregation rose to chant their response. I was late to rise, my head aching from the screams of my infant niece, and I'd forgotten the response.

So instead I mumbled some nonsense and crashed back down into my pew, sucking in a sharp breath as I sat flat on my arse and it kindly reminded me how much it hurt.

"I now present to you, Princess Evalina Elsrine Glenon of Isidia, blessed by the Mother and Father," The Isidian preacher proclaimed.

The crowd erupted with cheers.

I shrunk back from the noise, practically cowering behind my mother as my head throbbed.

Evalina, I almost laughed—it showed how lacking in creativity my brother and sister-in-law were. Elsrine, that I could let pass, a homage to her matrilineal lines. My mind got to thinking of what Queen Elsbeth could have been like, to have a daughter like Islina. She had either been absent or a brute, surely, to produce such a bitch of a daughter.

I followed my family as they exited the temple, not likely to enter another until the next niece or nephew was born. Instead of continuing with them to fawn over the baby and her newly revealed names, I walked to the side of the temple and emptied my stomach behind a bush. The rush of the morning had been too much after what I'd done to myself the night before.

"Bell."

I flinched, I was in for it now. "Eev, beautiful ceremony. Congrats on ... all that ... and what beautiful names." My charms had never worked on Eevan—we were too alike.

"You looked like you were going to shit yourself the whole time. Are you still drunk from last night?" He was trying to sound annoyed, concerned, but it came off more amused and ... maybe a little jealous.

"Not still drunk, and if I'd shat myself I probably would have died." I joked, rubbing my sore arse.

Eevan pinched the bridge of his nose "Bell, you're making this really hard for me. If you don't buck up, Islina's going to ban you from the kingdom."

"It was just a bit of fun! Come on Eev, you remember fun, right? We used to have it before your wife castrated you."

My brother's face darkened "It's not funny, Bellona. This was the one day I wanted you present, for Evalina. I thank the Father that she, at least, will not remember this." He took a deep breath, his black eyes fixing on the blue sky above. "I want you to be part of her life, but Islina won't let that happen if you don't sort yourself out."

I rolled my eyes. "As if she could stop me." When his frown became more downturned and he made to reply, I quickly placed a hand on his shoulder. "I'm joking brother! I'll be better. Last night was an accident, I didn't mean for it to go so far." I ruffled his blue hair. "I'll be better."

Eevan pulled away from me and tried to flatten his hair before returning to his wife and child. The brother I had once known was gone—he was a husband now, a father. We would have no more parties or adventures. My stomach churned as I watched him kiss his wife and steal his child away from her, gazing lovingly into his daughter's eyes.

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They'd stolen him from me. My best friend. The only one that understood me.

I decided to walk up to the castle, ahead of the planned procession. Along with the now constant pain radiating from my arsehole, my legs were burning and my hips ached.

I must have had a great night. I wished I could remember it better.

The castle grounds of Lonthia were beautiful, I had to give Islina that—she knew how to look after a palace. The walls were clean, the white stones glowing so brightly in the sun it made my head throb to look at them. The garden was well maintained, nothing overgrown or creeping. In Carracalla, we cared more for our ships. The villages were mostly wooden shacks, the castle little more than a leaking ruin, but our fleets were a sight to behold. Even from the gardens of the palace, I could see them down in the docks, gleaming in the sun.

I could spot my baby, The Siren's Shriek, from any distance. She was my pride and joy, a gift from my brothers after completing my first voyage. It was an important coming of age tradition for my people; we had to complete a solo voyage to prove our strong knowledge of and connection to the sea. A tradition that made sense. We showed our respect to the sea—lest it swallow us whole—rather than spend time in a temple worshiping gods that couldn't give a rat's arse if we lived or died. There was not a scratch on her, not one single barnacle, and there never would be. My mother had cringed at the name when I'd excitedly yelled it the second the great ship was presented to me; it was a nod to her heritage, one she would never confirm but also never deny.

I hated to be on land, wasn't used to the stillness of it anymore, or how many people were ... everywhere. I loved my crew, they were an extension of my family, but they stayed on the ship, doing maintenance and staying away from the properness of society. We were a rather improper bunch.

I let out a sigh under the judgmental gazes of the Lonthian servants on my back as I made my way to my rooms. I knew how it looked, that I was arriving before anyone else, but I'd rather get cleaned up for the rest of the event than be at my niece's blessing party smelling like alcohol, the unknown Aurali substance and sex.

I'd managed to bathe and dress before the rest of the party had made their way back to the palace. I felt slightly better after my bath, my head clear, my body relaxed after soaking in the hot water. My naval uniform was all I had that suited the formal occasion, with pale pants, hose, and waistcoat, and a deep-blue, double-breasted jacket that matched my hair perfectly. I'd slicked back my short locks with oil—it was too long to leave free—so I knew it and the gold buttons of my jacket gleamed in the afternoon light shining through the destroyed roof of the Isidian throne room that dimmed only when the shadow of the enchanted autumnal leaves, spelled to fall from the non-existent ceiling, swept over the party below.

I stuck to the edges of the room, smoking my pipe and waiting for my family to arrive, considering what to say to Islina to redeem myself—even slightly. I

hadn't thought I'd done anything wrong at dinner, I was just trying to liven things up, and Islina had glared at me from the other side of the table the whole time. I'd thought she'd want to hear of Eevan's and my adventures, but clearly I'd kept one too many damning details in that should have remained withheld.

I didn't have a clear measure of what was deemed too improper by Isidian conventions, it was part of the reason that Eevan and I had grown so far apart after he'd begun courting Islina. I was too crass for her liking. People from the ceremony continued to trickle in, taking up space between the over-decorated tables, people I had no interest in conversing with. From the looks they threw me, I assumed they felt the same way. How lucky that I was fourth born, that no one was required to know me and I could be left to my own devices.

I tapped on the bowl of my pipe, sending embers flitting through the air before me. I reflexively blew them away from my face before they could float into my eyes, immediately realizing my mistake as they rose in the air, setting one of the leaves alight. I watched the leaf tumble through the air with my breath held, hoping it would land on the floor so I could stamp it out, but it swooped higher on a breeze from the open door.

My family entered the hall, Islina trailing behind Eevan, baby Evalina raised above his head, as the table closest to me was suddenly ablaze. I snuffed my pipe with my thumb and threw it to the ground as I rushed to pat out the flames. Shouting servants rushed over, calling for buckets of water, then splashing them over the table to put out the fire and saturating me in the process. I spun to apologize to my family, my brother, but Islina was already there, her face contorted with rage.

"Get out," she hissed.

"It was an accident, I'm sorr—"

"Get. Out." She ground out, hands shaking at her sides.

My face fell. I looked to Eevan, his face stern. I dropped my hands and walked around my sister-in-law towards the door. My shoulders caved inward as I felt the eyes of the other guests follow me to the entrance. Darius and Mira, her hands resting on her large pregnant belly, gave me sympathetic looks that said, 'we'd join you if it didn't mean Islina would come after us next'. I shrugged at them and continued to the doors.

"Bellona? Where are you going?"

I cringed at my father's voice. He was leaning against a pillar at the entrance of the hall, smoking his own pipe. "Islina kicked me out," I said bluntly.

He took a drag and held the smoke in his mouth for a long while before releasing it. "Did you really want to be here anyway?" He asked as if he already knew the answer.

"Well, I wanted to be here for Eev, and he wanted me here for Evalina."

He puffed on his pipe again. "Your brother knows you well enough to know you mean no harm. Islina will learn, too, just give her time." He gave me a one-armed hug, forcing the air from my lungs. "We're family, after all, the only family she's got," he added solemnly. "Go to the tavern, or wherever it is that you go, celebrate your way." He winked at me before snuffing his own pipe as

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I had and entering the hall, Eevan's calming voice echoed out—he was giving a speech. No doubt thanking everyone for attending and apologizing for his disruptive destructive little sister. At least my father understood. He knew I didn't do these things out of spite or need of attention. They just happened, as if I had been born destined for a life of chaos.

SAMPLE



## CHAPTER TWO

The sun was setting by the time I'd collected coin from my room and begun my descent back into the village and I was glad for it. A cool wind rose up from the docks, halting any sweat forming on my brow.

I kicked a stone as I walked, imagining it was Islina's head, wishing it was that simple to free myself from her. She'd hung around our family like a bad smell for years. First pining after Darius until he'd met Mira, then constantly asking for assistance from my father after her parents died in the war—I guess that I could understand—and then she'd realized Eevan, who had been pining after her for what felt like centuries, wasn't too lowly of a person for Her Majesty to consider. And so she'd stolen him from me.

We'd done everything together before her, had been the best of friends. I should've been happy for him, but something deep in my gut burned every time I saw them together.

I took a seat at the bar of the first tavern I came across and ordered three drinks for myself, skolling the first two and sipping on the third, contemplating my brother's words. I did want to be there for my niece, Father knows she'd need someone fun in her life, but was it worth dealing with Islina? My father's words echoed through my head, 'the only family she's got'. I picked at the rough wood of the bar top and sighed. He was right, I should make more of an effort with her, especially if I wanted to see my niece and my brother.

I winked at the barman as he filled my tankard, receiving a blush and quick grin before he turned to service his other patrons. Was my body ready for more sex? After a quick assessment, I settled on yes, as long as we stayed away from my arse. I'd need a few days to recover that.

"Hard day?"

I scoffed at the male next to me. "I'm surprised the gossip hasn't reached you all down here yet."



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"Oh, it has. I was being polite." He chuckled into his tankard. "Did you really try to set the palace on fire?"

I rolled my eyes at the exaggeration. "It was an accident. That whole throne room is a fire hazard."

The Isidian laughed again and signaled to the barman to refill his drink.

"You like to knock it back don't you?" he asked.

"S'pose so," I replied, having a mouthful of my own drink.

"Then why don't we make this a little more interesting? Put a smile back on that glum face of yours."

My brows rose. "And what do you have in mind?"

He signaled for the barman. "How about a drinking game? From what I hear, you're not one to run from a little competition. Whoever can drink the most wins," he said with a snide grin.

I laughed. "What could you possibly have to offer me?"

"See, it's already working! Everything in my coin purse, and"—he dug around in his coat, too thick for the current weather, and slammed a roll of parchment on the bar—"a map to ancient goblin treasure, from a time before elves had arrived here."

My brows rose as I moved to retrieve the map for inspection, but the Isidian snatched it away with a pale hand.

"I'm to believe you without seeing it for myself?"

"A little mystery only adds to the fun and, really, what have you got to lose?" He shrugged.

My fingers tapped the side of my tankard as I considered. "And what's in it for you?"

"How about"—he tapped a pale finger on his chin—"the contents of your coin purse and your company for the rest of the night." A boozy smirk slid across his face.

"Barkeep," I called, "how many's he had?"

The barman thought for a second. "Same as you, once you finish that." He nodded to my ale.

I slammed it down, belching loudly as it sunk into my stomach.

The Isidian and I moved to a different table so that we were sitting across from each other and had the bar staff set it with rounds of spirits. We'd both already drunk four tankards of ale and decided twenty shots would be a good amount but would only stop drinking after one of us either threw up or passed out.

I took the first shot, staring into the green eyes of my competition, ignoring the others around us now placing bets.

When we each had five shots left, we were both swaying in our seats. We'd had multiple bathroom breaks, with someone following us in to make sure we weren't forcing ourselves to throw up—there's nothing quite like having someone watch you piss.

Damon, my competitor, had begun getting more and more irate the more he drank, picking fights with people he heard placing bets against him.

"You know who that is, right?" One laughed. "I'm not betting against Bellona Glenon in a drinking game." My supporters in the crowd cheered.

I straightened in my chair, reaching for my sixteenth shot of spirits. I held in the urge to laugh as the room around me seemed to ripple, distorting the faces of those surrounding me. I knocked back the shot and everyone went silent, watching and waiting to see if it would be the one to take me down, but I was fine. Damon gave an irritated grunt as I placed my shot glass back on the wooden table.

"Fuck." He sighed as he leant forward to reach for his next shot and knocked one over in the process, the liquid spilling over his lap. Damon hissed as his hand continued to sway before him. I stopped myself from grinning at my impending win.

He finally managed to pick up a glass but sloshed the liquid down the sides and fell forward onto the table, splashing me with the contents of his drink. I pushed away from the table and brushed the liquid off my pants.

"I suppose that means I win!" I announced to the crowd and was met with an equal number of cheers and groans as people collected and lost their bets. I swooped around the table and with a small knife that had been hidden in the lining of my coat, cut Damon's coin purse from his belt and fished the map from his jacket. I gave the money to the barman and left. I'd had my win for the night, and Damon had been right, the little competition had lightened my mood. But it was time to turn in before things got out of hand ... again.

I had planned to go straight to my rooms, but my drunken mind told me to seek out Eevan—even though he was pissed with me. I shushed a set of decorative armor that collapsed to the ground as I stumbled down a palace hallway, shaking off the hands of servants trying to assist me. A loud bang rumbled through the library as I opened the door and fell through it. The carpets were soft beneath my bare feet as I fumbled my way through the vast room, leaning on bookshelves to keep myself upright and leaving a trail of books in my wake. Where had my boots gone? Why was everything so white? I pitied the servants that had to keep Lonthia clean.

"Shit!" I exclaimed as I fell into a large candelabra and it clattered loudly to the ground, the candles tumbling out and scattering across the floor. I raced after them on my hands and knees, patting out the flames that survived the fall.

"Bellona, what are you doing?" Peverell hissed, coming around the corner of a bookshelf, his arms loaded with tomes.

"Looking for our brother, brother," I said, collapsing into a fit of laughter. Someone down another aisle shushed me, clicking their tongue indignantly when I shushed them back.

"Bell, we're in a library," Peverell said, placing his books down and hauling me to my feet. "Keep it down a little."

"What is going on over here?"

Peverell and I cringed at the angry tone of our brother's voice—it was not something we were used to from Eevan, our fun brother.

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“Eev! Look, look what I won!” I pulled the map from my coat and pressed it into his chest, using him to keep myself upright. He took hold of my arm and passed the map to Peverell.

“Bellona, I thought we talked about this. Father said he’d had words with you—does nothing stick?”

“It was one drinking contest. My last,” I added at his disappointed look.

“Bellona, this is only part of a map,” Peverell said from behind me, studying the map under the light of a candle.

“What?!” I pushed off Eevan and snatched the map from Peverell. “That fucker!”

“Alright, Pev, let’s get her out of here before the mages kill us.”

Peverell and Eevan took either arm and half lifted me to drag me from the library as I loudly ranted about being duped by the prick at the tavern.

Eevan’s office here was a homage to our home. The walls were lined with paintings of ships at sea and the cliffs of Carracalla, the bookshelves held volumes on sailing and charting, and the sextant my parents had gifted him after his first voyage sat proudly on the center of the shelf. His desk was littered with papers and broken quills and in the corner, behind his large, kingly chair, sat the helm of his first ship, which he’d crashed into a cliffside after only having it for a month. I slumped into a chair that sat opposite his, Peverell taking the one to my left, continuing to study the map.

“So, you didn’t think to check the map before entering into a competition?” Eevan scolded.

“The prick wouldn’t let me see it, but does it matter? I would have been drinking anyway.”

Eevan sighed. “Bell, you’re making this really hard for me. Islina almost threw me out of the castle after you nearly burned it down.”

“I didn’t nearly burn down the castle. I put it out before it spread.”

“That reminds me, you left this.” Eevan pulled my pipe out of his pocket and passed it to me.

I took it from him and began packing the bowl with tobacco, more out of habit than need. “Thanks.”

“Try not to set my office on fire.”

“Oh, fuck off, Eevan,” I said, lighting my tobacco with a candle and dripping wax on his desk in the process. “I’m sorry, alright? I’m sorry I’ve come here and disrupted your perfect life, with your perfect wife and child in your perfect kingdom.”

Eevan paled. “Bell, that’s not what I meant—”

“Well, that’s how it comes across. You’re a married man now, a king to someone else’s kingdom, and a father—you don’t have time for your shitty mess of a little sister. I get it.”

“Bellona, that’s not it at all.”

“This is a goblin map,” Peverell announced.

Eevan and I ignored him.

“You need to take better care of yourself and set a better example. You have a niece now and soon another, or a nephew. I would rather like it if you were

around to see them grow up, not dead in a warehouse somewhere. You can't expect us to keep looking out for you forever."

The words sobered me. Is that really what my family expected?

"Hey guys, this map is really fascinating."

"Pev, we're kind of having a serious discussion here."

"Bellona, I think you've actually found something worthwhile," Peverell said, pulling a notebook from his pocket.

"Really?!" I pushed him aside and gazed at the map, completely dropping the conversation I'd been having with Eevan.

I couldn't read any of the text on the map—it was written in ancient goblin symbols that I'd never learned. They could be found all around Carynthia, carved into old trees and rocks. The map depicted the lower half of Carynthia: Isidia, Aurali, Carracalla, and Shinchaku. I should have realized it was too small to be a full map, but the lure of alcohol and escapism had been enough to distract me from that fact. There was a large passage of writing in the lower corner of the parchment and a small symbol on a place in Shinchaku.

"What does it say?" I asked, pushing the map back into Peverell's face.

"Give me a second," he muttered, his charcoal scratching quickly across the page of his notebook as he deciphered the text. "If I've translated this correctly, it says something about a goblin treasure that was deemed too powerful by the first elves and hidden away. I can't translate it all right now, but I think this marker shows where the rest of the map is." Peverell pointed to the small symbol.

"There's no indication of what the treasure could be?" Eevan asked, shrugging at my incredulous glare.

"This is very vague but, if I'm remembering my goblin runes correctly, I believe it could be a bracelet made for the Goblin Queen during the first war. It was a ward against fairy magic—very powerful," Peverell said, leaning back in his seat. "It would be a priceless treasure, could teach us so much about the fairies."

"Or how to harness their magic," Eevan added.

My gaze danced between my two brothers, their expressions matched in thought. One no doubt considering the adventure and benefits of the treasure, and the other the unknown secrets that could be discovered. Harnessing fairy magic could mean so much for a kingdom, it would almost guarantee their success in any battle—if it could be truly controlled. Fairies were chaos beings, aligned fully with the Mother, which was why the Father had banished them to the Sillessian forests—to limit the reach of their magic and make Carynthia safe for the other races. But, in return, the Mother had stripped the goblins of their magic; now, tens of thousands of years later, very few goblin enchanted items remained.

"So ...when do we leave? We're going after it, right?" I asked Eevan excitedly, barely keeping my rear in my seat.

"Leave for where?"

"For Shinchaku! We need the other half of the map."

"We don't even know if this map is real," Eevan said, running a hand over his face.

"Oh, it's definitely real," Peverell muttered, scanning the map.

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Eevan looked between Peverell and I, at his desk laden with papers and court documents. "I ... I-I can't leave," he finally said, defeated. "I would love to, Gods know I would love to, but I can't."

"Eevan, come on! I can't do this without you. One last adventure, for old times' sake," I said, rising from my chair and holding my arm out to him. "Think of what this could mean for Isidia."

"I can't ... Islina needs me, Evie needs me."

I retracted my arm. Deep down, I knew he was right, but I couldn't help but feel, once again, as if they'd stolen him from me. "Then I'll go alone. My first solo voyage since I earned The Siren's Shriek."

Eevan's eyes lit up. "Why don't you take Pev?"

Peverell snapped out of his daydreaming. "Huh?"

"Go with Bell on her voyage! It'd be great! She runs the ship, you translate the maps"—he clapped his hands together making us both jump—"you both find the treasure."

"Why am I being dragged into this?"

"Yeah, why are you dragging him into this?" I asked incredulously. Peverell and I had never been close. He was too quiet and scholarly, and I too ... me.

"It's a great chance for you to get out of the books and see the world, Pev! And, who knows? Maybe he can sort you out a bit," Eevan said, throwing me a wicked grin. "Set you on the right course."

He knew exactly how this would go. I would be doing all the work and Peverell would be below deck stressing about his precious pages getting wet.

Peverell and I shared a look.

"I don't know about this, Eev," Peverell said, foot tapping on the stone ground.

"Just stay out of each other's way and you'll be fine. You need Peverell to read the goblin texts or you won't find anything," Eevan pointed out, crossing his arms and sitting back in his obnoxious chair.

He was right and he knew it. Even if he could come with me, we'd still have to bring Peverell with us to translate. At least then there'd be a buffer, Pev and I alone together would probably not go as smoothly as he was expecting.

"Come on, Bell, for me. Do it to prove to me that you'll make an effort," Eevan said.

"You don't trust me to do it by myself?" I challenged.

"To be completely honest, no. I really don't. Peverell would be the perfect influence on you, and you him."

"Me? Why do I need influence?" Peverell asked, clearly offended.

"You're boring, Pev. You need to have some fun! Bellona can help you have fun and you can keep her under a certain amount of control." Eevan held his arms out like a priest accepting prayer from the congregation. "Do it for me, document it so I can read it and live through you."

Peverell thought on this for a moment, his foot tapping more aggressively. He glanced between the map, Eevan, his notebook, and me. His eyes settled on me, my wet clothes, messy hair, tobacco stained fingers and alcohol breath. He sighed. "Fine, I'll do it."

evan grinned and turned his attention to me, waiting for me to say the same words, to agree to his plan.

"I'll do it, then," I said reluctantly. "But, on my ship, I am the Captain. I don't care how much older than me you are, you listen to my orders and you follow them." I jabbed a finger at Peverell to emphasize my point, not that I needed to make it. Carracallans knew to follow the Captain's orders, always.

Peverell nodded and held out his hand to me. I gazed at it for a moment, a small amount of regret lingering in my mind before I spat on my hand and smooshed it into his. He pulled his away with a cry of disgust that left Eevan and I as laughing heaps on the cold floor.

# CHAPTER THREE

I knocked on my brother's door before bursting through it as the sun was rising the next morning.

"Come, Peverell! It's time to go," I said, pulling the curtains apart and letting in the early morning sun.

"Ugh, Bellona," Peverell groaned. "How are you awake?" he questioned, throwing his blanket over his face.

"Adventure never sleeps. Now—come, come, brother! It's a long walk to the docks." I threw his clothes at him and walked back to the doors. "I'll meet you in the entryway in twenty minutes."

Peverell groaned again and, as extra motivation to get him out of bed, I strolled down the hallway without closing his doors.

I hadn't needed to wake him up, or leave so early in the morning, but after the mess of the day before I longed to be back on my ship—with my crew, with people who understood me and accepted me for who I am. I walked through the palace to the royal quarters, hoping to find Eevan, but there was only Islina and the baby. I stood awkwardly in the doorway, unsure whether or not I wanted to test Islina after the events of the Blessing.

"Are you coming in or not?" Islina demanded from within.

"I-uh ... I guess so," I replied sheepishly, stepping through the doorway.

The rooms were filled with morning light. The windows on the eastern wall sat open, letting in the light morning breeze. Islina sat with the baby on the rug before the unused fireplace. She hadn't dressed for the day yet and wore only her nightgown, her black hair still disheveled from sleep—if she had slept. The deep circles under her green eyes told me she probably hadn't. In this moment she looked most beautiful to me, more beautiful than when her hair was brushed and done up, her pale skin powdered to be perfectly paperwhite and her form contorted smaller with a corset. She looked more attractive unrestricted in only her nightgown with her hair down, sitting casually on the rug as she was. I'd



never really seen what my brother had found attractive in her, her attitude always blinding me, but now I saw her true beauty.

"You're leaving, then?" she asked shortly.

"Did Eevan tell you?" I asked, sitting across from her on the floor.

She nodded. "Told me of the great treasure, too. How his eyes lit when he spoke of it," she mused. "He would love to join you."

"He would rather be here with you two."

Islina gave a small, sad smile. "I would like to believe that. But Eevan's one true love will always be the sea."

Her words stumped me; Islina had never been so candid with me. I looked down at the babe, her thin arms reaching up for her mother's wiggling finger. In the morning sun, the small amount of hair on her head shone blue.

"I think he has some of the sea here with him," I said stroking the babe's head. Evalina.

Islina smiled. "I hope it stays like that—a small piece of home for him to have here." She paused for a moment, an emotion I couldn't read crossing her face before she asked, "Are you sober?"

"Uh ... mostly." She raised an eyebrow and I shrugged. "I haven't had anything to drink this morning."

She seemed to take that answer enough and scooped up the baby, little Evalina, and placed her in my arms, adjusting my hold so that I was supporting her head and bottom. I gaped at Islina, at the baby, and back again.

"I know it seems like I hate you, and I'm not just saying this because Eevan absolutely tore me apart last night about how I'd reacted yesterday," she added with a sheepish grin, "but I don't. I envy you, so much, more than you could imagine." She took a deep, shaking breath. "It's hard for me to admit. But you seemed to have everything I didn't—endless fun and lack of responsibilities, people falling at your feet, a loving family, and Eevan." She paused again, gazing at her babe in my arms.

"He adores you, he's constantly gushing about his 'amazing little sister' and telling stories of your adventures, adventures he'd never dream of taking me on." She reached forward and ran a finger down Evalina's cheek. "When Evie was born, one of the first things he said was 'I can't wait for Bell to meet her', he was so excited. I just wished for a moment that it could be us, just the two of us in that moment, that precious first moment ... but he still wanted you." Her eyes flicked to mine, reading my face for my reaction but it was blank, I didn't know how to react. "I suppose it's because I don't have siblings, I could never understand the relationship between brother and sister, could never understand how two people can be so close and so alike. I've never had that—even with Eevan. We're opposites, and sometimes I feel as if I've suffocated him, trapped him in a life he didn't want, a life that's too boring for him." She stopped again, looking at me as if waiting for me to confirm her fears.

"Islina, if there's one thing I know about my brother it's that he wouldn't do anything if he didn't want to. He loves you, and he definitely loves her." I smiled down at Evalina's plump little face, so much bigger than her tiny body.



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"I would bet my life that he loves the two of you more than he could ever love the sea, or anything else for that matter. And, I suppose, I have to admit that I've been jealous of you, both of you," I added, smooshing my nose into Evalina's belly and was rewarded with a small smile. "I felt as if he'd abandoned me for you, as if maybe I'd become too much for him. I'm sorry for how I acted yesterday. I made a fool of myself and of you, and I'm going to do better. I don't want you to have to ask if I'm sober before you hand me my niece, and I don't want you to keep her from me."

Islina rested a hand on my shoulder. "You're not alone in this. We're here to help you but, and I feel I have to be blunt about this, if you ever come here in the state you were in yesterday again you will not be welcome back. Your father may go easy on you, and your brothers and mother may ignore it, but I will not. You're killing yourself, Bellona, with each sip and draw, and it's infuriating to watch. Losing you would destroy Eevan—I will not allow it."

I placed Evalina gently on the floor, just as she had been before and pulled Islina into a tight hug. There was a moment of confusion before her arms eventually came around me, too. She said it would destroy Eevan, that my actions affected only him, but I understood her true meaning. "I'll be better," I said into her ear, "I promise. And Peverell is coming with me, anyway," I said as I pulled away. "I'm not going to get up to much with him around."

Islina laughed. "If there's anyone that can kill a mood faster than me, it's Peverell."

A barking laugh shot out of me. I'd never heard Islina make a joke, let alone a self-aware joke insulting one of my brothers. "We'll see how well he does when I return," I said, rising to my feet and poking one of Evalina's plump cheeks as I went.

"Good luck, Bellona," Islina said as I closed the door to her chambers.

"Meet me at the entry in 20 minutes'," Peverell said in a mocking tone as I approached him.

I gave him a light punch on the arm. "I was saying goodbye to our niece."

"Islina let you near her? I'm surprised." I reached over and flicked his ear. "Ouch, piss off would you."

"Enjoy it while you can, brother, soon you won't be able to speak to me like that."

Peverell rolled his eyes and pulled his large pack onto his shoulders, the books inside thumping against his back.

"Gods, how many books have you got in there Pev?"

"Many, and not all of them mine, so if we could hurry."

"Peverell, are you stealing books from our dear sister-in-law?"

"Only goblin related ones. Now let's go before the mages catch me."

I laughed as we made our way down the hill and to the docks, my ship awaiting us.

Peverell hadn't complained as we'd walked, but his gray face was tinged red and coated in sweat as we boarded The Siren's Shriek. The crew was already

bustling about the ship, readying for cast off. I was confused until I spotted Eevan standing at the helm, toying with the wheel and staring out at the horizon.

"Taking orders from others now, are we?" I said, stepping on board from the gangway.

"Well, he is the King, Captain," my first mate said.

"Not your king, Jarrell. Take my brother and his stolen books to the stateroom," I directed, striding past him and taking the stairs two at a time up to the quarterdeck. "Eevan, what the pit, man? Taking over my ship?"

Eevan snapped his attention away from the horizon and onto me. "Sorry, Bell. I was just excited I guess."

"Mm, don't make a habit of it."

"Got everything you need?"

"Should do. How about you?" I asked.

Eevan sighed, his hand tightening on the wheel. "Yes, I do." He smiled at me. "Got everything I need right here," he said with a sweeping gesture to the Isidian town before us, Lonthia Palace resting in the trees high on a hill above. "Did you see your niece before you left?"

"I did, and spoke to your wife."

His face paled. "And how did that go?"

"Fine, we've talked it all through and she's tentatively forgiven me—I think," I said, realizing she never outright forgave me.

Eevan laughed. "That sounds like her, you won't know if she truly has unless nothing happens—or it's too late. But I'm glad you spoke. I'm glad you saw Evie."

"I'll see her again, once I return with the treasure," I said, smacking his shoulder roughly.

"I hope she turns out like you." He paused and thought for a bit. "To a degree. I want her to have the best life, better than her mother's."

"Will you have more?"

"Not till Evie is older. The Council is already pushing for us to have a son, an heir—so old fashioned. But I think Evie will be a great Queen. 'Queen Evalina Elsrine Glenon' sounds good, doesn't it?" he said, eyes sparkling in the morning sun.

"That's a lot of pressure to put on a baby," I said, half-joking. It was obviously expected of royalty, I'd just been lucky enough to be born last.

"I have a feeling about her, she's meant for something more than just a princess to be married off."

"I'm glad Isidia has you around, maybe you'll help this place advance like the rest of us have."

Eevan laughed. "Maybe." He ran a hand through his blue hair, gazing once again over the horizon. "Well, I better let you leave. There's treasure to be found. Travel well, Bellona," he said, gripping my forearm and pulling me into a tight hug, "and look after our brother."

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"I will. We'll return here once we've got the bracelet." It didn't need to be said, but it comforted my own mind to have it known that the prize would be as much his as mine, as all things were (now) between Carracalla and Isidia.

With that, Eevan left me on the quarterdeck to say his farewells to Peverell and then left the ship; he took a place on the docks, resting against a crate, to wait and watch us sail away.

"Jarrell! How are we looking?" I called over the deck.

"Well, Captain, crew is accounted for but we've got a new cook."

"What happened to our cook?" He'd only been with us for five years.

Jarrell shrugged. "New fellow is Halen, Isidian."

"Right. Riston! Ready to go?"

"Aye, Captain! Provisions were restocked yesterday, riggers were sent by the King this morning. I've just checked over their work and all seems well."

"Seems well or is well, sir?"

"Is well, Captain," he corrected. "Everything is ready to go."

"You know our heading?"

My Bosun nodded.

I clapped my hands, "Then let's go."

Riston blew his whistle, demanding the crew's attention. "All hands, prepare to disembark! Starboard fore braces! Port main and mizzen braces!"

The crew dissolved into groups, ten stood at the anchor chain waiting for the order to weigh as others flocked to the starboard and port braces. I stood on the quarterdeck, admiring the organized chaos. Cast off was always my favorite part of the journey—spirits were high, excitement in the air. I lit my pipe, resting back against the starboard bulwark, admiring the morning bustle of the town, waving at the children that crowded on the docks to watch the ship leave. Closing my eyes, I sucked in a deep breath of salty air, the brine tinged with the light scent of petrichor hinting at incoming rain, before taking a long drag on my pipe.

"Weigh anchor!" Riston called.

Further grunting filled the air as the ten crew worked the wheel and hoisted the anchor. The wind picked up, filling the sails as if the Father himself was blessing our voyage.

I stood on the deck, staring back at the town as we sailed east to Shinchaku, watching it shrink into the distance, my brother's blue hair shining in the summer sun.