

WHITNEY RINES



BETWEEN
GODS
AND
MORTALS



— BOOK II —
THE WRAITH'S MEMORY

The Wraith's Memory
Between Gods and Mortals Book II
©Written by Whitney Rines

All rights reserved
First Edition, 2020
©Edited by Stewart Spokes, 2020

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to any actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

All rights reserved. Except as provided in the U.S. Copyright Act of 1976, no part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

The publisher is not responsible for websites (or their content) that are not owned by the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN - 978-1-71665-858-7
ISBN - 978-1-08790-736-9

Contents



Chapter One

Chapter Two

Chapter Three

Chapter Four

Chapter Five

Chapter Six

Chapter Seven

Chapter Eight

Chapter Nine

Chapter Ten

Chapter Eleven

Chapter Twelve

Chapter Thirteen

Chapter Fourteen

Chapter Fifteen

Chapter Sixteen

Chapter Seventeen

Chapter Eighteen

Chapter Nineteen

Chapter Twenty

Chapter Twenty-One

Chapter Twenty-two

Chapter Twenty-Three

Chapter Twenty-Four

Chapter Twenty-Five

Chapter Twenty-Six

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Chapter Thirty

Chapter Thirty-one

Part Two

Chapter Thirty-Two

Chapter Thirty-Three

Chapter Thirty-Four

Chapter Thirty-Five

Chapter Thirty-Six

Chapter Thirty-Seven

Chapter Thirty-Eight

Chapter Thirty-Nine

Chapter Forty

Chapter Forty-One

Chapter Forty-Two

Chapter Forty-Three

Chapter Forty-Four

Chapter Forty-Five

Chapter Forty-Six

Chapter Forty-Seven

Chapter One



For hundreds of years, the Amaranthine observed Cabbah's creations—her Mortal creations—walk the physical realm of Liansea, and build families, homes, and defenses against the darker parts of their nature that wanted war, destruction, and conquest. Despite several opinions about the so-called equality that Mortals, held with the Amaranthine, and the purpose they served in the first place, it was nothing new or taboo to spend time among them-both in battle and companionship. Able to traverse the planes of Liansea freely, curious Amaranthine took to observing, and sometimes forging relationships with mortal.

As Mortal-Immortal relationships increased, the rumors were whispered, questions, and silent disagreements with romantic relationships of Amaranthine and any of the mortal races grew louder. Reaching the ear of the Council of Four Greater Amaranthine, it was expected they'd finally make a judgment.

Their decision only deepened the divide.

Deciding that because Amaranthine were born from the Chaos, it was unknown when a new one would be born. Amaranthine who wished to carry out romantic relationships or unite with Mortals in marriage were now free to do so. The Council saw that in the past, their intimate union never sired offspring so it was reasonable to assume that the Amaranthine must be sterile. Those in disagreement of such allowances of the Council's decision, remained concerned that eventually some sort of abomination would be born.

Mortals of all races: faery, human, dragons, angels, and the breeds born from their unions were plentiful, they greatly outnumbered the Amaranthine. and a few sterile relationships was not enough to curb this concern.

In addition, mortal relationships between each other and sometimes the Amaranthine, seemed fragile, and able to break down at a moment's notice. They seemed quick to betray each other, outstretch a welcoming hand to one group while fighting another only to turn the table on their allies and devour them later, sometimes literally. Mortal alliances and kingdoms could be destroyed over trivial things and the Amaranthine in conflict of the Council's decision, viewed mortals them as a threat to both Liansea and themselves, especially with the rift growing between Amaranthine on all sides of the decision. Animosity rose between Amaranthine drawn to Mortals and those who would have nothing to do with them; the neutral ones were untrustworthy to both.

The division between the Amaranthine widened from a crack to a canyon when whispers of Amaranthine should be ruling over Mortals started. They infected some, and spread through a cascade of whispers, imbuing a sense of superiority among them. Since Mortals needed their help to survive, it seemed obvious that they were lesser beings who should worship and bow before them. At least then, there would be a reason to interact with Mortals. Those in agreement further argued that they shouldn't be treated as mere guardians-protecting the Mortals and their realms without recognition of this by Mortals. Many Amaranthine jumping at the chance to either quell or fuel the fiery argument, it grew more extreme, continuing to deepen and darken the infection tainting their conception of Mortals and those that would stand with them, *and* those who refused either stance for over a century until blood finally spilled.

When the violence finally fell to Liansea's Mortal realm, everything was thrown into chaos, Amaranthine with the decimation of a village that left nothing but bloodshed and ruin, stirring both Amaranthine and Mortals to war against each for the same massacre. Neutral Amaranthine and the disinterested Council of Four Great Amaranthine turned away as chaos as war between them and mortals tore through Liansea in a torrent of endless blood and blind violence again. With the success of the massacre gripping the most primal instincts of all sides, five Amaranthine co-conspirators and their closest followers slipped quietly into action under cover of the battles raging across Liansea.

Alliance

“You’re certain that this was the best time to enact our plans, Jatal?” Lizia demanded, watching him in disgust as he stood next to her twin brother, Fayet, and ignored the other two in their company. The twins had white hair, silver eyes and similar lean builds, with Fayet being much taller than Lizia, and a few inches taller than Jatal. The other two in their group Inihari—a beautiful woman with black hair and eyes, and an athletic build, sat atop a pile of rubble next to Ryasha, rolling her eyes at Lizia’s ignorance holding them up from leaving the decimated village. Ryasha—a man with handsome, youthful features, a medium build, glowing white eyes and shoulder-length hair slouched forward over his knees, played with his hair. Fayet surveyed the group silently, all of them retained their Amaranthine form, except for Jatal who’d taken the form of a male human adult with dark brown hair, gray eyes, and a lean build.

How ready he is to wear the facade of a human, such a disgusting choice in wanting to be the weakest of them.

“As I’ve told you *before*, Lizia, we get into these fights with Mortals all the time. The Council of Four Greater Amaranthine have come to regard it as a temper tantrum that must be waited out. They ignore the fighting and chaos because it usually ends within a few decades of its own accord. We will have plenty of time.” Jatal answered, exasperated at having to repeat himself.

Listening quietly to Jatal, Fayet looked around at the village they’d destroyed, and made into a neutral meeting place. Jatal already sent off their small army of allied Amaranthine with orders to wait for now, and blend in with the populations of Nismyth, the Great Empire of the East, and their nearby territories.

Fayet knew he and Lizia were right in choosing Jatal as their strategist. He was the oldest among them, and one of the most intelligent, cunning, and manipulative Amaranthine that existed. His knowledge of the past relationships between Mortals and Amaranthine made him perfect for planning the steps to control them both. Whether Amaranthine or Mortals, they seemed to jump to action at his direction. Though useful, Fayet and Lizia saw this ability as a threat, one that would need to be reined in and monitored closely.

“Ryasha, I want you to change the topography of this land...only in places where battles take place though. Devastate it as much as possible, we need to herd these Mortals towards larger towns and cities,” Jatal said,

before turning to the others, “I will find you if anything else needs your attention. Take Inihari with you. She’ll—”

“Just a moment, Jatal. Inihari should assist you,” Fayet interjected. Listening silently, Inihari perked up at Fayet’s suggestion, now attentively waiting to see where she would be placed. She hoped that it would be with Jatal, she couldn’t stand Ryasha. Everything about him made her blood boil, and despite being intimidated by Jatal at times, he was still her lover and Inihari preferred his company to any of the others, especially the twins.

“If you’re going to remain in a Mortal shell, you’ll need someone to protect you, while you’re that weak.”

“I see your concern Fayet, but I will be more than capable of protecting myself as a Mage, and through the positions I take within these communities.” Jatal said, a devious smirk on his face, and inward contempt at Fayet’s insinuation of a human shell making him vulnerable.

Fayet’s unyielding stare told Jatal that this was one argument he would not win.

“Fine, I will take her with me. She can assist me in my tasks and guard against interference from my enemies. She will have more freedom to do the things I can’t anyway.”

Fayet’s grimace relaxed at Jatal’s answer, and he nodded in satisfaction.

Inihari could feel the tension between Fayet and Jatal. “Inihari, let’s go!” Jatal called.

Turning back to Fayet, Jatal added, “To avoid suspicion, our group should keep direct contact to a minimum, and only meet when it’s necessary. Fayet, I will let you know when we have settled into our first target.”

Crisis

Over the next decade streams of survivors fled to the mountains and fortified cities, to escape the Amaranthine’s ever-expanding battlefield of ruin and destruction. Survivors fled to untouched villages, fortified cities, and small provinces in hopes of protection from the ongoing war that involved more and more mortals in it the further it spread. Amid the widespread bloodshed and chaos, corruption seeped into the nations and

kingdoms that once kept the smaller villages and towns safe, none of them immune to crisis that followed the diminishing resources, and rising need for protection as the Amaranthine now attacked their strongholds directly. One after another, they fell into ruination unable to sustain their walls from attack and overrun, or into collapse from the corruption that devoured them from within, until Terimah and Nismyth stood as the last two strongholds.

The empire of Terimah controlled its population expansion despite the influx of thousands of refugees, families and orphans alike, pleading for protection with strict regulations and enforcement while the province of Nismyth struggled to keep up with the repercussions of taking in more refugees than it might be able to support under its open gate policy.

The reality was that now nearly fifteen years into the war, Nismyth faced impending starvation and ruination as the deluge of refugees exacerbated problems for their citizens, and making those in positions of power ripe for corruption.

Starvation and disease loomed.

When the chaos and destruction threatened Terimah and Nismyth's walls themselves after overtaking their affiliated provinces, forcing them to dispatch most of their military to stop the destruction from devouring these as well.

As corruption within the walls infected their leaders and reached out to harm the common citizens, riots and revolts brought new challenges and strife. With danger outside the walls, and resentment within them, villages suffered the most and saw their leaders either abandon them to survive the violence on their own, conscript and send them to support the military, as fodder.

Chapter Two



For twenty years, Nismyth defended itself against the corruption and physical destruction that wrecked other provinces. At its heart lay Iridis, the capital city and home to the province's professionals and nobility—its high-status citizens. Iridis was surrounded by small towns and villages that peppered the landscape for twenty miles in all directions, all of which was encircled by an imposing stone wall rising fifty feet high.

Nismyth's combined forces of military and Knight-Mages, allied Amaranthine, and non-military Mages held a defense that kept even its furthest citizens safe from the war, but not against the fear that gradually twisted Nismyth's ruling family's decisions. Trickleing down from the head of the family and spreading through every class of citizen, all were tainted with the sheen of corruption and dishonor. Nismyth was now just as cruel and dangerous for those inside its walls, as what it fought outside.

They maintained great defensive and offensive capabilities for its citizens, but continued to open their gates to refugees at the suggestion of their ruling family's advisor, Jatal. He insisted Nismyth's image as a powerful province, and a place of salvation would best be shown by the gesture. The province already bloated with the influx of refugees, began to suffer crisis of towns, cities, and villages reaching their limits. More space was needed, and despite the efforts to keep up, more refugees poured into the area. They now traveled from the mountains as the Amaranthine's terror spread wider and deeper, into once safe and peaceful areas, and Nismyth was running out of land.

Finally closing their gates to survivors, as the attacks began destroying resources, Nismyth found itself in hardship. Forced to make the same decision as others before them had, Nismyth redirected the bulk of their resources towards their military and gave resource priority to places

housing higher profile citizens, leaving very little for Nismyth's lower citizens and their refugees.

Knight-Mages, merchants, scholars, doctors and apothecaries, lawyers, educators, nobles, and higher-ranking military personnel enjoyed the safety of the capital, Iridis, while the villages that housed the lower military or social status, the poor and uneducated, and refugees who couldn't afford to live in the larger cities were not granted this privilege. While these groups received some aid, they were largely left to fend for themselves. Most villages had no schools or educators and couldn't afford to pay the substantial fee to obtain either, leaving many villagers illiterate. Most villagers were too busy working to feed their families and community to dwell of it, and the only opportunities they had to raise status, was the military, or gaining an education that was paid for by a wealthy sponsor and becoming part of the professional class. Blessing or curse, a sponsored villager became their sponsor's property, until they paid the cost of their sponsorship.

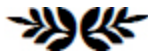
Situated in the Northwest region of Nismyth and about two days walk from the capital lay the village of Aritehn. Like other villages and towns, they had built underground escape routes that led to the mountains should the walls finally fall, but more often were used by refugees to enter Nismyth undetected. Now one of the largest villages in Nismyth thanks to the influx of refugees, Aritehn boasted a population of more than 3,000 men, women, and children, not counting the nearby barracks, of a hundred soldiers who also took some of their resources from the village. The village and its citizens were unaware but they would play a pivotal part, hosting one of the darkest chapters of Nismyth's history.

Forsaken

Several months after Nismyth was forced to close its gates, an unknown disease swept through the villages, decimating whole families, shrinking the populations or annihilating the villages entirely. Aritehn was struck mercilessly and under the pretense of keeping the disease from claiming larger cities, quarantined along with other villages, barricading the gates and burying escape tunnels, stationing guards nearby with orders to execute anyone attempting to escape.

Silently, Iridis and by extension, Nismyth abandoned the villages, sacrificing a few doctors and apothecaries to maintain the façade of support, but Aritehn was the first to discover the truth. Before, it was only speculation and paranoia, but now they knew that Nismyth truly had abandoned the villages and its loyal citizens, leaving the villages to the fate of becoming mass, open-air graves to protect the higher echelon of citizens.

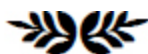
By the time the illness washed away, two-thirds of Aritehn's citizens were dead, barely a thousand were left and many of the survivors were left physically weakened. This was a crippling blow to their village. Already an illiterate village, Aritehn now lost many of its skilled citizens. Most of those who could read and write had succumbed to the disease, and damaged Aritehn's ability to communicate with other towns, cities, and Iridis.



Ena's family were among the few families that could read and write, and after the disease, became the only one. While Ena and his oldest son, Enan, avoided contracting the disease—with Enan away serving in Nismyth's military, -Ena's wife Eriela, and four of their six children had.

Now the only one left who could read and write was Chiron, his youngest son, a thirteen-year-old who'd barely survived the disease, and was weak and bedridden from it. His entire life, Ena worked long, arduous days and had never learned to read or write. When he came home, he only wanted to spend time with his family and much preferred the intimacy of Eriela reading to him. Enan, who had served Nismyth's military and was away too often to learn, liked listening to Chiron practice, or their elder sister Marin read to the rest of them. These warm memories now chilled both of them, as they cremated them and helped with the other dead villagers.

Despite their support for each other, Ena, Enan, and Chiron puttered around the house, and grieved alone; loneliness and fear of losing more, now their constant companions.



Spending his time studying, and doing what he could to recover, Chiron watched Aritehn gradually recover from the disease. They now relied on him to communicate with the rest of Nismyth, the pressure to become as talented a herald as his mother was, at times, unbearable.

Walking home at sunset after another long day of studying at the town hall and heraldry, Chiron spotted Enan waiting for him at the turnoff to their home. "Waiting on me again? Really?" Chiron asked. Enan walked alongside him.

"Well, someone has to make sure you get home alright. You're still not fully recovered yet, and you're the only herald in Aritehn, we can't have something happening to you," Enan said.

Chiron twisted his face at Enan's joke, "I'm fine, I have been for weeks," Chiron said, pushing away the exhaustion.

Ignoring Enan's scrutiny, Chiron cleared his throat, "Besides, I won't be doing this for much longer. I've decided to join the military like you."

"What, why?" Enan asked, stopping and staring at Chiron.

Chiron stopped and looked back at Enan. "Aritehn needs money to survive and I'm not earning much by reading and writing. At least in the military, I might earn enough that we can hire an educator. I'm tired. It's hard being the only one in town doing this job."

"And if you go, Aritehn won't have anyone that can read and write. What happens then? How will Aritehn survive not when it can't communicate with the rest of Nismyth?"

"Aritehn will manage somehow, we always do. It's not like I'm leaving for good. I'll just do what you do, and come back with money when I visit." Chiron answered, looking at Enan with a forced placid expression.

"I only come back with money, because I've survived the battlefield long enough to come home at all, Chiron. If you go and become a soldier, there's a lot you're going to have to do, that you don't have in you. Things I don't want you to have to do. Stay here. Please." Enan argued showing the real fear he had for Chiron, and losing the only sibling he had left.

"I come back, because I still have a family to come back to. Dad and I don't need to lose you too. Stay here."

Silent at Enan's protest, and slightly wavering on his choice, Chiron's shoulders dropped and he turned back towards the path, "I'll think about it."

With it almost dark now, they made it back to home, just in time for dinner.



Three months later, Chiron was finally recovered completely and having regained his athletic build, decided to go into the military against Enan's wishes.

Cutting Chiron's hair short in preparation of his interview, Enan grumbled with frustration as their father silently prepared Chiron's traveling bag. "You know, you don't have to do this." Enan pressed, looking over the haircut he gave Chiron. "Enan, I waited this long and things haven't gotten any better by me reading and writing. I can do this, you'll see."

Chiron answered, before pressing for another interview question as Enan groomed him.

"We've been practicing interview questions for days, so either you're ready or not. You're just lucky you grew so much in one growth spurt. You're still a bit small for a soldier though, that's not in your favor. Dad won't tell you to stay home, and you won't listen to me. Are you sure you won't reconsider this?" Enan finished, looking over his handiwork with admiration. It was the first time he'd seen Chiron's hair cut so short.

"No, I can't. Anyways, I better go if I don't want to be late. I love you both." Chiron answered, grabbing his bag and embracing both Enan and their father before setting off

Arriving in Iridis two days later and early in the morning, Chiron found the recruiting quarters right away, signed in and waited patiently. Sitting in an empty hall with only a bench near the door for two hours, Chiron sighed in exhaustion. Finally, the door opened, and Chiron was called in.

Entering the room, he immediately saw three soldiers—two burly men sat at desk and a woman standing next to them—the woman was smaller in build and only a little shorter than Chiron, but the men looked huge, so huge the desk seemed like a toy. According to Enan, they were all high-ranking officers in the military, specifically the female soldier who was known for her suspicious nature, making her a natural at interrogations.

Enan assured him that despite this event being an 'interview', it was very much a voluntary interrogation he was undergoing.

Hearing the door close behind him, Chiron looked back and saw his escort silently guarding the doorway. Despite the reality of being cornered in a room with no escape and a person trained to kill, guarding his only exit, Chiron maintained the facade of calm. Enan told him that the room he would be interrogated in was a test of mental resilience and the ability to focus in uncomfortable situations.

“Just keep your focus on your interviewer, and try not to break a stoic appearance. She’s the ranking officer—and is pretty good-looking, so keeping your eyes on her shouldn’t be a problem.”

Enan’s advice rang true, and Chiron aimed to follow it.

Directed to step up to the middle of the room, the woman approached and circled Chiron, inspecting him with her eyes, slowly taking in every detail.

He looks suspiciously young.

Stopping when she stood in front of Chiron, she was certainly suspicious of him, but remained silent on what she was thinking. The other two behind her could be heard furiously scribbling, and it was confusing considering nothing had been said other than her order for him to step forward.

“How old are you, boy?”

The officer narrowed her eyes at Chiron and waited for his answer. Maintaining his breathing at its steady pace. As calmly as he could, and with a straight face, Chiron lied. “I’m fifteen years old, ma’am.”

Chiron knew that thirteen was too young to join but, he had heard from others who’d managed to pass themselves off as the right age and join early, that as long as a Knight-Mage was not present and the candidate looked the part, the military didn’t bother checking, especially considering the current situations in Nismyth. She looked him over once more before continuing her questioning. Chiron was relieved that his recent growth spurt put him at just over six feet tall, and made his claimed age, somewhat, believable.

“What of your eyesight boy? Your hearing?”

“My eyesight and hearing have no flaws, ma-am.” Chiron answered, hoping the interrogation was finished but knowing it wouldn’t be that easy. Enan told him that they sometimes grilled candidates for several hours, especially if they were as small as he was.

“Can you fight boy?”

“Yes ma’am. I am well versed and practiced in both hand-to-hand combat and with a sword.” Chiron answered, keeping his eyes on the interrogator as the questions continued for over two hours at this point. When she asked pointed question, Chiron snapped out of his day-dreaming his attention waning from the endless string of question, and stress. The other two just continued to scribble in silence.

“Who taught you your combat skills, boy?”

“My brother Enan. He serves Nismyth as a soldier. He taught me the sword and weaponless combat from the skills he’d learned in training and combat situations with the military.” Chiron answered.

“Have you had any previous diseases or illnesses?” The soldier asked, immediately shattering the hope Chiron had that she wouldn’t ask that specific question.

“Yes, I contracted the disease in Aritehn, however my health has been recently evaluated by a doctor and I have a written statement of full recovery and good health.” Chiron answered, pulling the statement out once the officer held out her hand.

The mention of his village’s name in the statement sent the soldier silent for a few moments and after reading what Chiron handed her, asked, “Why do you want to serve in military, boy?”

“I want to be able to protect my loved ones and my village.” Chiron answered.

“Is that right? Can you read and write?” She asked, bemused by Chiron’s obviously generic statement coupled with the parchment that stated what he said in more complicated terms than most could understand, given the high illiteracy rate of Aritehn. Looking back at the two writing at the table for a moment, she raised an eyebrow when Chiron didn’t immediately answer.

“Yes. I can read well enough to understand edicts sent from the capital and I can write a bit as well.” Chiron answered, intentionally undercutting his abilities.

After several minutes of silence, she cleared her throat and spoke.

“If you can read and write this well, then go become a Doctor or a Scholar and put your education to use. We have no place for someone as small as you... especially if your health poses concern. You’re free to go.”

Gesturing for the guard to escort Chiron out of the room, she walked back to the table and spoke in hushed tones with the two that had been writing.

Sighing heavily and shaking his head at the decision, Chiron left the military quarters frustrated that his travel had been a waste. He felt insulted. He could tell that as soon as he entered, the recruiter knew he was from a village, and yet taunted him by suggesting he go to school instead. Something he'd never be able to afford on the meager wages he made reading for his village.

Walking to a nearby inn, Chiron paid for a room and meal for the night. Glaring at the table he was seated at, Chiron dwelt on all the things that the recruiter said were keeping him from joining. Things he couldn't control. After his meal, Chiron retired to his room and went to bed in frustration.

Chapter Three



Just over a week after his denial and return from Iridis, Chiron lay resting in his loft, recovering from work that day and the recruiter's words circling his mind again.

The thought of being told he should be a doctor or scholar by someone who was neither, angered him.

Much of Chiron's time since returning from his interview was taken up with attending to the communication needs of the village. Chiron had to relay public announcements that arrived from cities and towns, and Iridis. He also dealt with numerous personal and commercial correspondences between individual villagers, it did have the benefit of earning him a little money, especially when dealing with the more private messages, so he couldn't complain too much.

Chiron sorely wished that Aritehn could afford an educator but knew that after paying the doctors to help treat the disease, and purchase new seed because the last crop had been neglected, they couldn't. They'd never been able to afford a teacher before, but his mother acted as the next best thing, now it would be impossible. With little crop and more people in the village made frail and unable to work by the disease, Chiron knew it would be a miracle if they didn't face famine that winter. Chiron dwelt on these thoughts until his frustration peaked and he repeatedly pummeled his pillow.

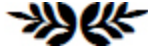
"Chiron?"

"Yeah, dad, what is it?" He asked, moving to sit up at his father's entry.

Chiron's father didn't ask why he was punching the pillow, even though it worried him. "A messenger came by, they said this was for you," his father said, handing him the note. Chiron unfolded the note and read it

silently, his father grew concerned when Chiron's grip on the note tightened, creasing and warping the note with every ratchet of his fingers.

"Well, what does it say, son?" Ena asked.



*To Chiron, resident of Aritehn
aged 15 years old,*

You have been chosen for a full scholarship to apprentice at the Scholars' Guild located in Iridis until you reach the status of fully acknowledged Scholar. Once you've graduated, you will receive permanent placement, and your education will be employed where it will be most beneficial to the province of Nismyth. This opportunity has been granted to you by the noble family who approved the funding for your education.

Based on the report of your displayed intellect in the recruitment office, it was decided that properly educating you would be the best use of your existence. Your sponsor has provided all necessities and funding for your residency, and as such you may bring nothing with you aside from the necessary funds and rations for your transportation. Having the support and funding of a sponsor to take care of your needs and expenses, grants them full rights and decisions with regard to your actions and allowances.

You may not decline this contract as the sponsorship has already been paid. In order to be released from the contract, the required station of Scholar must be achieved, and the full amount must be repaid.

You will attend and be present at the Scholars' Library for enrollment within fifteen days of this letter's receipt, or you will be forcibly escorted to Iridis by the military and imprisoned for theft and treason then executed.

*Signed,
Superior Knight-Mage
Elocina*

Sponsor

As Chiron read the signed name at the bottom, as if by magic, another line appeared beneath it.

I look forward to your success as an apprentice and to the future value of your support to Iridis, and Nismyth. See you in fifteen days.

“Chiron? Is everything alright?” Ena asked, watching his son stare at the paper for several seconds in silence.

Chiron cleared his throat and forced a straight face despite the fear and disgust, “Yeah, everything’s fine. It’s a notice of acceptance to the Scholar’s Guild as an apprentice. They want me there by the end of the month if I want to enroll.” Chiron said. He lied and suppressed the urge to crumple the paper up as the bitter words rolled off his tongue. He hated lying.

“That’s good, son, isn’t it? But I thought you wanted to join the military. Did you change your mind? How are we going to pay for the schooling?” His father asked. Chiron turned away, feeling the emotions claw their way back to the surface. He felt his heart sink, he couldn’t bring himself to tell his father the truth. Gritting his teeth, Chiron pushed away the feeling of anger and disgust, dropped his head and was thankful his back was to his father because he couldn’t stop the tears from coming.

“The recruiter said I would be more useful to Nismyth educated, because I can read and write. We don’t have to pay for the schooling, the Scholars’ Library is providing me with full scholarship for education and expenses. I guess they were impressed by the military’s recommendation.” Chiron said as he felt the tears began to trickle out slowly. Telling his father, the truth, would have been too painful. For both of them.

Chiron couldn’t bear to see the expression on his father’s face if he told him that he’d been bought like property, and indentured by a debt he had no choice in refusing. He didn’t want his family to know that he’d lost his freedom just by reading a letter addressed to him. Despite the proper education and status he would attain, under a sponsor, he wouldn’t be allowed anything less than success and total compliance, and if he didn’t, it would only make life harder for Enan and his father.

Chiron had never hated Nismyth as much as he did in those moments. The capital’s decisions already took his mother, sisters, many of his friends

and nearly his own life. Now it was taking the only things he had left, his father, brother, and his freedom.

Chiron felt his father's eyes on his back, he heard his father's voice break.

"Well. . .if that's what you want son. As long as you're happy, I'm happy you found something you like." Ena stared at Chiron's back, unsure of how he should actually answer given his son's conflicting words and reaction. He could tell something about the letter upset Chiron, but without being able to read it, he wouldn't be able to help, especially if Chiron wasn't going to tell him the truth. Ena knew for certain that Chiron had lied, but about what and why, he couldn't tell.

"Yeah...me too dad." Chiron answered, struggling to keep his voice from cracking and faced his father, forcing a small smile. Ena shook his head and turned to leave. "I'm going to go and make dinner. Call me if you need anything." he offered, and left the room.

Ena grabbed the supplies and from the storeroom at the back of their house to prepare dinner, he was worried. Chiron hadn't been this shaken since his mother and sisters died, and the three of them had to rebuild their family. Ena began preparing the bread and vegetables while thinking about what could have made Chiron so upset. As he focused, Enan entered the house and greeted him cheerfully. "Hello, dad!"

"Welcome home, son. It's so good to see you. We're having dinner soon, go wash up and...go see Chiron. There's something wrong, but he won't tell me. He might talk to you, though . . ." Ena explained, as he began cutting up vegetables and dumping them in a boiling pot. "What happened? Did someone say something to him? He's not in trouble, is he?"

Ena shook his head, "Don't know. He received a letter that was an acceptance to an apprenticeship for the Scholars' Guild, fully funded by them...at least that's what he said but, I don't know. He looked happy, but there's something wrong, something he's not saying. I'm worried about him."

After hearing Ena's explanation, Enan nodded and patted his father on the shoulder, "I'll talk to him, see what he says. Don't worry so much dad, you'll get old that way." Enan said, heading to Chiron's room.

Chiron left his room and headed to the washroom. gazing at the washroom floor, it suddenly receded as he was lifted off his feet in a hug.

“Hey, how’d things go? That message from the military bring good news?” Enan asked, setting Chiron down and smiling wide as he caught a glimpse of the paper Chiron was practically strangling in his grip.

“No. It’s from the Scholar’s Guild. They’re making me an apprentice.” Chiron said.

“Fancy. . .so what did the military say?” Enan asked, looking at Chiron with curiosity.

“The recruiter said I was too small and was better suited to school.” He answered, trying to hide his frustration about the decision.

“Huh. That’s dumb, but you’re better than the military anyways. You can read and write, and that’s more useful than someone who can just swing a punch or use a sword these days.” Enan said, catching Chiron off guard.

“You lost me.” Chiron responded.

“Well you have more opportunities when you can read. You can be a doctor, a scribe, an educator. You can even learn the spells and become a Mage or advisor to the nobles, even an ambassador between provinces. It’s pretty much endless what you can do.” Enan said, his voice trailing off.

“In those positions you might be able to earn enough money, status, or support to take back your freedom too, just like Mom.”

Chiron seemed surprised by his brother’s words but Enan mussed his hair playfully before he could say anything.

“You’re not like me and dad, we can’t read so we’re limited to things that don’t require a lot of brains. Don’t be scared to go... You’ll come back soon and we’ll be here waiting. I promise.”

Chiron wiped his eyes, surprised that his brother so easily figured out what vexed him, but no less glad for it. Wrapping his arms around Enan, Chiron hugged him tightly, “I will. I’ll teach you and dad one day, too.”

Enan squeezed Chiron tighter, “Good lad. . .now go help dad in the kitchen. He’s worried about you, so at least tell him you’re alright now... and don’t lie. It’s a bad habit. Always tell the truth Chiron, even if it sounds cruel or mean.” Enan said.

Apprentice

A week later, Chiron was enrolled in the Scholar's Library in Iridis, and being shown to his quarters. The room had a bed big enough to fit two people, a chair and desk, a shelf full of books for his studies, and a bureau filled with robes for him to wear on different occasions that sat across from the window. The window had a nice view and looked down into the streets. The room was a dull color, the walls, floor, and all the furniture were the same dark wood color. Chiron lamented the room's lack of personality but reasoned that at least he wouldn't be distracted, especially since his sponsor paid enough for him to have personal quarters with no roommates. After a short orientation of the grounds and an explanation of the rules for attendance and conduct within the Library, Chiron began his studies. As his studies continued over the next year, Chiron studied constantly to stave off the loneliness of not being able to visit his family when he wished. Motivated by memories and his fantasies of what they would do when he came back, Chiron studied harder than before to make that day come sooner.

Obsessively studying and centering his focus on his lessons, he quickly climbed the ladder among his peers in terms of rank, obtaining and maintaining a position in the top 1% of students attending the Scholars' Library. Studying a wider array of subject than his peers, including law, politics, science, government administration, and medicine earned him the title of genius among his peers, he was considered the model student by all of his instructors. Chiron was virtually on a pedestal placed there by both sides.

It earned him the notice of the Scholars' Library board, and more important, their interest and support when he became the first Level I apprentice, in twenty years, to attain Level II status in less than two years.

As a student, Chiron was quiet and stayed in his quarters rather than acquainting himself with his fellow apprentices except for occasionally tutoring other students.

While he pushed himself to combat loneliness, Nismyth began to feel the pressure at their borders with of the attacks in towns and cities outside of its walls, that threatened the safety of their province.

The Amaranthine left the villages and towns decimated, creating more and more tension as the survivors headed to Nismyth, begging for protection. Perpetually on the battlefield with very few rest periods, Nismyth's allied Amaranthine, Knight-Mages and military, slowly became.

You've Just Finished your Free Sample

Enjoyed the preview?

Buy: <http://www.ebooks2go.com>