

Breaking Down Darkness

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FOR SANDER & EMMA--

My light in the darkness

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book, I never thought I would finish it. I started this one back in 2017 and we're seven years further. I've been through ups and downs and finally found the inspiration to finish and continue the story. Sorry for the long wait, but it's worth it (in my opinion hahaha). Have fun reading, and I promise not to wait so long with the next one!

PROLOGUE

Trapped for eternity in the form of an eagle on Midgard, that had been her punishment and Kvasir had taken it in stride. She knew that fighting the outcome of her sentence would have been futile. When Odin rules, he rules true. Yet there suddenly had been a loophole, one she was certain had not been there before.

Kvasir knew this for a fact, being trapped for centuries had given her plenty of time to explore the stipulations of her exile. An eagle for eternity to roam Midgard without being able to communicate with its inhabitants.

There had been no loopholes.

Not until recently. When she had been able to speak with Odin's granddaughter.

Which had made her weary to begin with. Why now? And who had done this? She ruffled her feathers, sitting on a branch in a tree on the edge of the clearing which housed the world tree, Yggdrasil, and the portal back to Asgard.

She stared at the group of Aesir camped out in front of it, they hadn't moved or gone through the portal back to Asgard. No, they had erected tents,

and it looked like they were here to stay. Which had made alarm bells go off with Kvasir.

Why were they here?

The portal might have been opened but she was quite certain that Odin wouldn't allow any Aesir to come through. That ban had been quite clear. They had been pulled back from Midgard on his orders and only the ones who had strong ties to this place had managed to stay.

Those were just a handful.

And then there were the ones who were stuck here because of punishment or exile. Which, of course, had included her.

So how come this group had come through just a few days ago and nobody had come to collect them?

There was obviously something wrong and the urge to go through that portal had grown with each day that had passed since she had taken up her place on that branch.

Kvasir had been keeping her eyes on the portal. For a while now it had this constant whitish glow but occasionally, just for a split second, it flickered in a different shade. The white hue meant a doorway to Asgard but the light blue, that was a different world entirely. She was now figuring out the rotation of the colours because Kvasir was quite certain that she needed to take the light blue portal and not the white one. Why she was certain, she couldn't say but the fact that Aesir were now residing on Earth without being fetched back told her something was wrong in Asgard.

After all she was the God of Wisdom, and that same wisdom told her it would be wiser to go for door number two. Wherever that may lead. Hopefully not to certain doom.

Kvasir started counting the seconds between colour flashes and calculating how fast she could make it to the tree without being spotted. She might look like an eagle, but she was bigger than normal and for one of her kind still detectable.

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She had to fly fast, faster than she had ever flown.

Her eyes fastened on the portal, counting and waiting. She knew that once it flashed light blue for that one second, she had fifteen seconds to get to the portal before it would flash again.

There. It flashed.

Kvasir pushed off from the branch, spreading her wings and was in the air without making too much noise.

"Did you hear that?" One of the men said to his companion, looking in her direction. It was too dark for them to see her. She had waited till nightfall to minimise being spotted.

"Probably a bird or something." The other replied with a shrug.

Ten seconds left.

Kvasir dove for the tree, beating her wings as fast as she could. Being larger than normal gave her the advantage of being faster, too.

"There!" Someone pointed at her. Eight seconds left.

"Damn that's a big one!" Seven seconds.

"That's not a normal bird!" Six seconds.

"Do you feel that energy?" Five seconds.

"One of us?" Four seconds.

"Shoot it!" Three seconds.

Arrows started flying towards her, Kvasir dove and dodged while descending towards that damn portal but one of the arrows managed to pierce her left wing and she screeched in pain. Only two seconds left.

She flapped, it burned, she fell, one second... there!

Right when she would hit the portal it flashed light blue, and she fell through.

Kvasir rolled and rolled and finally came to a stop in ... snow? There was snow here as well? Or hadn't she gone through at all? She tried to get up but there was something wrong. Her legs... she lifted her head and saw skin.

Very naked skin. That of a woman. Toes, she had toes! She wiggled them and tried to sit up once more but she yelped in pain when trying to use her left arm. The arrow was still sticking through it, and she hissed. Then shivered. Right, naked in the snow wasn't very smart.

"I see you finally made it through." A gruff voice made her swivel her head to the right. A man came towards her holding a very warm fur coat in his hands.

"You! You got me here?" She croaked; her voice not used to speech for such a long time. She frowned angrily. This man had some nerves. In her anger she broke the shaft of the arrow and yanked it through her arm. Kvasir grunted in pain, a small trickle of blood ran from the wound, but she knew it was already closing up. She was Aesir, a god and had fast healing. "Give me that." She stood, wobbled for a bit to get used to her long legs and grabbed the coat while glaring at the tall, bearded man.

"Still angry with me then?" He asked and she could hear the amusement in his tone.

"What do you think?" Kvasir pushed her arms into the warmth of the coat, clasped it closed and let out a sigh of content. He held a pair of boots out as well and she snatched those away too. Putting those on she didn't stop glaring at him.

"You know I had no choice in the matter, darling." he truly sounded regretful but at the moment she really did not care.

"You could have given me an out sooner." She poked a finger in his broad, muscled chest. "For more than six-hundred years I was confined to one form." Her long curly auburn hair moved in the soft breeze, and he snatched one of the curls between his fingers.

"Still as feisty as ever." He had a sad smile on his face. This made her pause in her rant. He was never sad, except for the last time she had seen him. When he had banished her to Midgard.

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"What's wrong? What happened?" Kvasir asked him and he turned his sad eyes to her.

"I need your help more than ever, darling."

"Odin, what did you do?"

"I might have gotten my family killed."

ONE

Staring at the sky out of breath and in a lot of pain was not something Sierida particularly enjoyed but over the course of six months she had been training vigorously. Carlos and Tyr had taken turns as sparring partners whereas Tobias and Griff had been trying to give her pointers and how not to end up on her back with a lot of pain.

In the first few weeks that was all she managed to do but lately when sparring Carlos, he would be the one on his back and her standing over him in victory. However, when going up against Tyr, she could barely get her feet on the ground. She still was no match for the God of War, which frustrated her to no end.

He kept on taunting her that she used to drop him on his ass regularly and that she had it in her. Sierida doubted that. Even if she had all her memories back of who she used to be, before being dropped on Earth by her mother, Sif, as an infant, she didn't believe for a moment Tyr would get his ass handed to him by her.

So now she was lying on her back, staring up and checking herself internally for any broken ribs. Tyr's face showed up above her and he was grinning. The man was grinning at her.

"Told you to try and predict my next move." He held out his hand to her.

"I did." She grunted, taking his hand and being hoisted up from the floor.

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"No. You were focusing on just my arms." He took her by the shoulders in an attempt to steady her and she just shook him off.

"Well, I thought you were going to hit me again." She muttered, slapping away the dirt from her clothing.

"I know. That's why I used my legs instead."

And he had. A perfect roundhouse kick to her midriff and she had gone sailing with the end result of her on her back staring up at the sky. It was a good thing that in the last few months her healing had accelerated exponentially since it had first manifested and because of that the pain had already simmered down to a dull ache.

"You keep making that mistake." Tyr grunted at her and gave her a once over. "Memories not helping?" He quirked a brow at her in question.

"Not particularly." She frowned back. "And it's not that I have a say in which memories surface." Thanks to her mother who she suspected had used a memory retrieval potion, she was starting to slowly remember her former life, but it had been a slow process and sadly they only surfaced while she was asleep. Hence the no control over what she remembered. So far, mostly the memories contained snippets about her family. She sparsely had one about combat techniques or how to use her abilities. Which was annoying at best.

Not that she hated finding out about her family but for now she rather learned how to kick Tyr's ass. She was improving but not fast enough.

"Hmmm." He replied, frowning some more. Which was of no help of course.

Sierida sighed and just shook her head. The fact that they were still stuck in Mirage wasn't helping either. They were still on first pass since they had arrived six months ago and the first two had been very difficult for her. Tyr had warned them, told them it could take as long as a year between passes. That the passes were unpredictable. She had hoped they wouldn't take longer than a month.

That optimism had vanished after a month. The next one had been hell, not just for her but for her companions as well. She had taken out her temper on them and after another month the memories started to surface which had helped her settle down.

Tyr had suggested they picked up training again. After all she needed to get battle ready. Or as she suspected right now capable of living through an attack. Sierida might be able to beat Carlos, who was fairly strong for a werewolf, but he had nothing on strength like an Aesir.

"So now what? I can try and get my ass beaten by you again but that's getting old very fast."

"Perhaps we need to approach it from a different angle." He rubbed the stubble on his chin and looked thoughtful at her.

"Yeah? Like what?" Hadn't they tried that already? Going from full frontal attack to defence.

"Magical. Perhaps you need to use your abilities more while fighting."

Sierida stared at him. "Really? Don't you think I've been trying to do that?" She grumbled. She held up her hand, lightning coated her fingers before she snuffed the tendrils out again. "It's draining me. I could probably take out like five of them with my lightning before I'm drained."

"Then we should train your magical stamina." Was his answer. "You have formidable powers, Sierida."

"Yeah, they're not really showing, now, are they?" She snapped with irritation. "Sorry. You can't help it." She apologised quickly. It wasn't his fault that her abilities didn't want to manifest quickly.

Maybe I can help with that? Griff's soft rumble drifted through her mind and Sierida looked at him.

"How?" She said out loud.

"Trying to help you mentally, I mean we have a connection for a reason. Why not use it?" Griff shrugged.

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"We haven't explored what that connection can do, you sure you want to dig in deeper?" For now, the connection between them had just stuck to mind speak and the occasional emotional outburst. Sierida frowned, she wasn't sure if this was the wisest course. Opening up a link that shouldn't have been made to begin with.

"If it helps win this war." The werewolf simply said.

"Know what you ask of her, wolf." Tyr grunted. "You are risking being bound to her forever. Think long and hard if that is something you can live with."

"What else is there? You can't feel her agitation, her frustration over the fact that she's not progressing as fast as she wants. If this is something I can do to help, to make sure that we win and don't die in the process..." Griff growled at Tyr "...then yeah, I'm more than willing."

"Shit, bro, what if you turn into a mindless zombie wolf or something." Tobias not so helpfully pointed out.

"I'm pretty confident that's not going to happen." Griff replied drily.

"You put a lot of faith in me." Sierida wasn't sure if she liked that fact. Especially since she had no basic understanding about how her abilities worked.

"You've gotten this far, I'm sure we can figure out the rest."

She stared at Griff for a long while, trying to sense any doubt but all she received from his end was certainty and the willingness to do this. Was this how Tyr felt? Okay, so he had it with every wolf, but this could turn out so wrong with Griff completely bound to her that he always had to obey whatever she asked of him.

"You don't have to do this; we can continue your training and try to enhance your magical stamina." Tyr murmured to her.

Sierida let out a long sigh and shook her head. "Yeah, I think I kinda have to do this."

"Fine." Tyr announced sharply. "Get cleaned up, we'll join you in an hour."

"We?" Sierida hadn't missed that, was he coming along?

"You two need my help if you don't want him to turn into a zombie wolf."

Tyr grunted as he stalked away.

"Ha! I was right." Tobias exclaimed, earning a swat from his brother.

"Shut up asshole." Griff muttered, dragging his brother away.

Carlos made his way towards her, his eyes thoughtful. "You sure you want to do this?" She should be rankled that he felt the need to ask the question again, but he had said it with such a tone that she stopped and looked at him.

"Yeah, I do. Why you asking?"

"Did you ever notice that Tyr, whenever talking to one of us wolves, he never formulates it as questions? They're more like options, leaving it up to us to react to them or not." Carlos scratched his beard, staring down at her.

Sierida shrugged, she knew exactly why Tyr was doing that, but it was not her story to tell. "Did you ask him?"

"I did but he danced around it."

"I see." Which meant she needed to have a talk with the God of War about his promise to tell the wolves about his little predicament.

"You know." Carlos stated and all she did was nod. "I see. Not your story to tell I assume, and if it had been dangerous, you would've told us by now."

Sierida gave him a nod and a smile. "He promised he would tell. I'll have a talk with him."

"Don't bother." Carlos then walked away and left her behind.

"But I do bother..." Sierida muttered, going her own way to the small cottage that had been assigned to her when they had found out she was royalty. The guys had been thrown together, sharing two rooms at an inn not that far from her but they always made sure that one of them stayed with her at her cottage. Except for now.

She entered the small living room and let out a long, deep sigh. Her mind spun back to the earlier conversation and doubt started to wiggle back inside of her.

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Was she doing the right thing? Was this the right course to take? What if indeed she would enslave Griff?

Cursing softly, she walked to the stairs on the left that would lead her to her bedroom and the bathroom. Over thinking it wouldn't help, she knew that this needed to be done. No matter what the cost.

And that thought frightened her even more. When had she become that kind of person?

After her shower, who would've known that Mirage would know about an Earth thing like that, Sierida was still mulling over the fact that Griff could become more entangled with her than either of them wanted. Sitting in her bedroom at her dressing table, brushing out the wet strands of her hair, she hadn't even heard the stairs creak. Nor did she hear the soft knock on her door.

"Sierida?"

The low rumble made her turn around abruptly, dropping her brush to the floor and almost loosening her towel in the process. She managed to grab that before it came undone completely. "What the hell, Tyr! Don't you know how to knock?" She glared at him, reached forward to snatch her brush up from the floor. "Bedroom is off limits, you know!" She kept on going. "It's great that you guys don't want to leave me alone here, but we agreed on the lower level of this cottage."

Sierida looked up again, finally noticing that he hadn't even interrupted her ramble and that he was just standing there. "What?" She narrowed her eyes, trying to assess him but he was standing too much in the shadow of the doorway for her to see his face. Something fluttered inside her, trying to awaken but she put a firm hold on that. *No. Just no.*

Tyr just turned around, left without a word and she heard him descent from the stairs.

What was that? Standing, she caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror and it made her swallow deeply. She had been sitting there practically naked, with just a towel to cover up the girly bits. *For the love of...* Sierida thought, casting her eyes upwards and then closing them for a moment. She tried not to think about it, especially not his reaction because if she dove into that she had to assess more than she was willing to do right now. Including some things about herself and she was not ready. So not ready.

Letting out another sigh, she started dressing herself. Why did things always get so complicated around her? Braiding her hair, she walked down the stairs and found Tyr brooding in front of the window next to the door.

"I did knock. Called your name twice. You didn't respond so I came in to investigate." He finally answered her questions.

That made her feel guilty.

"You need to pay more attention. What if it hadn't been me?" Tyr chastised her.

Okay not so guilty anymore. "I know. I'm sorry." She grabbed a piece of fruit that looked like an apple but tasted so much different. Like a sour/sweet combination that exploded in your mouth once you took a bite. "Where's Griff?" Because she noticed now that he hadn't been with Tyr.

"He'll be joining us shortly. I asked for a moment alone with you." Tyr finally turned around and faced her. Sierida had taken up a spot on the small couch that stood next to the fireplace across from the stairs.

"What for?" The whole encounter from upstairs came back to her mind and she could feel her face heat up.

"You know." He gazed intently at her, but Sierida had no clue what he was hinting at.

"No, Tyr, I actually have no idea what you're talking about. What is it that you need to discuss with me in private?" She took another bite from the round fruit and tried to sound as nonchalant as she could manage. Which wasn't easy,

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since she kept thinking back about that stupid flutter that had surfaced when he had been staring at her upstairs.

"You realise that if you go through with this, the wolf and you..." He stopped, closed his mouth and she could see him rework whatever he was about to say. "...He will be more aware of you."

"What does that mean? Like he can read my thoughts all the time? Or experience whatever I'm feeling?" Her appetite faded and she dropped the fruit onto the small table in front of her. "Or will it be more like you and the wolves? Never able to resist doing whatever I ask of him?" Sierida saw him flinch and knew that she had hit the mark.

"You know I struggle, each day it's becoming worse..." He rubbed his face with his hands.

"Talk to Carlos."

"And then what? They will distrust me even more than they do now."

"They don't distrust you."

"Yes, they do. And I cannot blame them."

"Stay here then." She blurted out without even thinking about it.

"What?"

"I mean, you guys have been rotating your stays here and I can see that when you have to stay in a room with a wolf isn't really helping so... stay here full time." She tried to sound casually, like it was no big deal but that damn flutter disagreed. "I'm sure we can rig up a better bed than this couch."

"You don't have to do this."

"I know, but I'm doing it anyway." She gave him a smile.

Can I come in? Griff's voice drifted through her head.

I don't see why not.

Well... He started but instead of finishing he just knocked on the door. Tyr moved towards it to open it and Sierida frowned.

Well, what? Don't you go implying something, when there's nothing to imply. She told him but Griff kept silent, both in her mind and while walking through the

opened door. Had she been leaking emotions again? Sierida thought she had a firm handle on that part of their connection. Apparently not as firm as she would've liked when she caught Griff looking at her and then Tyr.

"Where do we start?" Griff finally broke the silence as the door got shut behind him.

"Sit across from her and then we get started." Tyr told the wolf and the moment he realised he had given an order, Sierida saw his face going pale. But Griff didn't react to the order, didn't obediently do as was told. Instead, he narrowed his eyes, knowing that something had just happened, but he couldn't figure out what.

Right now, Sierida wished she had a magical link to Tyr so she could ask why the hell Griff hadn't responded to that order. However, the God of War just shot her look to forget about it. She sighed, rolled her eyes and patted the small table in front of her. It looked sturdy enough to hold Griff. "Come on then."

You will explain what just happened, right? Griff asked her.

I wish I could but it's a bit complicated. She answered him.

I don't care, I could feel the tension coming from him after he practically ordered me to sit down.

Sierida didn't even know herself what had happened, let alone have any answers for Griff. Yet part of her figured it had something to do with that damn connection they had already forged.