

WANJA WESTERBACK



IN  
ICE

AND

BLOOD

A SEVERED KINGDOM



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## A Severed Kingdom

*Book I: In Ice and Blood*

*Book II: In Starfire and Smoke (forthcoming)*

A SEVERED KINGDOM



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BLOOD



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*To my family,  
thank you for your endless support.*



This book contains violence and attempted sexual assault and harassment. As well as homophobia.



The Yaidiel Empire

The Pirate Islands

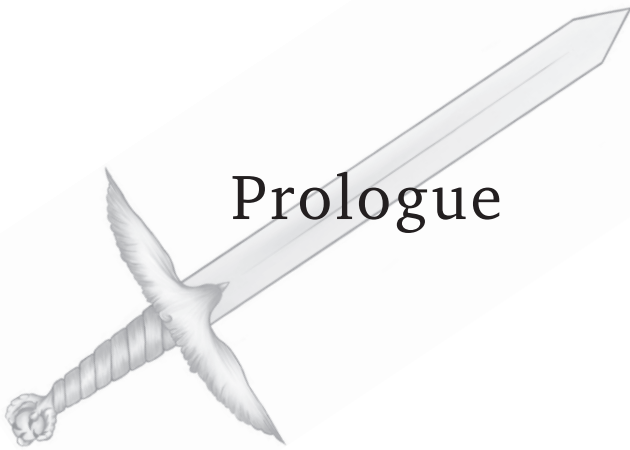
Kingdom of Kalbhinn

Kingdom of Aicheren

Queenom of Zilyra

Aymiria





## Prologue

Aquila's kingdom was at war, but not as she'd expected. Not the bloody war on one massive battlefield, fighting for territories with other kingdoms. But with itself, tearing in half and stranding people on either side. Aquila was the one expected to end the useless infighting. The plans were done, all that was left was to actually do it.

Aquila was in her room, trying to center herself. She needed to be at her best to succeed with the mission the King had ordered her on.

Aquila's head snapped up as the door to her room clicked open. Her hand tightened on the hilt of her sword as the sharpening rock fell to the ground. It hit the soft, coral colored carpet with a thunk. The door creaked, Aquila was on her feet with the cool rush of a possible fight in her veins. And then, Seren was there. Aquila relaxed as Seren leaned against the doorframe. Aquila smiled and as it usually did, her

heart skipped a beat at the sight of her.

“Hi,” Aquila said as she sheathed the sword. She closed the distance between them with long strides and kissed her softly. Seren barely reacted, she just looked at her with sad eyes. The deep purple irises had white flecks in them and the colors swirled like galaxies.

Aquila couldn't blame her for shutting down though. The chances of her returning at all were very slim. She was one misstep away from certain death. The rebel King would not let her live if she was caught and if she returned unsuccessful, Aquila almost didn't dare think about what her own King would do to her. She swallowed against the sudden lump forming in her throat.

“Hey,” Seren said finally, her voice small. Her delicate nose scrunched up, like it always did when she disliked something.

“Are you okay?” Aquila caught her face in her hands so she wouldn't be able to look away. Her skin was pale against Aquila's own light bronze colored skin.

“Why would I be? You're leaving. Again.” She raked her hand through her dark brown hair. It hung loosely around her, reaching her waist.

The heavy rain pattered against the window, giving the whole room a dark melancholy feeling. Outside, the dark clouds rolled over the sky in soft peaks and curves. Inside, only the flickering fire in the hearth and the sconces gave them light, it bathed the white walls in a warm orange glow. Around them, shadows danced.

“You know I don't have a choice. He's a horrible

monster and he threatens everything Aitheren stands for. He deserves to die.”

“Why do you get to choose who deserves to die and who doesn’t?” Seren narrowed her eyes.

“I don’t,” Aquila sounded confused to her own ears. “It is King Myles’ choice. I just happen to be his blade.”

“You still choose to do it when the time comes. Are the King’s orders really so important to you?” Aquila let her hands fall, taking a shocked step back. But why was she still so surprised by her behavior and blatant disrespect to their King? It wasn’t anything new.

Seren cocked her head and looked at her, with a hand on her waist. The purple silk robes she wore, the exact same as the rest of the castle’s mages wore, gleamed orange in places where the firelight touched it.

“Yes, because it is either them or me. King Myles will have my head if I disobey him,” Aquila said a little harshly. Seren just stared at her, her eyes flickering with something Aquila couldn’t place. Aquila took a breath and then another. Letting the air fill her lungs and the even movements calm her.

“Look Ser, I don’t want to fight about this, not now. I just want to spend these last moments with you. And I’d rather see you smile than question the King’s authority. You’re already toeing the line of treason.”

“Okay,” Seren nodded before embracing her. Aquila inhaled her scent. Burning wood and the forest after it rains. The essence of her magic.

“I hate leaving you,” Aquila murmured in her ear.

“I know,” was all Seren said in return.





The gates closest to the castle opened with a loud click that echoed in the open space. Aquila turned from her horse to see her friends walking through.

“You made it!” Aquila exclaimed, a grin spread on her lips.

“I said we would, didn’t I?” Avani’s hazel eyes sparkled in the rays of the sun as it peaked through the clouds.

“Of course,” Aquila said and pulled her into a hug.

“You better hurry back.”

“Trust me I will be back in time for all that wedding planning.” She turned to hug Zemira. She both heard, and felt, Seren enter the courtyard. Her magic crackled gently against Aquila’s own. She pulled back and caught Seren by the hands. “And then we’ll dance all night.” Aquila swung Seren around the courtyard. To her surprise, Seren actually laughed. A light, beautiful sound that made it all worth it.

“I’ll hold you to that.”

“Of course.” Aquila kissed her cheek gently. “Gods, I’ll miss you all.”

“We’ll miss you too. Now go, save us all.”

“I will.”



Before she knew it, Aquila was astride her brown mare riding away from the first castle gate. They sparkled in silver as the sun reflected off them. The

grey cover of clouds were slowly splitting apart. Everything became brighter by the second as more sun was let through. Soft beams of sunlight fell over Silverfalls.

Aquila waved stiffly to her friends and girlfriend she had to leave behind again. She smiled sadly as the gates silently slid shut behind her.

How had she become so lucky, going from having no one to three people eagerly waiting for her return?

She passed the second gate and was out on to the crowded red cobbled streets of Silverfalls with its beige houses and grey rooftops. She turned down a new street and headed for Dragon keep, hidden inside a mountain on the other end of the city.



Close to four days later the dragon set down outside the city of Kilwind, the rebel strong hold. They had flown at an almost excruciatingly hard pace, but neither dragon, nor rider complained. Aquila hadn't either. She was ready to end this war. She needed to end this war, this needless waste. She could only hope killing him would actually help.

She patted the dragon's long snout, the black glistening scales were warm under her ungloved hand. He closed his electric blue eyes and a rumble sounded from deep within him.

"You did good," she whispered. Aquila couldn't help but smile as he huffed a warm wind over her, shielding her from the frigid winter air, if only for a moment. With a nod of thanks to the rider he took off

and Aquila gloved her hands. The black leather wrapping tightly around them, like a second skin.

The wind of the beating wings hit into her, she steadied herself as she watched after them, until they disappeared behind dark grey clouds. The magic shielding them from view left her, like a cloth being dragged off her body and she couldn't stop the shivers that snaked their way down her back. She shot a quick glance around her, checking to see if anyone would notice her pop into existence, but the fields surrounding the city was empty. No one was out strolling in the dark.

It had been a while since she had been this far north, and she had forgotten how cold it got. Her breath clouded in front of her, and she took a moment to look around, to really take in her surroundings. The trees didn't rise far over ground and they were bare of leaves. The night sky was so dark it felt like it was pressing down on her. Aquila had never seen anything like it before. Was this how it always looked? Maybe it was her eyes. They were so incredibly dry, from the whipping wind that accompanied travel on dragon back, it stung every time she blinked. She had a hard time to focusing her sight as well. She blinked rapidly, hoping it would help. The stinging eased and her vision cleared, but to her dismay the darkness remained.

She picked her rucksack up and headed for the entrance she'd scouted on maps beforehand. From what she'd heard it was mostly unguarded and would be the easiest way to sneak in undetected.

The rider would pick her up in a week in a

neighboring town two days travel from Kilwind. She had five days to finish this mission. Failure wasn't an option.

A cold breeze caused her hood to slip off. She shivered and pulled it back up, covering her face as best she could, just a traveler shielding her face from the cold. The mask would come later when she made her way inside the rebel stronghold.

She would have shifted if it wasn't for her bag, the black fur would have kept her warmer than the sleek black leather armor did. Her suit was made of a material containing magic, and would remain on her even in the shift, the bag wouldn't. She hadn't had the time to get one made. Her armor, newly made, was designed for easy movement, comfort and to keep her safe. Warmth hadn't been in the forefront of her mind when she'd had it made, which it should have been. She would have to get it fixed when she got back. Besides, sneaking around a hostile town in wolf form probably wasn't the best idea.

She took a breath and slipped unseen into the city, following the deep black streets she blended easily in with the crowds.



After a couple of days walking around the city, getting to know it and its people, Aquila was ready to take on her mission. She snuck through the dark alleyways. Her mask, in the shape of a wolf's head, and hood in place. Her black hair was secured tightly on her head so it wouldn't get in the way.

A faint sour smell wafted through the city and Aquila scrunched her nose. Her sharp sense of smell enhanced it, and she could taste it in her mouth. It draped her tongue in an instant, tasting of curdled milk. She immediately regretted not bringing her water skin with her, but it would have been extra weight. The sloshing sound it made as she walked would likely have exposed her cover. She tried to swallow the taste in her mouth anyway with no luck.



She had made it to the castle wall, the rebel leader Kael had stormed one of King Myles' castles early on in the war and had driven his rebellion from there since then.

She climbed the grey stonewall with ease, the uneven stones making for good hand and foot holds and slipped down into the barely lit courtyard. The faint glow of the three moons shining behind the grey clouds, and the torches lining the walls was all the light she had to see by. The clouds almost reminded her of stirring white paint in dark water as the light, and the pressing darkness filtered through.

She kept to the shadows, slipping between them as if she was a part of them. The vast courtyard had few good hiding places, and she would have to be mindful of which once she chose. The square shape of it meant guards would be walking at all sides. And the pillars that held up the small roof, that extended into the courtyard, where few and far between.

Above her, the metal spires gleamed ominously in



Aquila's life belongs to her King.

As his assassin she does her duty without question. When a threat to King Myles rises, she's sent out to quench it. As efficiently and ruthlessly as always.

Betrayed, Aquila is left to suffer under a cruel curse. One that steals everything from her, leaving only agonizing guilt.

Her failure to kill severed the world.

Determined to set things right, Aquila sets off on a journey through a tangle of missing memories and a world that no longer works as she remembers. At least she's not alone, her savior stays by her side.

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