



# TRINITY<sup>OF</sup> BONES

IN A LAND WHERE  
DEATH IS NOT THE END,  
HIS RESURRECTION WAS  
HER GREATEST MISSION. . .

CAITLIN SEAL

BOOK TWO

IN THE NECROMANCER'S SONG

# TRINITY OF BONES

C A I T L I N   S E A L

Charlesbridge  
  
TEEN

For my mom and dad, who have always  
encouraged my love of stories



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she is looking for the necromancy journals which may help her to save her love, Corten,  
who is trapped between resurrection and true death—but Talmir is dangerous for  
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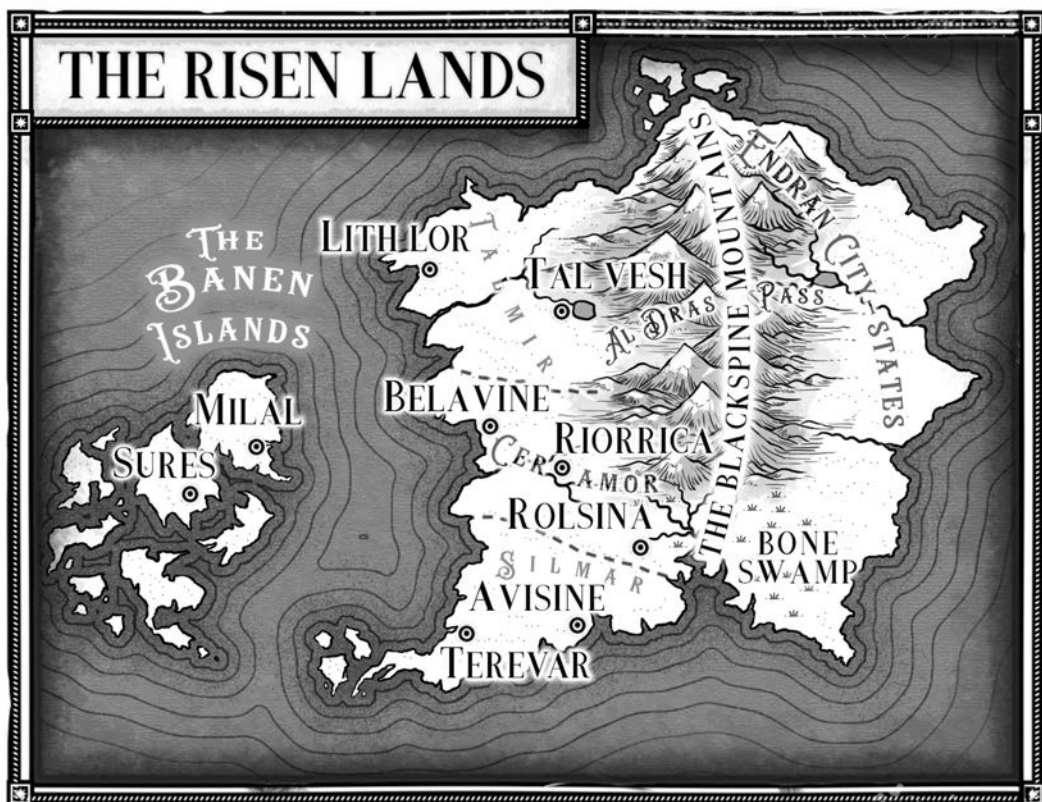
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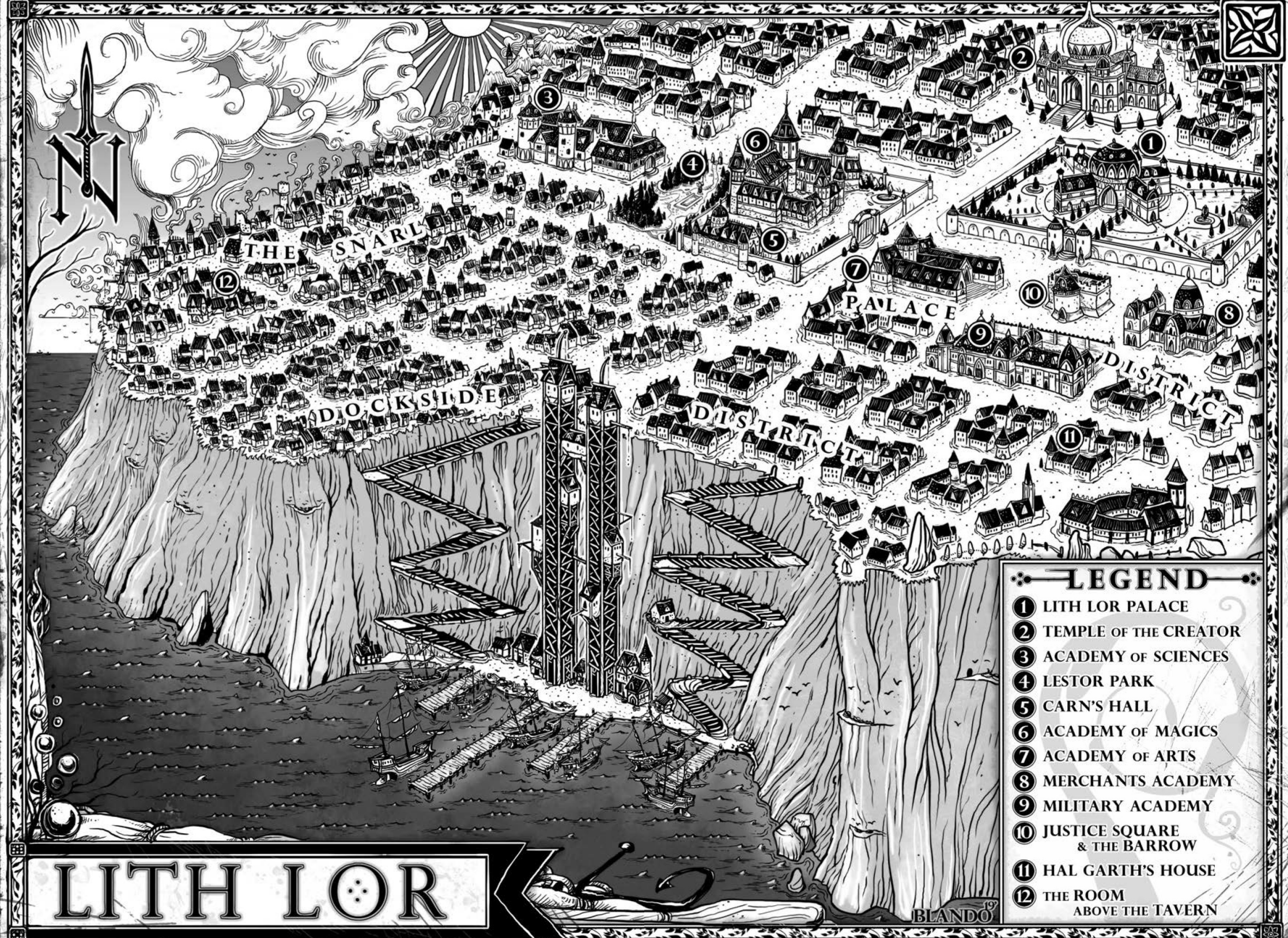
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# THE RISEN LANDS







# LITH LOR

## LEGEND

- ① LITH LOR PALACE
- ② TEMPLE OF THE CREATOR
- ③ ACADEMY OF SCIENCES
- ④ LESTOR PARK
- ⑤ CARN'S HALL
- ⑥ ACADEMY OF MAGICS
- ⑦ ACADEMY OF ARTS
- ⑧ MERCHANTS ACADEMY
- ⑨ MILITARY ACADEMY
- ⑩ JUSTICE SQUARE & THE BARROW
- ⑪ HAL GARTH'S HOUSE
- ⑫ THE ROOM ABOVE THE TAVERN

BLANDO

# CHAPTER 1

## CORTEN

Wind howled through the dark and twisting landscape of death. It pressed against Corten's chest as he struggled forward. One step. Another. Up ahead light glimmered through a crack in the darkness. It was a portal, a tiny gap in the barrier between the world of the living and that of the dead. His old mentor Lucia's voice resonated from the other side. The notes of her song were deep and rich, and achingly familiar, as she called him back toward life.

As Corten struggled on, blades of shadowy grass sprang up to wrap around his ankles, and the wind pressed like a thousand hands trying to push him back. Rocky, uncertain ground shifted beneath his every step. The first time he'd died, the pull of this strange landscape had been gentle and insistent. Voices on the wind had whispered of rest and safety. He'd refused them, and now it seemed death was determined not to let him escape a second time.

Corten set his teeth in a snarl and pushed on. Second resurrections were tricky, but theoretically not impossible. He just had to reach the portal.

The ground crumbled under his foot as though in response to his determination. Corten cried out and stumbled to his

hands and knees. Struggling to stand, he heard a sound more terrifying than the howling wind. Lucia's voice was faltering.

"No!" Corten forced himself up, fighting the wind and his own exhaustion. He was so close. The song broke off as Lucia coughed. Then she gasped in breath and managed another half-strangled refrain.

"Corten!" a second voice called, higher than Lucia's and sharp with desperation.

"Naya?" Corten reached for the portal. For just a moment, he saw her on the other side, her eyes wide as she reached back for him.

But it was too late. Lucia's voice failed. The light wavered. Then with a crack like thunder, the portal closed, leaving Corten standing with one hand outstretched toward the infinite darkness.

"No," Corten whispered. His hand fell limply to his side. Grass rustled against his legs as the wind's strength lessened. He collapsed to the ground, and the grass blurred and re-formed around the scorched pants he'd been wearing when he died. He shuddered at their touch, more like the brush of heavy mist than anything real. *Probably because they aren't real*, Corten thought. This place was shaped by thoughts and fears. It was an echo of the living world, and nothing here was quite what it seemed.

Naya had told him that when she'd died, she'd felt the shadows like a tide. Others felt invisible hands pulling them away. For him, death had always been this endless grassy field, all winds and uncertain footing. He'd wondered if the landscape would change after a second death, if whatever killed him would shape the scenery into something new. Apparently not.

Corten stood, holding one hand against his chest. Hot pain still lingered where the sword had snapped his rib and sent his soul screaming back to this dark place. How long had it been since he'd followed Naya into the tunnels beneath the burning

Talmiran Embassy? Time was impossible to judge on this side of death, but Lucia wouldn't have waited more than a day or two before she attempted to sing him back.

Images from those last hours before his death flashed through Corten's memory. The fire they'd run through had seemed almost alive as it furiously consumed the building—nothing like the controlled heat of the furnaces he'd worked with as an apprentice glassblower. What they'd found in the tunnels below the embassy had been worse. Yet Naya had faced it all without flinching. Even when her father, Captain Hal Garth, had stood before her and snarled his hate, still she hadn't run away. In that moment she'd seemed a different person from the quiet, uncertain girl she'd been when they first met.

And from what he'd seen in that single glimpse through the portal, it looked as though she'd gotten away safely.

Corten smiled to himself. Of course she'd gotten away. She was trained to fight, unlike him. Creator, he'd probably looked the fool when he'd swung that iron poker at her father. At least he'd managed to break the foul man's arm.

Corten's smile turned to a grimace. Such a mighty legacy he left behind. Corten Ballera: failed necromancer, breaker of arms, and crafter of ugly glass trinkets. Oh, yes, the bards would surely sing his praises. And Naya . . . Well, if she were lucky, she'd forget him and go on to lead a long and happy life. Maybe she would even meet someone new.

The image of her in someone else's arms made his stomach twist. He squeezed his eyes shut, remembering the heat of her lips against his after they'd fled the execution. He must have been mad to kiss her like that. But in that moment, he'd felt so intoxicatingly alive that all his thoughts and doubts had been incinerated. He'd imagined sweeping her off her feet and carrying her far away to find a place where they could both be more than their regrets and the mistakes they'd made.



The wind blew harder. Insistent.

Corten glared at the swirling dark expanse of this dead world that had claimed his soul. “So that’s it?” he asked. “That’s all I get?”

The wind swallowed his words and carried them away. Corten stood. “This isn’t fair!” he shouted. “I still have things to do!” He had a life back in Belavine, friends. Was death at the hands of some hateful merchant really the end of his fate?

The wind mocked him with its constant force. It made him feel like a little kid stomping and screaming at some slight. As that image formed in his mind, the world twisted, perspective warping and light flooding the dark. He *was* a little kid, five years old and fuming over the injustice of his parents’ going out for a picnic without him. His father scowled from behind his mustache while his mother rolled her eyes.

As abruptly as it had come, the vision vanished, leaving Corten kneeling as he struggled to make sense of his surroundings.

Well. That hadn’t happened last time he’d died. Then again, last time he hadn’t missed his chance at the portal. Corten stood on shaky legs. He closed his eyes and searched his memory for every scrap of lore he’d ever learned about death. The longest recorded gap between a death and a resurrection was four days and six hours. No one had ever successfully been resurrected after a second failure, but so far as he knew, no one had tried since the end of the war. And if anyone was going to try, it would be Lucia.

Voices whispered through the darkness, barely distinguishable from the endless rustling of the grass. The back of Corten’s neck prickled with the sense of someone watching.

*Stop fighting.*

*Come.*

*Rest.*

When Corten opened his eyes, a figure stood before him.

It was almost human, but its edges were indistinct and its face hidden in shadows. Corten stepped backward, nearly tripping over his own feet.

“Stop fighting,” the figure said. The voice was masculine, and the rasp of it made Corten think of old books and mildew.

Corten shook his head. He tried to back up farther but felt the ground shift ominously beneath his heels. His stomach lurched like he was already falling, and he had to fight down a gasp of fear. He reminded himself of all the times he’d gone up on city rooftops, even jumped off some of them just to prove to himself that such falls no longer held any power over him. But rooftops had always felt so stable compared to the loose rocks of the cliff’s edge, and there was something very different about falling when you were the one in control of the jump. “I don’t want to die,” Corten said, managing to make the words come out in something slightly manlier than a terrified squeak.

“What you want matters not. Your life is spent. Now it is time for you to rest.”

Something about the figure’s words tugged at Corten. Necromancy was as much about purpose and will as it was about carving runes. A necromancer could use their circle to create and contain a portal, and they could use the song to find and guide a soul back. But they couldn’t force anyone back into life. What if it worked the same going the other way? “What happens if I refuse?” Corten asked.

“All souls go to their rest.”

Corten crossed his arms. “Why? And what are you anyway?”

The shadow man didn’t answer. The darkness at the edges of Corten’s vision writhed, and the feeling of being watched intensified.

“Will you drag me away if I refuse to go?” He wouldn’t let his fear get the better of him. If he stalled long enough, maybe Lucia would figure out a way to open another portal.

“You will go willingly.”

“I won’t.”

“You will. If you don’t, the scavengers will consume you.”

A chill crawled up Corten’s spine. “What’s that supposed to mea—” Before he could finish the thought, the ground beneath his feet vanished. His words became a scream as he plummeted into darkness.

# CHAPTER 2

## NAYA

Naya strode through the hallways of the Ceramoran palace and prayed her nerves didn't show on her face. Servants and low-ranking officials bustled past her as they tended to the daily business of the court. A few glanced her way and whispered behind their hands when she walked by, but no one tried to stop her.

Naya's former mentor, Celia, had once told her that understanding the expectations of others was one of a spy's most valuable skills. Most of the people Naya passed knew who she was. They knew that only weeks ago she'd been spying for their enemies in Talmir. She was Talmiran after all.

However, the people here also knew she'd betrayed her former masters and countrymen. She'd saved the life of the Ceramoran king's chief adviser, Salno Delence. Now she was taking lessons from a tutor in the palace and preparing to join the Ceramoran delegation to the Congress of Powers. She was sure the palace gossips would gladly whisper about her motives or her ties to the Necromantic Council. But when they saw her walking the palace halls, they would expect she was there on official business.

Naya walked quickly, as if she had somewhere important to be, but not so quickly that she would look like she was trying to flee. She kept her head up and her expression neutral. She willed

the palace denizens to see her, then dismiss her as just another part of the everyday scenery. Because if any of Delence's allies realized what she was really up to, they would do everything in their power to stop her.

Memories stirred in the back of her mind as she entered a wing of the palace she hadn't visited in weeks. They made her chest ache and her throat tighten with fear. Once, she'd been a master of locking away such things. But locking pain away had been her father's strategy. Captain Hal Garth had taught her to be cold and calculating. He'd seen the people around him as either tools or threats. Including her.

Naya turned a corner and saw a familiar guard standing in front of a heavy wooden door banded with iron. A servant polished the gilt frame of a painting farther down the hall, but otherwise there was no one in sight. The guard, Lieutenant Lila Selmore, flashed Naya a nervous smile as she approached. She was a small woman with lean features, close-cropped hair, and an air of cheerful confidence. Today the aether swirling around her was spiky with unease. "You're sure you want to go through with this?" she asked without preamble.

Naya hesitated, feeling the press of Lila's emotions against her own. As a wraith Naya could detect emotions through the aether—energy that drifted off all living things. It was a skill that had proved useful more than once, but sometimes it felt as much like a curse as a gift. It was all too easy to lose herself under the flood of outside sensations.

"I can do this," Naya said, trying to banish both her own fear and Lila's. "But if you think this will bring too much trouble down on you—"

Lila shook her head. "Let me worry about that part. The Necromantic Council owes you a debt for the help you gave us during the coup." She smirked. "And besides, the Council wants to know what that lying bastard has to say as badly as you do."



Some of the tension in Naya's chest unwound. "Then let's get going."

Lila glanced down the hallway. She waited until the servant finished her polishing and moved out of sight around the corner. As soon as they were alone, Lila pulled an iron key from her pocket and unlocked the door. Naya sensed the wards deactivating as the lock's heavy tumblers shifted. Lila opened the door and led Naya down a long flight of stone steps.

Unease thrummed through Naya as her bare toes touched the first step. Not so long ago, she'd been dragged into this same dungeon to face what she'd thought was certain death. She heard the shouts again, felt the icy cold of salma wood cuffs binding her. She saw Valn looming over her. He'd demanded her help even as he condemned her to die as a pawn in his plans for war.

These dungeons, and the man who waited in the cells below, were reminders of her failures. And no matter how hard she tried, she couldn't lock away the fear and loathing she felt every time she thought of what those failures had cost. Naya pressed one hand flat against the wall of the narrow stairway. She closed her eyes and tried to focus on the physical world, blocking out everything else.

"Are you all right?" Lila asked.

Naya opened her mouth to answer, but her throat was too tight to speak. Her eyes burned with unshed tears, and suddenly the task before her felt too vast, too impossible for words. But she also knew that if she didn't summon the courage to face Valn now, she would spend the rest of her life in uncertainty and fear.

Naya clenched her jaw, trying to convince her stupid feet to keep walking down the stairs. After a moment she felt Lila's hand on her shoulder. Lila's aether flooded through her, a warm mix of sympathy and concern. She'd been with Naya on the night Valn had captured her and thrown her into the dungeons.

Though Lila couldn't sense the aether, she obviously guessed some of what Naya was feeling.

Naya gripped Lila's hand and drew in her comforting energy. The warmth reminded her that there were good people here in Ceramor, people she could trust. She was afraid, yes. But at least she didn't have to do this alone.

Naya opened her eyes and gave Lila a weak smile, trying to offer a little reassurance in return. "Thank you," she said. "I'll be okay. I just want to get this over with."

Another door waited at the bottom of the stairs. Lila unlocked it and led Naya into a square stone chamber with a table and chairs in the middle. Two guards sat at the table with a deck of cards spread between them.

They nodded and let Naya and Lila pass. Lila had called in a few favors to ensure that those on watch this shift would be allies of the Council.

The younger of the guards watched Naya intently. She could tell from his aether that, ally or not, he wasn't happy with his part in this. Well, she wasn't happy about it either. She'd been asking Delence for permission to interrogate Valn practically every day since learning he had survived their last encounter. Delence had refused her every time. So, with time running out before the delegation left for Talmir, Naya had been forced to find a way around his orders.

When Naya had gone to the Necromantic Council for help, Lila had told her about the warnings Delence had issued. Apparently, he was afraid Naya would try to kill Valn. As if she'd be satisfied with giving him a quick death. No, Naya wanted to see Valn stand trial for all he'd done. For years he'd passed out bribes and commanded spies, kidnappers, and murderers as he sought to steal the freedom of Ceramor's people. He would pay. But before that happened, there was something Naya had to know.

“He’s at the end,” Lila said, speaking softly as they stepped into the long hallway of cells beyond the guardroom.

Naya’s attention focused on the cell at the end of the hall. It stood just next to the salma wood chamber where she’d been locked the last time she was here. Despite the despair-drenched atmosphere, Naya felt a burst of vicious glee at the thought of Valn rotting in the same darkness where he’d confined her.

“Are you ready?” Lila asked as she placed one hand on the heavy iron bar set across the door.

Naya didn’t feel ready, but she nodded all the same.

Lila opened the lock holding the bar in place, then slid the bar back. The metal groaned. The door swung open, and Naya stepped into Valn’s cell.

She heard a soft thud as Lila closed the door behind her. A small, irrational part of her panicked at the thought of being trapped. She tried to ignore it, reminding herself that the door was unlocked. Even if it hadn’t been, this cell wasn’t designed to hold a wraith.

The dim light of a single rune lantern revealed a narrow chamber with a straw pallet on one side and a waste bucket on the other. Valn had been lying on the pallet, but as Naya entered he heaved himself upright with the help of a wooden crutch.

Naya stared at him in silence. He bore little resemblance to the man she remembered. His suit was gone, replaced with the simple brown pants and shirt of a prisoner. His normally impeccably combed black hair was dirty and tangled, and bruises and scrapes shadowed the skin around his wrists and across one cheekbone. His right leg was wrapped in a thick cast up to the knee, and from the careful way he moved, Naya guessed at least one of his ribs was broken.

Only his eyes hadn’t changed. Even here, locked in a dirty cell, he still stared at her with that same gleam of confident superiority he’d had when he’d scheduled her execution. He met

her gaze, then dipped his head in the imitation of a bow. “Miss Garth, welcome. I had wondered if we’d see each other again. Does this mean Lord Delence has changed his mind about letting me live to face trial before the noble Congress of Powers?”

Valn’s tone was light, almost jovial. Naya’s fingers curled into fists. “No,” she said. “You’ll go to trial. I just have some questions for you first.”

“Ah,” Valn said. “In that case I hope you won’t mind if I sit down. Lord Delence was kind enough to offer the services of an excellent healer, but as you can see, I’m still recovering from the wounds you gave me.” He moved carefully, using the support of the wall and the crutch to ease himself back onto his pallet.

“Well, what did you want to know?” Valn asked once he was seated. “I can assure you I’ve already told Lord Delence and his interrogators everything.”

“You told him the runes for my bond came from Talmir,” Naya said. As she spoke, she drew in aether, trying to sift Valn’s emotions from the aura of fear, pain, and despair that seemed to permeate the very walls of the dungeon. Growing up in Talmir, she’d believed her people would never stoop to using the necromantic magic they so hated. But not only had Valn organized her resurrection as a wraith, he’d done it with powerful runes, which should have been destroyed after the last war between Talmir and Ceramor.

Recognition flickered in Valn’s eyes and Naya tasted something sharp and bright in his aether. Was that fear or anticipation? “Did I?” Valn asked. “It’s hard to remember all we talked about. Those first few days after our last encounter were . . . difficult.”

“Who gave you that journal?” Naya asked, taking a step forward. “Why would a Talmiran have access to illegal runes?”

Valn tilted his head back and laughed. It might have been

a convincing display if she couldn't taste the bitterness in his aether. "Why do you care?" he asked, a harsh edge bleeding into his voice.

Naya didn't answer, and slowly the corner of Valn's mouth curled into a sneer. "You know, back when you pulled that stunt to escape your execution, I assumed you were just trying to preserve your own pointless life," he said. "I never would have guessed your loyalties were so flexible that you'd be willing to switch sides and work for Delence. Perhaps your father was right about what necromancy does to a soul."

Anger, hot and red and sharp, surged through Naya. That heat concentrated in the rune-carved bones of her hand. She drew in more aether and imagined transforming the despair-laden energy into true heat and burning that condescending look right off Valn's face. How dare he speak to her of loyalty! Twice he'd ordered her death. He'd used her and betrayed her. He'd manipulated everyone around him as though their lives were nothing. Valn might not have swung the blade himself, but Corten's death was on his hands, along with those of everyone else killed during his failed coup.

Valn must have seen something in her eyes, because he shifted as though he were trying to press himself back through the stone wall.

Naya clenched her teeth. The aether sang in her bones, demanding action. But she couldn't, wouldn't, burn him. She wouldn't become the monster her father had seen, or the killer Delence apparently expected her to be. She held her hand out to one side and concentrated, releasing the energy in a burst of light that seemed blinding in the dim cell. Valn didn't cry out, but she heard his sharp intake of breath and the rustle of straw as he jerked in surprise.

"Who I'm loyal to doesn't matter to you," Naya said, proud of the cold note in her tone. "All that matters is that you answer



my questions. So tell me, where did you get the runes for my bond?"

Valn shook his head. "I already told the interrogators. I had no allies in Talmir. I acted entirely of my own volition. And whether or not you believe me, I acted for the good of everyone in both Talmir and Ceramor." He said the words in a monotone, like a schoolboy repeating a lesson learned by rote.

"You're lying!" Naya snarled. "Nothing good would come from another war!"

"I never wanted war," Valn said, leaning forward. "I sought a transfer of power, a joining of Talmir and Ceramor that would have saved lives."

Naya shook her head and took a step back. "Just tell me, did you get the runes in Talmir or didn't you? Is it true that more works like that still exist?"

A series of sharp knocks sounded against the door, two fast and one slow. Naya cursed silently. That was Lila's signal that someone was coming. Valn glanced at the door, then back at her. "If I said yes, what would you do with that knowledge?"

"Just answer the question," Naya said.

"Perhaps I will, if you tell me why it matters so much to you."

Naya couldn't tell him the truth—that she and Lucia hoped to find an ancient ritual that would allow Naya to step into death and hunt for Corten's soul in order to bring him back. But she had to do something to convince Valn to talk. "I don't trust Delence with those runes any more than I trust the Talmiran government," Naya said slowly. "If they exist, then I want to find them before he does."

Heavy footsteps and shouts sounded in the hallway outside. Naya could feel the seconds ticking away. She kept her eyes locked on Valn's. His expression was intent, and the aether around him shimmered with uncertainty. "Well, it's true that

Talmir's policy on necromancy is more complicated than people like your father have been led to believe," Valn said. His eyes seemed to shine in the dim light.

Excitement and frustration thrummed through Naya's chest. "Stop giving me half-answers. Who are you even trying to protect? Your plans failed. Do you really think anyone in Talmir will argue for you at the Congress? They named you a traitor. It's over."

Valn laughed at that. "Over?" He met her eyes. "For me, maybe. But for you, my little spy, I suspect the war has only just begun."

PHOTO BY MIC DBERNARDO PHOTOGRAPHY



**CAITLIN SEAL** is a writer and compulsive reader living in Northern California. She says, “Death is maybe the most personal and universal of all human experiences. I love the idea that there could be something so powerful about an unfulfilled purpose, or the pull of a person’s relationships with those they love, that it would draw them back to the living world.”

When not writing, Caitlin GMs tabletop games, practices aikido, and hunts for portals in old wardrobes.

— [www.CAITLINSEAL.com](http://www.CAITLINSEAL.com) —

BOOK ONE IN THE NECROMANCER'S SONG

HER DEATH WAS ONLY THE BEGINNING. . . .

# TWICE DEAD

CAITLIN SEAL