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**GLISETTE LORENTI  
PONTAVAL, VOLARRE**

A sigh of wind snuffed out the campfire. The darkness in the belly of the forest was as dense as the black soil underneath my bedroll. I went rigid, listening to the rustle of footsteps and the rattle of rasping breaths. Enemies were near.

My elicrin stone held reassuring warmth from nestling against my breastbone. But magic couldn't guarantee my escape from the soulless creatures prowling in the shadows. When I opened my mouth to utter a spell, no sound emerged. No light burst from the stone. My head felt too heavy to lift.

A blight with sallow, sore-ridden skin and milky eyes approached, raising a jagged blade to ram it through my quick-beating heart. The creature drew so close I could smell its putrefying flesh, the scent of dark magic unbridled. Yet I couldn't react, couldn't move. I could only hope my death would be swift.

"Glisette?" the blight said in a cheery voice.

I gasped and heaved awake, terrifying my younger sister, Perennia.

Cold sweat dampened the satin sheets twisted around my thighs. Shafts of light from a flaming sunrise melted through gaps in the powder-blue drapes, skimming over gilded furniture and velvet upholstery. I was at home in the palace at Pontaval, not in the woods at night or in the throes of a bloody battle.

Months had passed since I'd helped to overthrow the Moth King, but the most harrowing memories of the journey still stalked my sleep.

"Sorry!" Perennia squeaked, holding aside the embroidered canopy that surrounded my four-poster bed. "Oliva said to tell you the mayors of the border towns have arrived."

With an irascible grunt, I swung my legs over the edge of the bed, brushing

strands of blond hair from my face. "They're early."

"Yes."

"Was Oliva afraid to wake me?"

Perennia's honeyed curls bobbed as she nodded.

I could hardly blame my head maid, not after I'd accidentally unleashed a spell last week that had flung her across the room and into my open wardrobe. My heaps of flouncy dresses had padded her fall, but since then Oliva had been skittish when it came to waking me.

I pounced into action. A year ago it would have taken me hours to prepare for a social engagement. Sometimes I missed the simple luxury of pruning in the scalding water, dozing off as a maid's gentle fingers sifted through my long locks. Now I barely took the time to use a comb and mouth rinse before throwing back a swig of tea and hurrying off to whatever appointment awaited me first, pursued by Oliva and her flock of underling ladies-in-waiting. I could hardly even visit the lavatory alone for all the guards and servants tailing me.

Nothing had been the same since the day I told Uncle Mathis, in no uncertain terms, that I was stepping into the role of queen of Volarre and forcing him out.

One of the maids broke formation to scuttle ahead and open the door to the meeting chamber—I hadn't opened a door for myself in months either—revealing my chief advisor sitting at the marble-top table with a group of strange men.

"I present Her Majesty, Queen Glisette Lorenthi," he said.

As the mayors stood to bow, their gazes coasted over me, moving from the misty lavender chalcedony at my throat to the silver crown on my head, landing in unison on the scar that slashed over my right eye from forehead to cheek.

"Gentlemen," I said, scooping the skirts of my sapphire dress—a bit modest for my taste, despite the plunging neckline—to claim the head of the table.

They took their seats. "Once again, I profoundly apologize for the decisions made by my uncle and elder sister, which brought food shortages to your towns. How are the assistance programs faring?"

"They're helping, Your Majesty," answered the man to my left, who looked too youthful for his silver hair. "The problem is that when Prince Regent Mathis tripled the tolls, the produce vendors who cross the border to our markets raised their prices."

"But we've decreased the tolls," I pointed out. "They're even lower than before Uncle Mathis raised them."

"Yes, Your Majesty," my chief advisor said, "but the vendors fear the crown might raise them again on a whim."

I was grateful for Hubert, who patiently filled in my gaps of understanding. My younger brother, Devorian, had been coached to take the crown while my sisters and I learned etiquette, languages, and of course, elicismancy. As queen, I was forced to countervail my years of deficient governing studies with tireless initiative.

"I'll sign a decree guaranteeing that I will not raise the tolls for a decade," I said. "We'll have a ceremony in one of your towns."

"A bold idea, Your Majesty," Hubert said. "But it doesn't solve the immediate problem that many poor Volarians cannot afford food."

A blush of embarrassment bloomed behind my cheeks. In moments like this, I missed my old life—but not sprawling in the lap of opulence and reveling in a lack of responsibilities. Instead, strangely, I longed for my time trudging through the wilderness, scared, hungry, thirsty, sore, and wounded, but driven by a singular purpose.

The quest had been arduous, but with only one goal: deliver Valory Braiosa to the Moth King's court so that she could kill him before he destroyed Nissera.

The upheaval that necessitated the quest had happened so swiftly that I'd barely had time to second-guess my decision to join.

First, Valory had touched the Water—the ancient source of elicrin magic hidden deep in the woods—without permission from the Conclave. But unlike others who had tried before her, she did not die. Nor did she receive an elicrin stone, which would have bestowed her with a magical gift. Instead, she had dried up the Water and gained a destructive power that looked nothing like elicromancy.

Meanwhile, my brother Devorian had come into possession of a pearl tablet inscribed with an arcane "awakening" spell written in an ancient, forgotten language. Though Devorian was an Omnilingual, the language was so strange that even he struggled to make sense of the spell. He convinced himself it would have the capacity to resurrect our parents from the dead.

Instead, it raised Emlyn Valmarys, an elicromancer tyrant from a dark age in history. He had been kept dormant for centuries when no one—not even an alliance of elicromancers, fay, and sea folk—could defeat him. His power allowed him to take other elicromancers' gifts for his own or lend them to his servants. He was invincible—until the three groups devised a way to trap him in his mountain lair and keep him dormant using a contract engraved on the tablet.

A group of mortals called the Summoners had given Devorian the tablet to decipher without telling him what it would do. They wanted to resurrect Emlyn Valmarys so that he would offer them a reward of magic and immortality. Devorian was their pawn—a foolish one—who unwittingly did their bidding by speaking the spell on the tablet.

Valory accidentally cursed Devorian with a beastly form for his recklessness, demonstrating that her power could do more than just destroy. Then she crossed paths with Mercer, a Prophet from an earlier time. Mercer told her that Valmarys, whom he called the Moth King due to the tyrant's sigil, did not hold the power to give and take elicrin gifts on his own. Mercer's brother, Tilmorn, had; Tilmorn was a Purveyor, and the Moth King had taken him captive long ago. Now, the Moth King was using Tilmorn's power to conquer the mountain fortress city of Darmeska and unleash havoc on the realm.

Mercer felt certain that Valory would be the one to defeat the risen tyrant at

last, given her strange and unrivalled power. Thus we set out, the Moth King's servants hunting us while we hunted him. And as we fought, the Realm Alliance unraveled. The Moth King's servants captured and murdered many of its members, but spared Valory's family, who had joined forces with the Summoners in order to sow political chaos and make their own magical laws. My family had fallen under Valmarys's influence as well. Ambrosine and Uncle Mathis let the Moth King win them over with fine gifts, leading to crisis when they began overtaxing the kingdom to support the new heights of their lavish lifestyle.

Every corner of Nissera seemed to be caving in on itself. Yorth fell to plague, Volarre fell to greed, and Calgoran fell to corruption.

But we managed to deliver Valory to the Moth King's tower in Darneska. While we battled his servants, she faced the tyrant himself. She stole his power and freed Tilmorn. And in the midst of the fight, she realized that the Water had given her more than just a gift for destruction and transformation—it had given her *itself*. The Water had always decided who was worthy of elicismancy. And now, Valory had that power, carrying the Water's legacy. She was more than a mere Purveyor, like Tilmorn had been before she made him a Healer. She was more than a Neutralizer. She was the source of elicrin power.

On the heels of our triumph in Darneska, we returned to our respective homes and punished those who had wronged the realm. Devorian supported me in pushing Uncle Mathis aside so that I could become queen of Volarre.

I had thought my trials were over. How was it that overthrowing a tyrant was somehow easier—or at least more straightforward—than taking up the scepter to rule?

"Theft and murder have escalated in our towns, Your Majesty," one of the mayors at the far end of the table said. "Our people have resorted to eating draft animals and seed grains. They're desperate for food."

I gulped, trying to remain calm so I could think. If the mayors hadn't arrived early, Hubert would have counseled me privately. But if he helped me now, my inexperience would be all too apparent.

A din from outside drowned my thoughts. "What is that shouting?" I demanded.

One of my guards hurried to the windows behind me. "There's a crowd approaching the palace gates, Your Majesty."

I rose and turned to see for myself, blinded by the brilliant sun glistening on the distant hills. I blinked the stars from my eyes and found a horde marching along the cobblestone thoroughfare, winding uphill past shops and markets to our towering palace.

"Is it some sort of parade?" I asked, squinting into the distance. "Why was I not informed?"

"It's not a parade." Hubert sounded alarmed as he appeared at my side.

My stomach clenched. Even from afar, I caught angry flashes of farm tools and fists punching into the air, unintelligible chants and jeers. "It's a riot," I said. Excerpted from *Palace of Silver* by Hannah West. Copyright © 2020 by Hannah West. All rights reserved. No part of this excerpt may be reproduced or reprinted without permission in writing from the publisher.