Prologue - Juniper

Daggersea Isle, 1357

Darkness. Juniper was expecting it when she opened her eyes. She could barely see the ceiling planks above her bunk. Pinholes of sunlight danced on the cell floor during the day, so the darkness told Juniper that the sun had set. That, and the cacophony of loud snoring outside her locked door.

Juniper reached out her hand to touch the ceiling of her cell, tracing her index finger over the deep grooves in the rough wood. She concentrated on her raised hand until it burned with heat, then green sparks erupted from her fingertip. Juniper dragged her sparking finger down the planks; first in a single line, then a circle surrounded with little curved points. She pulled her hand away from her carving, and ignited the rest of her fingers to illuminate her carving in flickering green light. It was the outline of a flower, a black-rimmed daisy etched in the umber wood grain. Juniper raised her left hand to meet her right and willed the bright sparks to burn brighter. The carvings ran from ceiling to floor; fields of crude flowers, boats on triangle waves, and a waterfall, cascading from a cliff whose jagged edges ran down the wall and under the bunk.

Boots stomped down the stairs of the hold. Juniper extinguished her sparks and lay quietly as a commotion erupted outside her door. Men swore and shouted to each other, and heavy wheels rolled across the floor. The ship swung left, and Juniper grabbed onto the bunk as the room tilted. A muffled voice shouted over the din.

"Fire!"

Boom.

A deafening explosion shook the room. Sheets of dust coated Juniper's hair.

Boom.

A closer explosion sent Juniper scrambling across her bunk, pressing herself into the corner with her hands over her ears.

Boom.

Shivering, Juniper pictured the waterfall. Not the carving, but the one where she'd been raised. Hot sun warming her body, cool water rushing over her head, soft sand squishing between her toes. *Home*.

The cell door swung open, and there was Colin, fourth son of Carmine, ruler of the Eastern Shore. Lantern light shone in from the hold, lighting the edges of Colin's lush fur coat and the gold plating of his helmet. Colin held out a single iron cuff attached by a long chain.

"We're making port. Your services are required."

Boom.

A cannon rolled backwards behind Colin in the doorway, its barrel smoking as it was jerked to a stop by large ropes anchored to the wall of the ship. Juniper flinched, but Colin did not.

"Now! Hurry up!"

Juniper rose from her bunk and slid on her silk slippers. With the iron cuff digging into her left wrist, Juniper followed Colin out of the hold and into the violent night.