



The Eye of the Falcon (Gods and Warriors)

By Michelle Paver



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Editorial Review

Review

"While the exotic setting and intriguing plot will draw adventure lovers, Pirra and Hylas' unlikely friendship and budding romance will keep them...A lush and riveting journey."--*Kirkus Reviews*

"Fast paced with well developed characters and a rich setting, this book will appeal to fantasy and history lovers alike."--*VOYA*

"Paver's conscientious research, skilled writing, and beguiling animal familiars continue to produce gratifying levels of adrenaline-charged suspense and pacing."--*Booklist*

About the Author

Michelle Paver is the internationally bestselling author of the Chronicles of Ancient Darkness series and the winner of the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize. She lives in the United Kingdom.

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1

"What happened here?" said Hylas. "Where are all the people?"

"There's one over there," said Periphas, "but he's not going to tell us." He pointed at a ship that the Sea had flung halfway up a hill. Snagged in its rigging was the skeleton of a man. Shreds of rotten tunic flapped in the wind, and one bony arm swung in a grisly wave.

"Looks like the gods punished Keftiu worst of all," said Glaukos.

"Smells like it too," said Medon. The others muttered and gripped their amulets.

Hylas was stunned. Over the winter he'd seen many horrors, but nothing like this. The Sea had smashed huts, boats, trees, animals, people. The shore was eerily silent, and wherever he turned, he saw mounds of rotting wreckage. Dirty gray surf clawed at his boots, and he breathed the throat-catching stink of death. How could Pirra and Havoc have survived this?

With his knife, Periphas turned over the skull of an ox. "This happened months ago. Everything's covered in ash."

"But someone must've survived," said Hylas. "Why didn't they come back and rebuild?"

No one answered.

"This can't be Keftiu," said Hylas. "It's a huge rich island with thousands of people, Pirra told me!"

"I'm sorry, lad," said Periphas. "You won't find your friends now. We'll see if there's anything worth taking, then we're off."

While the others spread out to forage, Hylas spotted a hut farther down the shore and picked his way toward it, desperate to find someone alive.

The icy wind tugged at his sheepskins, and he startled a vulture, which flew off, raising a haze of ash. He hardly noticed. All through the winter the Great Cloud had hidden the Sun, plunging the world into perpetual twilight and shrouding it in ash. He'd grown used to the gloom, and the black grit that got into hair, clothes, food. But this . . .

He thought of his friends as he'd last seen them, seven moons ago on Thalakrea. The Mountain had been spewing fire and there'd been chaos on the shore, people fleeing in whatever boats they could find. Somehow, he'd gotten Havoc and Pirra on a ship: Havoc scrabbling in her cage and yowling at him, Why are you abandoning me, and Pirra white with fury—for the ship was Keftian. "I told you I couldn't go back!" she'd screamed. "I'll never forgive you, Hylas! I'll hate you forever!"

He'd done it to save her. But he'd sent her to this.

The hut was mud-brick and thatch, and someone had crudely repaired it after the Sea's attack. They'd also marked the wall with a stark white handprint. Hylas didn't know what that meant, but it felt like a warning. He halted some distance away.

The wind flung more ash in his face. As he brushed it off, he felt an ache in his temple, and from the corner of his eye, he glimpsed two ragged children. They vanished inside, but he saw that they were girls, one about ten, the other younger. Both had bizarrely shaven heads, except for one long lock hanging from the temple, and angry boils on their necks the size of pigeons' eggs.

"I'm not going to hurt you!" he called.

No answer, but he knew they were listening. And he caught a sense of anger, and hopeless searching.

To reassure them, he turned his back.

Again they appeared at the corner of his vision.

"Are you looking for your parents?" he said without moving his head. "I'm looking for someone too. My friends. Is anyone else alive?"

Still no answer. The anger and loss came at him in waves.

Belatedly, he remembered that he was a foreigner here, so they wouldn't understand him. "I'm Akean," he explained. "I can't speak Keftian!"

Once again when he looked, they vanished inside. After a moment's hesitation, he followed.

The hut was empty.

Yes, empty—and no way out except for this door. The back of his neck began to prickle, and his hand went to the lion-claw amulet at his throat.

Dim gray light filtered through the thatch, and the air was thick with the stench of death. Then on a cot against the opposite wall, he saw the bodies of two girls.

His heart hammered against his ribs.

One girl looked about ten, the other younger. Both had shaven heads with a single lock of hair at the temple, and terrible boils on their necks. A dark haze seemed to boil and swarm around them, like ash—only this was alive.

With a cry Hylas staggered from the hut.

Farther up the shore, the others were already splashing through the shallows to the ship, and Periphas was hastily untying its line from a boulder. “Where’ve you been!” he yelled at Hylas. “We’re clearing out, we found bodies!”

“So did I!” gasped Hylas.

“Did you touch them?” barked Periphas.

“No, I—no.” He didn’t dare mention the children. His mind shied away from what they might be.

No one sees ghosts, he told himself. And yet I saw them. They were there.

“We found three fresh corpses in a shelter,” muttered Periphas. “Black in the face, and all over with boils.”

“What is it?” said Hylas.

“Plague,” snapped Periphas.

The men within earshot blanched.

Hylas’ mind reeled. “M-maybe it’s only on this part of the coast,” he stammered. “If we go farther—”

“I’m not risking it,” said Periphas.

“Then inland! There are mountains, we can—”

“Let me tell you about the Plague,” Periphas cut in. “It comes with the unburied dead. That’s what happened here. First you get a fever. That’s the Plague making its nests in your flesh. Soon those nests swell into great agonizing boils. They hurt so much you can’t stop screaming, but the Plague doesn’t care, it’s breeding inside you. Now the boils are bursting, and the pain’s so bad you’re going mad.” He chucked the line toward the ship. “It only ends one way.”

The others had stopped what they were doing and were gaping at their leader.

Hylas glanced from Periphas to the ruined shore and the hazy mountains beyond. “I-I have to stay,” he said.

“Then you’re already mad,” retorted Periphas. “I thought you were desperate to reach Messenia and find your sister!”

“I am, but . . . The gods didn’t send us to Messenia. They sent us here. To Keftiu.”

“Look around you, Hylas! Your friends won’t have survived this!”

“But if they did—”

“A girl and a lion cub? There’s no one here but the dead! If you stay, you’ll become one of them!”

Hylas licked his lips. “Pirra and Havoc are my friends. I sent them here. I can’t abandon them.”

“What about us? Aren’t we your friends?”

Hylas glanced at the others on the ship. They were tough men—escaped slaves like him—and used to unimaginable hardship. At nearly fourteen, he was the youngest by far, and yet they’d treated him with rough kindness. For seven moons they’d been trying to get back to Akea, but the Sea was full of huge floating islands of pumice, and they kept losing their way. Once, they’d run aground; it had taken two moons to repair the ship. And now they’d fetched up here, on Keftiu.

Hylas looked at Periphas, with his broken nose and his brown eyes that had seen too many bad things. Periphas had saved his life by hauling him aboard as the ship left Thalakrea. He’d been a warrior once, and over the winter he’d taught Hylas a bit about fighting. In a way, they’d become friends.

But Pirra was different—and so was Havoc.

“They need me, Periphas,” said Hylas. “It’s my fault that they’re here. If there’s a chance they’re still alive . . .”

Periphas gave him a strange, angry look. Then he scratched his beard with one grimy hand. “It’s your choice,” he growled. “A pity. I liked you.”

After that, things happened fast. Hylas already carried his axe, knife, slingshot, and strike-fire, but now Periphas gave him a waterskin, a sack of provisions, and a coil of rope. “That always comes in handy,” he said with a scowl.

Soon afterward, Hylas was watching the ship heading out over the gray Sea. He watched till it was gone, and he was left alone with the vultures and the icy wind: a stranger in a haunted land ravaged by Plague.

What have I done? he wondered.

Then he hoisted his gear on his back and headed off to find his friends.

2

Hylas could see snow on the mountains, and here on the coast the wind was freezing, but the cold didn’t bother the lumpy little creature squatting in front of him. It was about knee height and made of dirty wax, with hair of moldy straw and fierce red pebble eyes.

Periphas had warned him about these as he was leaving. “They’re Plague traps, they draw it away from the living. People call them pus-eaters. Make sure you don’t touch.”

As Hylas edged past the pus-eater, he felt an ache in his temple, and rubbed the scar from the burn he’d received on Thalakrea. The ache faded, but from the corner of his eye, he glimpsed dark specks crawling all over the pus-eater. He’d seen the same black swarm on the ghostly children. Was it Plague? Periphas hadn’t said anything about being able to see it, so how could this be?

And how was it possible that he was seeing ghosts?

There was no one to ask. He hadn’t met anyone all day, either living or dead. To his right, the gray Sea

sucked at the shore, and to his left, low gray hills barred the way inland. Halfway up, a dark band of wreckage was a grim reminder of the Sea's attack.

Periphas had told him that if he followed the coast west for a day or so, then headed inland, he would reach the House of the Goddess, where Pirra's mother ruled. "Although who knows what you'll find. There used to be villages and ship-sheds all along this coast. Where we're standing used to be a town."

"What's a town?" Hylas had asked.

"Like a village, but bigger. Thousands of people."

"Thousands?"

"Keftiu is vast, Hylas, it takes two days to sail from one end to the other. Even if your friends are still alive, how will you find them?"

That had only been this morning, but already Periphas seemed long gone. Hylas felt lonely, vulnerable, and cold. He wished he had something warmer than a sheepskin jerkin whose sleeves were too short, and leggings with holes in the knees.

Up ahead, he saw smoke rising from behind a spur. Drawing his knife, he crept forward and peered around a boulder.

He blinked in disbelief.

Below him at the head of a bay clustered several makeshift huts with people bustling about in between, oblivious to the desolation. Some stirred huge steaming cauldrons; others bent over stone vats cut into the hillside, or unloaded dripping baskets from boats in the shallows. Even more bizarre, women stood at drying racks, hanging up sodden armfuls of astonishing colored wool. Scarlet, yellow, blue, purple: The brilliant clots of color seemed to throb in the grayness all around.

The wind gusted in Hylas' face, and he inhaled an eye-watering stench of urine and rotting fish. In astonishment, he realized that these people must be dye-workers. But why would anyone bother to dye wool in a Plague?

He was debating whether to go down and seek shelter or avoid them altogether, when a stone struck the boulder near his head. He spun around—guessed it was a trick—flung himself sideways. Too late. A noose yanked tight around his neck, his knife was kicked from his hand, and spears pinned him front and back.

"I told you, I'm not a thief!" shouted Hylas.

His captors yelled at him in Keftian, brandishing fishing spears and big double axes of tarnished bronze. There were ten of them: squat beardless men in ragged sheepskin tunics baring muscular limbs stained a weird, blotchy purple. Their faces were purple too, and they stank of urine and rotting fish. Hylas had never seen anything like them.

One man hooked Hylas' axe from his belt, then they hauled and pushed him down to the huts, keeping him at a distance with their spears, for fear of Plague.

Still yelling in their strange bird-like speech, they halted at the largest hut, and an old woman appeared in the doorway: Hylas guessed she was the headwoman of the village. She was enormously fat, and swathed in layers of filthy gray rags. She had a spongy purple face crowned with a few greasy threads of hair. One eye

socket was empty, the other eye was a cloudy gray. It skittered about alarmingly, then fastened on Hylas and gave him a hard stare.

One of the men pointed to the tattoo on Hylas' forearm: the black zigzag that marked him as a slave of the Crows. Over the winter, he'd tattooed a line underneath, to turn it into a longbow. That didn't seem to fool the old woman.

"What's a Crow spy doing here?" she rasped in Akean.

"I'm not a Crow," panted Hylas, "and I'm not a spy, I—"

"We drown Crow spies. We feed them to the sea snails."

"I hate the Crows! I'm just trying to find my friend! Her name's Pirra, she's the daughter of High Priestess Yassassara."

The woman snorted. "As if she'd be friends with the likes of you." Barking a command in Keftian, she jerked her head, and the men began to drag Hylas toward the Sea.

"I can prove it!" he shouted. "Pirra grew up in the House of the Goddess, she told me it's huge and—they do rites with men jumping over charging bulls—"

"Everyone knows that," sneered the woman.

They were hauling him over stinking mounds of crushed sea snails, past conical baskets baited with rotting fish. Was that how he was going to end up? As bait?

"Pirra hated the House of the Goddess," he shouted over his shoulder, "she called it her stone prison! Then her mother tried to strike a bargain with the Crows, she was going to seal it by giving Pirra in marriage—but Pirra burned her own face to spoil the match! She—she's got a scar like a crescent moon on her cheek—"

"Everyone knows that too," called the woman.

"You can't do this!" he yelled. "I'm a stranger here, it's against the law of the gods to kill a stranger!"

"The gods have abandoned Keftiu," snarled the woman. "Around here, I make the law!"

Now they were dragging him into the freezing shallows and kicking him to his knees. Icy waves stung his face. The tines of a pitchfork enclosed his neck, forcing him toward the water . . .

Something Pirra had said came back to him. "She had a tunic of Keftian purple!" he blurted out. "She said they make the purple from mashed-up sea snails, thousands of them, and it costs more than gold!"

The woman barked a command, and the pressure on his neck lifted. Panting, he lurched to his feet.

"Quite a few people know that too," the woman called drily. "You'll have to do better if you want to live."

"She—um—once she told me there were only two robes like it in all Keftiu," he gasped, "but nobody's ever seen the other because it's Yassassara's, they made it in secret, she only wears it for secret rites."

Silence. The gray Sea lapped hungrily at his thighs.

“I dyed that wool myself,” said the woman. “By moonlight. In secret. Now, how’d you know that?”

“Like I said, Pirra told me!”

Another command—and Hylas was hauled back to the shore. The noose was removed, the spears withdrawn. Someone chucked him his axe and his knife.

The old woman hawked and spat a gobbet of purple snot on the stones. Then she turned and lumbered back into her hut. “Yassassara’s dead,” she said over her shoulder.

Hylas flinched. “What about Pirra?”

“You better come inside.”

3

The lion cub heard ravens calling from the ridge and quickened her pace. Ravens meant carcasses, and she was hungry.

The Bright Soft Cold lay deep on the mountain, and by the time she’d struggled onto the ridge, the ravens had left only bones. The cub crunched them up, but the hunger didn’t go away.

The cub was always hungry. Long ago, men had brought her to this horrible land of shadows and ghosts. She remembered fleeing in terror as the Great Gray Beast came roaring in and savaged the shore. Afterward, there had been piles of carcasses—dogs, sheep, goats, fish, humans—and swarms of vultures. The lion cub had fought for her share, until men had chased her away with their great shiny claws.

She’d fled to the mountain, because she knew mountains, but this was nothing like the fiery Mountain where she’d lived with her pride. There were no lions, only frozen trees and Bright Soft Cold; hungry creatures, ragged men, and ghosts.

It was a land of shadows. When the cub sat on her haunches and gazed at the Up, she couldn’t see the Great Lion whose mane shone golden in the Light and silver in the Dark. And there was no real Light, only this gray not-Light, in between the Darks.

The cub had grown used to the not-Light, as it helped her hide from men; but as the Darks and the not-Lights passed, the cold bit harder. Her breath turned to smoke, and she couldn’t find any wet to drink, so she ate the Bright Soft Cold. She learned to crawl into caves when the white wind howled, and her pelt grew thick and matted with filth. It kept her warm, but she was too hungry and frightened to lick herself clean.

Then, alarmingly, her teeth started falling out. She was horrified, until new ones thrust painfully through. They were larger and stronger than the old ones: She could rip open a frozen carcass with one bite. And she got bigger. Now when she stood on her hind legs to scratch a tree, her forepaws reached much higher than before.

Here on the mountain, there weren’t as many dead things as on the shore, so as well as scavenging, the cub tried to hunt. Mostly she did it wrong, charging too soon, or getting confused about which prey to chase; but finally she felled a squirrel with a lucky swipe. It was her first kill. If only there’d been someone with her, to see.

That was the worst of it, the loneliness. Sometimes the cub sat and mewed her misery to the Up. She longed for warmth and muzzle-rubs—and to sleep without fear, because other ears and noses were keeping watch.

A jay cawed to its mate, and from high on the ridge came the squawks of vultures. The lion cub struggled toward them through the Bright Soft Cold.

The vultures were squabbling over a dead roebuck. The cub wasn't yet able to roar, so she rushed at them, snarling as loud as she could and lashing out with her claws. It was good to see the vultures flying off in a clatter of wings; and the buck was still warm. Tearing open its belly, the cub hunkered down to feed.

She'd hardly gulped a mouthful when two men burst from the trees, shouting and waving big shiny claws.

The cub fled: down a gully and up some rocks, anywhere, as long as she got away. She didn't stop until she could no longer smell that horrible man-stink.

The lion cub hated and feared all men. It was men, with their terrible flapping hides and their savage dogs, who had killed her mother and father when she was little. It was men who had brought her across the Great Gray Beast to this freezing land of ghosts.

It hadn't always been like this. Long ago when she was small, there had been a boy. She'd had a thorn in her pad, and he'd pulled it out with his thin clever forepaws, then smeared on some healing mud. The boy had looked after the cub and given her meat. She remembered his calm strong voice, and the warmth of his smooth, furless flanks. She remembered his ridiculously long sleeps, and how cross he would get when she jumped on his chest to wake him.

There'd been a girl too. She'd been kind to the cub (except when the cub struck at her ankles to trip her up). For a few Lights and Darks, they'd been a pride together: boy, girl, and cub. They'd been happy. The cub remembered uproarious games of play-hunt, and the humans' yelping laughs when she pounced. She remembered a magic ball of sticks that could fly without wings, and race downhill without any legs. She remembered much meat and muzzle-rubbing and warmth . . .

A clump of Bright Soft Cold slid off a branch and splattered the cub. Warily, she shook it off.

It hurt to remember the boy, because he was the one who had sent her here to this horrible place. He had abandoned her.

The lion cub snuffed the air, then plodded on between the cold unfeeling trees.

She would never trust another human. Not ever again.

4

"You speak Akean," ventured Hylas as he stood shivering in the gloom.

"Well of course I do," snapped the one-eyed old woman, "I am Akean. Name's Gorgo. What's yours?"

"Flea," lied Hylas.

"Your real one."

“ . . . Hylas.”

Gorgo subsided onto a bench before a large fire and arranged her vast belly over her knees. An elderly sheephound heaved himself to his feet and limped over to her, swinging his tail. From a pail, she sloshed milk into a potsherd and watched the dog lap it up. “You just going to stand there?” she barked.

It took Hylas a moment to realize she was speaking to him.

“Feed the fire, then sit,” she commanded. “I can see you’ve not got the Plague, but if you don’t dry off, you’ll die anyway.”

Hylas fed the fire with dried cowpats, then poured seawater out of his boots and huddled as close to the fire as he could without getting scorched. The hut was dark and cramped; he tried to ignore the stink of urine and rotten fish.

With a blotchy purple paw, Gorgo scratched the bristles on her chin. Her cloudy gray eye veered all over the hut, then skewered Hylas. “So. You were a slave of the Crows.”

He nodded. “In the mines of Thalakrea.”

Gorgo grunted. “I hear that’s where it started. The Crows dug too deep and angered the gods. Because of the Crows, the Sun’s gone, we’ve had the coldest winter anyone can remember, and there is no spring.”

Hylas bit back the urge to ask about Pirra. He sensed that the old woman would tell him when she was ready, not before. “What happened here?” he said, his teeth chattering with cold. “I’m a stranger on Keftiu, I—”

“Then your luck just ran out,” said Gorgo. Jabbing her knuckle in her empty eye socket, she gave it a vigorous scratch. “First we knew, the Great Cloud was blotting out the Sun and the ash was raining down. Then the Great Wave.” She scowled. “They say some people just stood and stared. Others fled. Wave got them all. Faster than a horse can gallop. Didn’t see it myself. We’d taken a load of wool inland to be weighed. Bit of luck, or we’d of drowned.”

With a stick, she stabbed the fire. “My sons say they never smelled anything like the stink of the bodies, but I wouldn’t know.” A juddering laugh shook her mountainous flesh. “I can’t smell. Never have.” She spat, narrowly missing the dog. “Since that first fall of ash we’ve had many more. Then the Plague came about a moon ago. It struck the heart of Keftiu. Yassassara ordered everyone out of the House of the Goddess and for all around as far as a man can ride in a day. Villages, farms, emptied. She sent them to the settlements in the west. They can’t come back till the priests say the Plague’s gone.”

Hylas swallowed. “I’m trying to find the House of the Goddess.”

“Didn’t you hear what I said? There’s no point, it’s deserted! The High Priestess was going to do a Mystery, get rid of the Plague and bring back the Sun. Ha!” Another juddering laugh. “Plague got her instead.”

Hylas was appalled. He’d only seen Yassassara once, but she’d radiated power like heat from embers. How could she have succumbed to Plague?

“Didn’t expect that, did you?” Gorgo said drily. “Nobody did. Not even her. They say she had herself carried to her tomb when she was still alive. Had her priests purify the House of the Goddess with sulfur, then seal it up. So now it’s empty. Rest of Keftiu’s not doing much better. Great Wave got most people on the coast, Plague got half the rest. Priests have been busy, sacrificing rams, bulls, but nothing’s worked. Survivors still holed up in the west, a few hiding out in the mountains.” She sniffed. “And with no one to bury the bodies,

we've got all these ghosts wandering about. They're angry, no proper rites, no one to put them at rest in the tombs of their kin."

Hylas went still. "Can you—see them?"

She glared at him. "Course not! Why'd you think that?"

He ducked the question. "Aren't you afraid of the Plague? I mean, why are you still here?"

Again her bloated body shook with laughter. "We smell so bad, not even Plague comes near us! Nobody comes near dye-workers, we've always lived apart. And now with all this rotten meat in the Sea, why wouldn't we stay? It's the best sea snail harvest we've ever had! Plenty of wool about too, all those lost sheep wandering around for the taking." She slapped her belly. "That's why I'm so fat!"

"But who's going to buy your wool?"

"Look," snapped Gorgo. "If the Sun never comes back, the crops fail and we all die. If the Sun does come back, things'll get better and we'll be rich. Either way, we keep working."

Hylas held his hands over the fire and watched his tunic steam. "Why was Keftiu hit harder than anywhere else?"

"Because of Yassassara!" roared Gorgo, causing the dog to set back his ears, and one of her sons to put his head in the door.

Hylas sat very still and waited for Gorgo to calm down.

"You said it yourself," she growled, waving her son away. "Yassassara tried to bargain with the Crows. So when the gods punished them by blowing up Thalakrea, they punished us too. Oh, she knew it was her fault. That's why she was going to do the Mystery, to make up for it."

Hylas mustered his courage. "So where's Pirra?"

Gorgo's eye became opaque, like that of a snake before it sheds its skin. Hylas had a sudden sense that she knew a lot more than she was letting on. "How should I know?" she said. "Now suppose you stop asking questions, and tell me what an Outsider from Lykonía is doing on Keftiu."

Hylas tensed. "What makes you think I'm an Outsider?"

For a heartbeat, she hesitated. "They're the only people I know with yellow hair."

He wondered how much to reveal. "I was a goatherd. The Crows attacked my camp and killed my dog. I got separated from my little sister. That was"—he caught his breath—"nearly two years ago."

Gorgo narrowed her eye. "Why'd they attack you?"

"I don't know." But he did. The Crows wanted him dead because an Oracle had foretold that if an Outsider wielded their ancestral dagger—the dagger of Koronos—it would be their ruin. But he wasn't about to tell a stranger that.

"What's your sister's name?" Gorgo said abruptly.

“What?—Issi.”

Again she scratched her bristly chin. “Did you find her?”

“No. I think she’s in Messenia. If—if she’s still alive.”

“Messenia.” Gorgo’s eye turned inward, remembering. “Long time since I heard that name.” The dog put his muzzle on her knee, but she ignored him. “Dark soon,” she said abruptly to the fire. “You got till nightfall to get out of arrowshot of my village. Don’t ever come back.”

Hylas blinked. “You mean—you’re letting me go?”

Reaching under the bench, she pulled out a small wovengrass pouch and chucked it at him. “Fleabane and sulfur. Might keep off the Plague for a bit.”

“Thanks,” faltered Hylas.

Gorgo glared at him. “Don’t you dare thank me!” she bellowed. “Get out and never come back!”

Hylas was leaving the village at a run, when she shouted after him: “That daughter of Yassassara’s! I hear they took her to the mountains—to Taka Zimi! But that was moons ago, just after the Great Wave, and they say there’s Plague up that way, and some monster stalking the forest—she’ll be dead by now!”

5

Pirra is on the deck of the ship, screaming at Hylas. “I hate you! I’ll hate you forever!” She goes on screaming as the ship pulls away and he is lost from sight.

Now the voyage is over, the ship has reached Keftiu, and Pirra is watching the sailors unload Havoc’s cage. The lion cub is frightened and miserable. She’s been seasick all the way, and has rubbed her forehead raw on the bars, but Pirra couldn’t let her out in case she jumped overboard.

They’re hardly ashore when something terrible happens: The Sea begins to withdraw. Pirra stares in disbelief at glistening mounds of seaweed and stranded, flapping fish. Then the captain remembers a story of the old times and bellows a warning. “It’s going to attack! To the hills! Run!”

Now the sailors are fleeing in panic and Userref is dragging Pirra up a cliff. She sees Havoc in her cage, abandoned on the rocks, and screams at the men to set the cub free, but Userref won’t let go of her wrist and the Great Wave is roaring toward them with vast white claws . . .

Pirra woke up.

She was in bed at Taka Zimi. Her chamber was warm: Embers crackled in the brazier, and she lay in a nest of sheepskins. She smelled the wormwood that Userref burned to ward off the Plague, and heard the distant roar of the waterfall and the gurgle of water collecting in the cistern under the sanctuary. But the dream clung to her. She remembered the terrible silence after the Great Wave had gone.

She shut her eyes. She hadn’t actually seen Havoc washed away. Maybe someone had let the cub out, and she’d escaped in time . . .

Round and round Pirra's thoughts circled: from grief for Havoc, to shock and disbelief over her mother, to rage and anxiety—mostly rage—about Hylas.

As her heartbeats slowed, she realized she was clutching her amulet pouch, which held the falcon feather he'd given her two summers before. Falcons are creatures of the Goddess, but Pirra loved them simply because they enjoyed a freedom she didn't have. It had meant a lot when Hylas had given her this feather.

But things were different now. All through the winter she'd had fights with him in her head. "I told you I'd die if I was sent back to Keftiu—and yet you did it anyway!"

"I was saving your life," replied the Hylas in her head.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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