



ED GREENWOOD
PRESENTS
WATERDEEP

MISTSHORE

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CHAPTER 1

22 ELEINT, THE YEAR OF THE AGELESS ONE (1479 DR)

Icelin pressed her back against the warm chimney and watched an island of rock drift across the sky. Like a roughly hewn barge, it cut through cloud wisps and shrugged aside winging seagulls on its way to some unknown destination, far across Faerûn.

If any living beings walked upon its surface, Icelin couldn't see them. Tiny lightning bolts chased each other across the rock's surface, flashing bruise purple and deepest black. They might have belonged to some otherworldly creatures at play. Icelin ignored them. She was far more interested in the events unfolding below her tucked-up perch on the rooftop.

Dawn had come, and with the first rays of sunlight, the city of Waterdeep came alive.

She heard the wagons first. The commerce of South Ward turned on the spokes of caravan wheels. Merchants carting goods in from the trade routes formed a jagged line that funneled through the south gate from Caravan City. The scent of animal sweat, spices, and earth saturated the air, like threads in a familiar tapestry.

From her vantage, Icelin couldn't see the lines of traffic moving up and down The High Road and The Way of the Dragon. But the huge dust clouds they caused drifted up from the streets to mingle with the dawn fog. The dry air stung her eyes.

Voices shouted from the alley below her. A rear door opened. Icelin caught the sharp tang of yeast in new bread. A tired-eyed

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woman of middle years stepped into the alley, lugging a bucket of soapy water. She emptied its contents into the alley and glanced up to where Icelin sat. She threw a careless wave and turned to go back inside the bakery. Icelin smiled and waved back.

Most of the buildings, including the bakery and her great-uncle's sundries store, fronted The Way of the Dragon; behind they hitched up together against the darker shades of Blacklock Alley. Icelin preferred the quiet of her high perch, especially at dawn, when the rougher alley folk had gone abed or collapsed with a bottle.

Across the alley another door opened. Light spilled from the House of Dust, an affectionately named tavern where much of the caravan traffic ended up at the close of their long journeys. The tavern keeper, a man named Sintus Farlhor, shuffled through the door, sweeping out the leavings from the previous night's business. Muttering and cursing under his breath, he beat the broom against the wall to loosen the dust.

Icelin watched the man impassively. She lifted a bulky sack from a nook behind the chimney and placed it on the ledge next to her. The small lump of burlap had been tied tightly with a leather cord.

"Not sleeping again, lass?"

The voice made Icelin jump. She hadn't heard her great-uncle's approach.

"I thought Waterdhavians considered it virtuous to rise before the dawn," she replied, and she pressed an ivory finger to her lips. "Hush, now. I'm on a mission of deepest revenge this morn."

"Oh, is that all, then?" Brant came to sit next to her on the ledge. He was dressed for work in breeches and a double-pocketed vest of moss green, exactly the shade of the sign over his door. Brant's General Goods and Gear catered to the wagon folk, just like everything else in South Ward.

Brant pressed a mug of something steamy into her hands. Icelin inhaled the sugar and cinnamon in the tea and nodded

her thanks, but she refused to be distracted.

"I heard Farlhor was at it again last night," she said, nodding to the tavern keeper, who had not yet noticed them.

"Shouldn't believe everything you hear." Brant loosened the ties on Icelin's sack and wedged a finger in to touch its contents. He brought the brown substance to his nose and gagged. "Gods, Icelin! You aren't ten years old anymore."

"My poor great-uncle," Icelin said, "you have never appreciated the subtle art of revenge." She put an arm across his thin shoulders. "Watch now. I promise you'll enjoy the spectacle."

"Whatever you say, lass." Brant swiped her tea and took a sip for himself. He wiped his other hand on the shingles.

Three stories below them, Farlhor finished his mad beating of the broom and seemed about to storm back inside the tavern when the door opened in his face. A bouquet of blonde hair and lively chatter spilled out.

"Her name is Eliza," Icelin said for her great-uncle's benefit. "She is sixteen this winter."

The girl was small but compact. Her brown arms showed a slight definition of muscle, but not so much as to make her unattractive. She was built well for barmaid's work, with animate features and friendly brown eyes.

A shutter closed over Eliza's face when she saw Farlhor. She started to back away, but the tavern keeper put himself in the path of escape.

"You're late," he said. He slammed the door, sealing them both in the alley. "I told you to be here before daylight."

Roughly, he grabbed her wrists, hauling her away from the building. The angry glaze in his eyes softened, became something more personal and far more sinister.

"Gods' teeth!" Brant hissed, slamming the tea cup down on the ground. He leaned so far over the ledge Icelin had to grab his belt. "I know that girl's father. Son of a whore! He better not touch her."

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"I don't think he shares your sensibilities, Great-Uncle," Icelin said. She lifted the sack and let the cord fall away. In one motion, she upended the vessel of sweet revenge and emptied fresh dung into the alley.

The cow pies showered down on Farlhor, turning the tavern keeper into a mosaic of straw and animal filth.

Farlhor let out a lusty, inarticulate cry of rage and instantly released the barmaid's wrists. Eliza, who had missed the worst of the dung, bolted down the alley and disappeared around the corner of the tavern. Icelin hoped the girl would be smart enough to find a new place of employment.

"Oh, that was glorious," her great-uncle said. He rocked back on the ledge. "I wouldn't have appreciated the story nearly enough if I hadn't seen it!"

Icelin smiled. But she wasn't done with Eliza's tormentor.

"Sintus Farlhor," she said. Her voice echoed off the surrounding buildings, carrying to the tavern keeper's ears. "Heed me."

Farlhor tried to look up at her, but there was dung in his eyes. Icelin wondered what he could see of her. Her voice was strong, almost masculine—her great-uncle claimed that was because she used it so frequently—but her body was small. She had a thin, pale face curtained by long strands of unruly black hair.

"There are no fouler men than you in this city. But darker still are the eyes that watch this alley," Icelin said. "If you want to tryst here, let it be with yourself and not the girls under your care. If you forget, I will rain more than animal filth on you."

"Who are you?" Farlhor yelled, trying to sound fearsome. He squinted at her. "I know you! You're Brant's little she-witch! Come down here, then. I'll crack your bones." He reached for his broom.

"Will you, now?" Icelin said. Her voice was very soft.

She could feel Brant's eyes on her as she started the spell. No words came to her lips, not at first. Instead she hummed, finding

the tune of an old song. She could recall it without breaking her concentration on the magic. The rhythm of the song steadied her until she was ready to cast.

The words and gestures felt foreign to her at first. She used them so seldom that recalling each aspect of the spell was a chore. Patiently, she worked her way through the complex patterns.

When she was done, the air crackled. Farlhor's broom snapped in half.

The tavern keeper shrieked and dropped the broken pieces. Cursing, he grabbed for a pouch that hung around his neck. The trinkets inside were meant to ward off harmful magic, but Icelin knew for a fact that they were owl pellets and painted stones, sold at the markets as arcane charms.

Rubbing his precious forgeries, Farlhor opened the door and darted through it into the safety of the tavern.

Icelin leaned back against the chimney, breathing hard.

"Icelin—lass!" Brant grabbed Icelin's shoulder as she swooned, but the faintness passed quickly enough. Then came the nausea, but she mastered it as well, swallowing and gulping air like a drowning swimmer.

It had been too long since she'd used such magic. She hadn't been properly prepared. The spell was not difficult, but she had worked herself up into a fury before the casting.

"I'm all right," she said. She squeezed his hand. "I'm just weak."

"You shouldn't have spent yourself like that," Brant scolded her, his good humor forgotten. "It's not like you to be so careless."

"You're right." Icelin grinned and pulled back her sweat-soaked hair. "But revenge is such a demanding creature. You have to be patient, day after day, until your chance comes in a wondrous spark of inspiration. The stableman down the south end of the Way; his son has a devious heart the equal of my own."

"I find that hard to imagine," her great-uncle said dryly.

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“He selected the dung personally: aged one day inside a fat, cud-fed cow. I’m told she has loathsome intestines.”

“Oh, I hope that’s so,” Brant said. “But you didn’t need to use magic, Icelin. The dung was enough.”

“I know.” Her gaze flicked briefly to his. “Eliza and I used to play together as children.”

“I remember,” Brant said. “I don’t fault your feelings. But you could have given Farlhor over to the Watch if you feared for her safety.”

“Yes, and you know precisely why I didn’t.” Icelin leaned her head back against the chimney and closed her eyes. “Hush, now, while I bask in the sweet glory of my victory.”

“Perhaps you should take to sleeping on the roof always,” Brant observed. “Up here, you seem to have command of the whole world.”

“If by world you mean Blacklock Alley, then I’ll warrant you’re right.” Icelin didn’t open her eyes. “I will reign over it as queen—or witch—and never have to sleep again. The Watchful Lady, I shall be, with her raven-black tresses and bloodshot eyes.”

“We all need to sleep sometime, lass,” her great-uncle said seriously. “Tell me truly: are the nightmares getting worse?”

“No. They are what they are.”

“It’s been five years, Icelin. Maybe, if we found you another teacher, he could help. You clearly still have the ability. It’s only the control you lack.”

“No,” Icelin said. “I don’t want to get into all that again. Today was a lapse. I lost my temper. It won’t happen again.”

She stared down at the alley, refusing to meet Brant’s eyes. After a breath, she felt her great-uncle take her hand. She leaned sideways and allowed him to gather her up. They sat together, silently, against the backdrop of the awakening city.

“You never knew my Gissetta. But when you were humming that song, you sounded just like her,” Brant said quietly.

"The music calms me," Icelin said. "The rhythm it makes in my chest. . . . Spells are just like music, only more. And more frightening," she added. "But the song braces me." She looked up at him. "You used to sing it to me. 'Give me eyes for the darkness, take me home, take me home.'" She knew Brant liked her singing voice. It was the only untainted gift she could give him, so she sang in his company as often as she could.

Brant patted her shoulder. "We should go below," he said. "The day has started without us, and you've an appointment with Kredaron after highsunfest."

"I haven't forgotten." Icelin said, wrinkling her nose.

"He's a respectable merchant, Great-Niece," Brant said. He always called her "great-niece" when duty and responsibility were involved. "You made a contract, and you have to honor it."

"It's not the honor part that I'm dreading," Icelin said. "But you're right. The price is more than fair, for one afternoon's work."

"What's he having you guard?"

"He wants to sell jewelry—family heirlooms, mostly—to boost his coin while he establishes his spice business. He's offered me first selection of the pieces before he sells them. All I have to do is ensure their security before and during the transaction."

Brant whistled. "That is generous. You remember what I taught you about appraising?"

Icelin shot him a wry look.

"Right, of course you do." Brant offered a hand to help her up. "You'll do well by him. This will be a good day."

"Assuming everything goes smoothly." Icelin plucked up the discarded cup, got to her feet, and drained the rest of her tea in one swallow. Brant sighed at the gulping noise.

Icelin wiped her mouth. "Yes, Great-Uncle, I slurp my tea and will therefore never be a proper lady." She widened her eyes. "Didn't I horrify you with that revelation a long time ago?"

"Can't an old man hope for a miracle?" Brant smiled. "In

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with you. The least you can do is meet Kredaron in something more than a dressing gown.”

“Anything to make you happy, Great-Uncle.”



The sun was warm and high in the sky by the time Icelin got out of the house. She and Brant shared a small, neat set of rooms above the sundries store. Her great-uncle had few possessions, and Icelin had no great desire for baubles. The space was more than adequate for them both.

As promised, she'd shed her dressing gown, and even washed her face. But then Brant had cornered her in the kitchen and forced her to eat some bread and a bowl of the simmer stew he'd prepared the night before. He claimed she never ate enough. Her usual chores were after that—washing the windows and sorting coin from the previous day's business—before she had to prepare for her afternoon meeting with Kredaron.

She'd braided her hair and put on an ankle-length dress of light linen—brown, of course, so it wouldn't show the dust. One had to measure beauty against practicality in South Ward. Clouds of dust were everywhere on the dry days, and the mud slowed traffic when the rains came. But she had tall boots for those wetter occasions.

Crossing the High Road, Icelin wove among carts and shouting drivers until she reached Tulmaster's Street. She slowed her pace and walked in the shade of the crowded old stone shops and warehouses. The cries of cattle and horses mingled with the constant chatter of people coming and going on the busy streets.

Icelin knew the way without marking it. She knew that two streets north sat Shureene's Clothiers, and after that The Lone Rose, a flower shop that had been vacant since the winter but still smelled of fresh blooms. New violets grew in boxes outside the empty shop's windows. Someone had been watering them,

though Icelin knew the shopkeeper had left the city months ago, with no expectation of returning.

This perpetual motion of travelers and traders, old and new settlers making their marks, left a strange mixture of restlessness and comfort in the city's inhabitants. Change could come in a day, yet commerce carried on. There was always more coin to be made and more to be lost. Icelin had been born to this function; it was the one thing you could always count on, according to her great-uncle.

Between the flower shop and the Inn of Spirits were two condemned warehouses. Icelin turned off Tulmaster's before she reached them, opting instead for Caravan Street to take her to the designated meeting spot.

The Watch claimed the warehouses were not dangerous, but Icelin had heard rumors, whispers that Spellplague workings had made the buildings unstable. Icelin avoided such places, as did all sensible folk in Waterdeep.

The city had been lucky—or gods-blessed enough—to escape much of the destruction that came in the wake of the Spellplague, an event that Icelin only comprehended through her great-uncle's stories. The explosion of wild magic had swept through Faerûn decades before her birth. Icelin and the rest of the younger folk had been spared the phenomenon and many of its aftereffects.

Icelin glanced at the sky. In the distance, she could still see the floating rock mote and its lightning play. One could get lost watching the strange islands drift over the city.

She blinked and saw the impression of a tower: white stone buried in sand. The spire appeared grown from the rock itself. Icelin shivered and looked away. When she looked back, the tower was gone. She must have imagined it.

That was another reason folk were quick to come and go from the city. All over Faerûn, the Spellplague had made life an uncertain notion at best. At times you couldn't trust your

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own eyes. And the strange, deadly spell ravages always seemed to spur people in one of two directions: to the cities, for relative comfort and security; or to the wilds, so that the travelers might comprehend some small piece of this changed landscape. Whatever strangeness had been wrought in Waterdeep by the Spellplague, Icelin wanted nothing of that outside world and all its upheaval.

Quickening her pace, Icelin tucked up closer to the familiar buildings, structures that didn't change shape or sprout new heads.

She reached the end of Caravan Street and a small, open square between buildings. Portals had been cut in the side of the nearer building, and folk leaned out to serve handpies and cold drinks to laborers and passersby. Wooden benches lined the square, and a handful of people sat at tables and sipped while they conducted private business.

Kredaron sat at the far end of the square. He was an aging man, with white hair that curled at the ends and papery skin that had seen the sun too often. He carried a rolled bundle of silk close to his chest. He rose and waved when Icelin caught his eye.

"Greetings, Kredaron," Icelin said, taking the seat across from him. "I hope you haven't been waiting long."

"Not at all, lass," the merchant said. His voice sounded soft and reedy. "I appreciate you coming. I trust Brant is well?"

"Yes, and he sends his greetings," Icelin said. She spread her hands. "So, where is this trove you would have me safeguard?"

Kredaron smiled. "Brant said you didn't enjoy wasting time—how rare in a young person. To business then, but if I may: would it be rude of me to ask for a small demonstration of your qualifications?"

"Not at all." Icelin's polite smile held. She listened to the sounds of the square. After a breath, she put her hand on the warped tabletop and made a gesture against the wood grain.

Light glazed her fingertips, and a warm glow spread across the table. No one sitting nearby could see the light except Icelin and the merchant. When the light faded, Icelin took a moment to gather her wits. There was no nausea, just the edge of weakness that came with every spell. Fortunately, she'd eaten heartily before leaving home—her great-uncle had seen to that—and barely noticed the pull.

She focused on Kredaron. "There are three occupied tables behind me. One is a lad and lass, roughly six summers my junior. They are lovers planning how best to tell the lass's father that she is with child, and they not yet hand-fasted. The second is a gnome sitting alone. He talks to himself, lives in the Warrens, and thinks it's too warm this Eleint day for being out of doors. The third table bears two women, pocket-thieves, who until a breath ago were very interested in your roll of silk. I've since disguised it to appear as if you're holding an ugly and very sulky dog, wrapped in a silk blanket. We should be undisturbed."

Kredaron shook his head in admiration. "Brant didn't exaggerate. You are remarkable, lass. Did you determine all that with your magic?"

"No," Icelin said, chuckling. "Mostly I listened to their conversations. Folk reveal more about themselves when they feel they are unobserved than most magic could tell you about their entire lifetimes."

"True words," Kredaron said. His forehead wrinkled. "You have an extraordinary memory, to note so much detail."

Icelin's smile twisted ruefully. "My means of living is spellcraft, but it is not my only gift. If you would know my full qualifications, you should be aware that my memory is flawless. I can recall any piece of information I am confronted with, no matter how trivial."

Kredaron smiled uncertainly. "That's quite a statement. I would dismiss such a claim entirely, especially coming from so young a

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person, but you don't seem to take any joy in the admission."

Icelin lifted a shoulder. "I only speak of it when it's necessary to the task at hand. Whether you believe me or not, you should know what you're getting when you hire me. Would you care to test me?"

"I would, for curiosity's sake," Kredaron said. "How?"

"Spread out your pieces," Icelin said. "I've shielded the table from prying eyes."

"As you say." Kredaron unrolled the span of silk on the table in front of her.

Icelin looked at the spread for two breaths and then back at Kredaron. "Cover them," she instructed.

He did as she asked. When the pieces were safely hidden, so that not even their shapes could be discerned in the wrappings, Icelin folded her hands on the tabletop.

"I am by no means an expert," she said, "but by my estimation your heirlooms would easily bring in enough coin for you to establish a presence in the spice market, perhaps even secure property for a small shop. You have three opals: one in a silver ring, thumb-sized; one in a clawed brooch; and one alone, ripped from its setting by some force. There is a ruby with a well-concealed flaw, and a silver braided neckpiece, like a spiderweb but with links missing. You shouldn't have any trouble repairing them; the damage is minimal. The gold chains are problematic—one is a clever forgery, but nested with the others it appears just as fine. I would of course remove that one before trying to sell the lot.

"You won't have trouble with fakery when it comes to the matching circlets. Those chains are genuine, and the diamonds they hold are the star items of your collection. But I didn't have to appraise them to know that. Your displaying of them in the exact center of the collection shows your pride. The sunlight catches the stones and sets them aflame with color.

"There is magic swirling in all the pieces," Icelin said, "of

varying degrees. It would take further study to determine how much and of what type.”

“What about the bracelet?” Kredaron asked her. “The charms on the chain, what were they?”

“The charms were a lock and key, both tarnished, a tiny slipper, and a rose,” Icelin said. “The rose was pink topaz. There was no bracelet. Shall I keep going?”

“How long could you recite them?” Kredaron asked, fascinated. “Will you remember the pieces tomorrow, or is this just a mind trick you’ve mastered?”

“I will remember them tomorrow and every day for the rest of my life, if it serves me,” Icelin said. Kredaron was right. She felt no joy in the admission. “Since it likely won’t serve me beyond this day,” she added, “I will put the knowledge away, find some dusty corner where my memory has space—there’s always space, of course—and there it will stay. Once I’ve put a recollection like that aside, it’s difficult to find again, since I don’t have a ready use for it. It’s much like locating a single crate in all the warehouses of Dock Ward. It may take hours, days, but I can remember them all.”

Kredaron shook his head. “Well, lass, you are a wonder, which is rare in a city full of them. You have shown me your skills. I am assured of success in this transaction.”

Icelin inclined her head. “Then let us proceed.” When he’d spread out his items again, she laid a finger on a cameo brooch. The figure was of a thin woman sheathed in lace. The piece was smooth with age, but the detail was still astonishing, from the creamy relief to the oval background. She’d briefly touched the magic in the piece, but that was not her reason for choosing it. Her interest lay in its value to a jeweler.

“May that be my payment, Kredaron?” she inquired.

“You have excellent taste,” said the merchant. He lifted the brooch for her inspection. “It’s not the most valuable, nor the most ostentatious of the lot. But there is history here, I think.”

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“You *think*? You don’t know the origins of the pieces?”

“Not all of them,” Kredaron admitted. “They came from my father’s family, and he’s been gone a long time. I don’t even know who the woman is, so I haven’t formed any particular attachment to the piece. You may have it with my gratitude.”

Icelin slid the brooch into the coin-purse fastened around her neck and tucked the pouch away in her dress. Kredaron ordered them light wine from the vendors. The glasses were just being poured, the wine’s buttery color glowing warm in the sunlight, when Kredaron’s buyer arrived.