

*A not-so-quick note: At the end of the novel, Raevyn Thorne has developed an absurdly long title. She is addressed as Lady Raevyn Thorne, the Lady of House Thorne, Mistress of Ravenhall, Lady Thorne, the Thornbearer, the Ravenqueen, the Queenslayer, the Dreadmother, the Crownbreaker, and the Raven in the Night.

RAEVYN I

When night fell, house Thorne fell. The Lady Raevyn had succumbed to the shadow presence of the queen, Alysanne, and had been threatened from the shadows. Her daughter Shaeryn, her heir, and her son Aelar had been taken captive by the queen on false charges of debt. Her reputation ruined, Lady Raevyn was forced to bend to Alysanne, to ensure the safety of her children.

In a public display, the queen forced Lady Raevyn to bow, and secretly put her on a treasonous mission: to act as a spy and a saboteur to an enemy queen. The queen Kathryn Sommyr of Sothgar, closest ally and confidant of Lady Raevyn, was thought to be stirring rebellion in the south. Lady Raevyn was to uncover this plot and condemn Kathryn to death. Her closest ally, her closest friend. Now her greatest enemy...

Raevyn Thorne, a lady of the court, sailed alongside common barbarians. The men around her were all surly, muscular men, most of them coming from the north. Every one of them had a beard worthy of the highest praise, and each time the strong sea-wind blew, their whiskers flapped like birds. Raevyn made sure to move out of the way whenever this happened.

Their journey had been mostly uneventful, excluding the occasional storm and dragon, the dragons they did see being too small to harm anyone. Raevyn had seen dragons up north big enough to fit an entire castle in their mouths, and had nearly died with her

husband fighting War Dragons in the east. House Thorne had never had a Royal Dragon, like the noble families of the north, south, and east did. For some reason, dragons hatched everywhere except the west, a curse that many queens had tried to break.

Raevyn had been many places in her time: to Westgar, as the head of house Thorne. To Sothgar, as an exile. To Northgar, to wage war against its people. To Eastgar, to search for new dragons. And now back to Sothgar, to spy against her will. She stood at the prow of the ship, facing the left, looking over the vast waters. As the days passed, she had noticed a huge shift in the weather. As the company headed south, the air had become humid, something the crew complained about often.

She had commanded each member of the crew to swear an oath of total silence, and the queen had “encouraged” the captain with the threat of crucifixion. Captain Baldur, understandably, did not like this, but Raevyn had to keep this a secret, after all. Spying was generally frowned upon by lords and ladies. Especially on one’s closest ally.

Queen Kathryn Sommyr of Sothgar had long been an ally of house Thorne. After Raevyn was exiled from the west for conspiring against her king, Kathryn had taken her in and sheltered her in Sothgar until it was safe to return. When queen Alysanne and her loyalists took control of Westgar and began a purge of the late king’s allies, Raevyn had protected house Sommyr from the queen’s wrath, after returning to Westgar and claiming her titles once more.

And now, through cunning and plot, Alysanne had put Raevyn in debt and forced her to turn against house Sommyr by spying on Kathryn. And Raevyn had allowed this to happen, completely unaware of the queen’s plans until it was too late. Now, for the good of house Thorne, her children and her husband, Raevyn served Alysanne. Not her friends, not her allies, but her queen.

Often, Raevyn would spend time alone in her favorite spot by the masts, where she would take necessary breaks from the crew to think. Some days, she would cry, and others, she would laugh. She tried not to think about her mission, about her intentions. What she was going to do to her friends. But sometimes, it was unavoidable. When this happened, it put her in an awful mood, and she retreated to her spot to spare the crew her wrath. Today,

she found herself staring into the water, watching as their ship raced past the waves, leaving them behind and greeting them again. It was beautiful.

Raevyn jumped when a crew member came up behind her, his loud footsteps heralding his arrival. She let out an embarrassing, high-pitched squeal, and nearly fell backwards into the sea, but managed to hold herself up by grabbing onto the wooden rail. The man who had startled her—Frey, the bosun—simply stared at her, like he had somehow missed her near death. Raevyn tried to act like she didn't care, quickly pulling herself together, addressing Frey.

“Frey!” she said, greeting him warmly, ignoring his interruption of her peace.

Frey was holding a half-eaten fish from the previous night, picking small bones out of his teeth, eating what he could out of the poor creature. Raevyn didn't mind, because, hey, you gotta do what you gotta do to survive. Even if it meant a savage act of fish mutilation. Frey, it seemed, wore a constant expression, even in the worst and best conditions. When Raevyn and the crew were nearly shipwrecked in a storm a week ago, Frey was found staring blankly into the chaos for hours, as if he didn't care. It was strange. Encouraging, yet destructive at the same time, weakening one's confidence in a mere glance.

“Milady, da' lookout has spotted land, and ye' shall dock at the Dragonport soon. Da' queen Kathryn w'll be expectin' ya'. And...well, seein' as we've been acquaintances fa' so long, the crew wanted to give ya' somethin'. A token o' thanks, if ya' will.” He spoke through his noisy chewing, his powerful and gruff northern accent conveying just how much strength he really had.

In truth, Raevyn was touched by the gesture of kindness. The northerners took debts very seriously, she had heard. Unless they were just trying to win her over. Maybe she had been harsh on the captain, Baldur, with the crucifixion threats and all that. Whatever the gift was for, she was ever willing to accept it, seeing as she was a lady and it would be rude to turn it down. She would offer a gift of her own, later.

“I'm anxious to see what this...what this token of thanks *is*, of course. You may proceed,” she said, curtsying.

“Come, then, if ya’re really interested. The rest of da’ crew is gathered in da’ hold. Except, da’ captain, o’ course. Ya’ know how he is,” Frey said, finishing off the last bits of the fish, throwing the inedible parts into the sea.

Not surprising, Raevyn thought. The old grouch wasn’t one for talk, and rarely ever left his quarters. The first time she had seen him was with Alysanne, when she was just leaving the west and the matter of gold was first discussed. Baldur had appeared stern, at first, but after talking to him when the queen wasn’t there, he had shifted completely from a stony but human character into an all-out sociopath who locked himself in his chambers and never slept. Frey and Olaf ran the ship with Baldur locked away.

Raevyn hadn’t noticed before, but she found that she could hear the crew below deck even with the constant blowing of the wind. She smiled and followed Frey down the stairs, leaving the outdoors and the fresh air behind. The cargo hold was dark, like always, save for the few candles that the crew had lit. Unlike the outdoor appearance of the ship—threatening and fearsome, with a dragon figurehead and a sail depicting a dragon encircling a skull—the inside was like a cavern, dark and cold. But today, it was warm and lighter of feeling, more like an old tavern than a cave.

Frey lead Raevyn through the main hall and into the hold, which now stored more food and drink than it did cargo. She had never liked to spend time here, and had elected to sleep on the deck rather than in the sleeping chambers. It smelled like... men. Men who hadn’t bathed in weeks. *Still, they’re the same men that were kind enough to carry me across the sea and into the south*, she thought as she stepped through the doorway and witnessed the scene.

Most of the crew, a group of forty-four, were sitting at separate tables, talking and laughing with the maidservants. One of them lay passed out on the floor, and four others were brawling and had attracted quite the party. Raevyn braced herself as Frey coughed and announced:

“Da’ Lady Thorne is here!” he shouted, trying to get the attention of the whole crew.

It took a while, but Frey got them all to settle down. The few that had spent the coin to buy the gift stood, and gathered in an awkward horseshoe circle. Raevyn tried not to laugh as Olaf, a huge beast of a man, brought a fancy wooden box with a raven carved into the lid

up to her, bowing dramatically. Raevyn giggled as she opened its lid, wondering what would be inside. A dress? No, the box was much too small for that. A bow? She had made it very clear that she hated bows. It had to have been something that rough men like this would give a lady like her...

She stared at the contents of the box, utterly speechless. She drew the weapon from its sheath and drilled her eyes into it. It was perfect! Not at all what she was expecting. The blade gleamed with a light truly unlike any she had ever seen, and its small crossguard was simple yet beautiful, made to look like raven wings. The pommel was exquisitely proportioned, tiny and regal, made to match a rose thorn's appearance. She ran her finger along the blunt end of the blade, then put her hand around the hilt and drew it up, so that she could examine it in the faint light.

Women, despite being the more important gender, able to ride the Royal Dragon and take thrones where men could not, were forbidden to draw swords, except in a knighting ceremony. To kill with one was the man's job, to defend and to serve. Spears were not womanly, and axes were for barbarians. Daggers, however, were not forbidden. Raevyn had ample experience with the weapon, wielding it during her first days in the north. She had perfected the art of the Dragoncraft, a style invented to allow a woman to penetrate tough dragon skin and thick dragonbone and remain undetected. This worked by exploiting the physical weaknesses of a dragon, such as the exposed head and neck. True, the weapon she wielded in the north was nowhere near as fine as this.

"And what smithy was it that created this masterpiece? To whom do I owe the honor?" Raevyn said, truly breathless.

Frey was there to answer her question, chuckling a bit, preparing his voice.

"Olympia, da' queen in da' east, owned a legendary slave-smith from da' north. This dagger was dis' life's work, and he named it da' Thorn. When the east kingdom fell, da' dagger was taken north, where it was given to my grandfather. I inherited da' blade after da' death of me' parents, but you, m'lady, have proven ya'self worthy of the Thorn. May it serve you well in all your... endeavors," the bulky man said, a somber feeling radiating from his face, as if he really did feel emotion sometimes.

To Raevyn's sorrow, the dagger only reminded her of her mission. She thanked Frey and the rest of the crew before dragging herself back to the deck, head hung low. She sunk into a ball beneath the masts, in her special spot, and cried many silent, painful tears. She clutched Thorn, pulling it close. She wanted to return to the first days, when she was the luckiest lady in the kingdoms, to have befriended a princess, and the princess was lucky to have the greatest ally she could ever have. But she allowed those times to slide away, and because of her carelessness, she had put her daughter and son in danger and put herself in debt.

She had played a dangerous game, she had lost, and she had to pay the hard price. She must've left the crew confused, with her sudden departure from the hold. Frey, or Olaf, would come up soon. She knew them, and they had always been concerned with her well-being. Whether it was because she was their passenger (and a noble one at that) or because they truly cared about her, she didn't know. Perhaps it's a bit of both, she thought.

Raevyn wiped the tears from her eyes, sheathing Thorn. She looked over, to her right, seeing land and a city. Daemyria was just the way she remembered it, with the huge, beautiful lighthouse, the shining palace on the hill, the magnificent Dragonport, and the dragons had chosen the south as their home, flying above the city, their wings and scales like living stars. If she was correct, house Sommyr still kept a Royal Dragon. Raevyn had forgotten its name, but she was sure to soon find out.

The last time Raevyn had visited had been a decade ago. She remembered the way the city made her feel...always alive, like the port, lighthouse, and dragons that made it shine. Here, ever since the very first queen to ever rule ascended her throne in the north, dragons had lived. The western queens, Raevyn knew, had always been envious of this. A few claimed that it was the reason that Alysanne was so bitter. Raevyn didn't know for sure, but she definitely hated Alysanne. She'd plotted killing the queen on several occasions. Whether it be crucifixion, hanging, public execution, poison, or simple assassination, Raevyn didn't care. She just wanted the queen dead.

They were very near to the harbor now. Raevyn could hear the noises of the men on the port, mostly loud grunts and the occasional logical word. Kathryn's brother and husband,

Maerok, was supposed to be there to greet them. Raevyn had met Maerok once before, when he mustered the armies of the south to fight War Dragons. He was no mean warrior, and was certainly a match for the queen's intellect, something that all the queens looked up to for council. He had also acquired quite the expensive tastes, Raevyn had heard.

Raevyn's children, Shaeryn and Aelar, had always thought the incestual traditions of the kingdoms to be strange. All children did, but incest was the only way to keep the royal bloodline pure. If the most intelligent were to lead them, the only way to keep the bloodline just as intelligent was through incest. Raevyn understood this, the common folk understood this, and the royals most definitely understood this. The men in the royal families were the Crownmakers, and the women the Crownbearers. Queen Alysanne never had a brother, and therefore no heir.

Raevyn reminded herself that she was doing this for her children, but the sight of Maerok made her nearly collapse on the inside. The same golden-blond hair accustomed to all southerners, the dark skin of house Sommyr, and the deep, emerald eyes that all southern royals had. The ship was docking, rocking steadily from side to side, just like her conflicting heart. Frey, Olaf, the rest of the crew, and even crusty-skinned Baldur were pulling themselves onto the deck. Olaf bore an expression of confusion and hurt, probably thinking that there was something wrong with the dagger that made Raevyn storm off.

Raevyn felt bad, now, for leaving the hold without any explanation. She would explain what happened to Frey and Olaf later. Right now, she had duties to attend to. Raevyn adopted a royal stature, raising her chin and standing tall, giving her hand to a man who tried to help her down from the ship. Raevyn stepped down, putting both feet on the ground and feeling what it was like to be on land again. The ground was...still. Calm. Like ancient, unchanging stone. Like the western palaces Raevyn had escaped. She hid the feelings inside her and continued, towards a smiling Maerok, ever a statesman.

Above, whole bunches of dragons flew, some bigger than others, many smaller than the rest. The Royal Dragon was always the biggest of them all, but was never a War Dragon. The royals usually preferred beasts like these. Powerful, yet not as powerful as they were

gorgeous works of living, breathing art, brought into the world when the gods deemed fit. Raevyn made out fifty-four dragons, each one unique in its own way.

She curtsied and smiled broadly, displaying the perfect image of a young noblewoman who knew nothing but joy and mirth. Maerok bowed, kissed her hand, and rose smiling at her and the crew. Of course, he smiled the most at Raevyn.

“My good fellows, my dear lady Thorne! We have long awaited your arrival, my wife especially. She has been caught up in the affairs of the state, worrying about this, or that. I am most certainly not cut out for the burden of a kingdom. I do, however, wish to know how your time at sea treated you. The vessel Alysanne and I paid for certainly held up, I see,” the Crownmaker announced, exaggerating his voice, as if he were part of a theatre production.

“Yes, milord, the vessel most certainly did hold up. As for our voyage, a few sudden storms and more than a few common drakes disturbed us, but I dare say it was enjoyable. Especially with such a fine crew! I give my humble regards to Frey, a bosun, and Olaf, a navigator,” Raevyn said, turning to face Baldur and the crew. “And, if I may, your Grace, I have decided to appoint these two to my personal guard. It has been quite lonely ever since I returned from the north,” she made sure to carefully enunciate every word, checking her tone and thinking about every sentence she made.

Despite this, Baldur’s crusty old face lit up like dragonfire, his gob nearly exploding with all the awful things that he could say in that moment. Frey and Olaf, on the other hand, wore expressions of shock, the one time Raevyn had ever seen Frey show true emotion. It was a nice change from the hurt frown Olaf was giving her a minute ago. The captain, however annoyed he was, managed to construct a polite, calm, yet obviously fake manner about himself.

“I politely decline, yer’ Grace. Dees’ men came to ye’ for work, and they’ll stay, to do da’ work that ye’ themselves laid out before yem’,” Baldur said, turning and beckoning the crew to follow him.

Maerok shot an annoyed look at Baldur. He stepped forward, to deal with the captain himself, but Raevyn stopped him.

“Captain, do you recall my *command* as a question? Because I do NOT recall leaving any room for argument. One way, you can defy me, lose your men, and find yourself on the cross. The other way, you politely cooperate, lose your men, and keep your life. I’d really hate to see you go now, seeing as we’ve been shipmates for far too long. Which shall it be, captain?” Raevyn said, putting power and strength behind her words.

Baldur whirled around again, this time drawing his sword.

“M’lady, I believe ye’ve overstepped ya’ power! This is a rough man ya’ got here, and rough men do as they please. I wouldn’t care now or ever when I killed ya’, but mark me’ words, Lady Thorne, ya’ got more than one enemy with a sword pointed at ya’!” Baldur said, announcing a threat.

Maerok put his hand on his sword-hilt, preparing to draw it and strike the captain down.

“Captain Baldur, you stand accused of the harassment and assault of a noblewoman and an ally of the queen and Crownbearer Kathryn Sommyr. By order of her majesty, the sovereign of all...” said Maerok, who was cut off when Raevyn raised her hand, silencing him for good.

“No, milord! This man is a traitor to my house and name, mine alone! I will deal with this traitor personally, like I always have!” Raevyn shouted, drawing Thorn from its scabbard, ignoring the captain’s warning.

“Have at thee!” Baldur cried, leaping forward, swinging at Raevyn’s head.

Raevyn dodged, swinging her head under the captain’s sword, rolling out of the way just in time. She swung Thorn at Baldur’s side, just as he turned to face her. The dagger cut deep, bloodying the captain. He staggered, managing to balance himself. He lunged forward, planning to skewer Raevyn’s throat on his sword. Instead, the lady dodged again, tackling the man from behind and stabbing Thorn deep in his leg. Baldur howled, rolling around on the docks, trying to throw Raevyn off. She eluded the captain’s feet, just as she had before with his blade, and attacked from the front. The poor man was still on the ground when Raevyn thrust Thorn through his heart.

To Be Continued...

Gauldur

The brothers Jyrik, Mikrul, and Sigdis, were the sons of Gauldur, Arch-Mage of the College of Winterhold. Gauldur owned an amulet of extreme power, sought by many, including his sons. They ambushed him, oneday, and thrust their daggers through him. Gauldur perished, and his sons went on to wage war against the King of Skyrim, Harald. They split the amulet in three ways, so that each could have a fraction of its power. Harald had the strength of dragons, because he wore the Jagged Crown, but the brothers had the amulet. Harald searched for the legendary sorcerer Geirmund, and asked him for his aid in defeating the brothers. Geirmund declined at first, but agreed to help when Harald bested him in a contest of wits. Geirmund used the horn Windcaller, once owned by Jurgen Windcaller himself, to summon a storm which destroyed the armies of the brothers. Geirmund used a powerful writ to seal the brothers away, along with their pieces of the amulet. Geirmund demanded a reward, but was betrayed by Harald and killed, in order to keep the war a secret from future generations. Harald buried Geirmund in his former hall, alongside Sigdis Gauldurson. The amulet still lies in pieces, the legend forgotten. But for any man who can remember, the treasure is theirs for the taking.

MAEROK I

*The dragons in the east fought with tooth and claw,
but none could stand against mighty Jaesan Thorne.
He wielded a blade forged of dragonbone, and
likewise his armor of dragonscale. Many drakes, whether they
be of fire or ice, fell to a blow dealt by Jaesan, and more still
felled by time. When the knights of the west gathered and prepared a final
assault, Jaesan fell from his saddle and perished, his
life ended by a mysterious disease. And so, night fell for
house Thorne.*

Maerok stood completely still, hand still on his sword hilt, in shock at what he saw. A young girl, a widow at that, had just slain a northerner. He pulled his hand away from his sword and bowed, a traditional way to celebrate a victory. Maerok had dressed himself in his finest

armor, hoping that he wouldn't need it to simply welcome an old friend. As it turned out, he didn't. Raevyn had handled the captain just fine.

“Well done, milady. Make an example of traitors,” Maerok said, putting on a fake look of satisfaction.

Raevyn flashed a quick, pretty smile, all for looks. She approached Maerok and requested his sword.

“Milord, these men expect a knighthood and a chance as my bodyguards.

Death of Mercer Frey: Stabbed in the back and drowned by Vasha.