

Zélie and Amari have succeeded in bringing magic back to the land of Orïsha, bestowing powers to not only the maji, but also the tîtáns—nobles with maji ancestry. The return of magic has thrust the nation into chaos, and as the only surviving royal, Amari must unite the country and restore peace. In this excerpt, we meet Amari as she prepares to make a public bid for the throne.

“My name is Amari Asiwaju,” I declare to my reflection in the cracked mirror. “Daughter of King Saran. Sister to the late crown prince.”

As our warship nears Zaria’s shores, I attempt to feel the power embedded in those words. No matter how many times I speak them, they don’t feel right.

Nothing does.

I pull the black dashiki over my head and toss it onto the growing pile of clothes on my bed. After weeks of only living with what I could carry on my back, the excess gathered by Roën’s men feels foreign.

It brings me back to mornings in the palace; to biting my tongue while servants forced me into gown after gown under Mother’s orders. She was never satisfied with anything I wore. In her amber eyes, I always looked too dark; too large.

I reach for a gold-tinted gele on the floor. Mother was always fond of the color. I nestle the headdress along my temples and her voice rings through my ears.

That’s not fit to wipe a leaponaire’s ass.

My throat dries and I set the gele down. For so long, I wanted to shut her out. Now I don’t have a choice.

Focus, Amari.

I pick up a navy tunic, squeezing the silk to keep the tears in. What right do I have to grieve when the sins of my family have caused this kingdom so much pain? I slide the tunic over my head and return to the mirror. There's no time to cry.

I have to atone for those sins today.

"I stand before you to declare that the divisions of the past are over," I shout. "The time to unify is now. Together, we will be unstoppable!"

My voice trails as I shift my stance, inspecting my fragmented reflection. A new scar spills onto my shoulder, crackling like lightning against my oak brown skin. Over the years, I've grown used to hiding the scar that my brother left across my back. This is the first time I've had to hide Father's.

Something about the mark feels alive. It's as if Saran's hatred still courses through my skin. I wish I could erase it. I almost wish I could erase him—

"Skies!" My fingers flash with blue light. I wince at the burn. I attempt to suppress the navy glow that shimmers around my hand, but the room spins as my new magic swells.

Midnight blue tendrils shoot from my fingertips like sparks from a flint. My palms sting as my skin splits. My scars rip open at the seams. I gasp at the pain.

"Somebody help!" I shout as I stumble into the mirror. Crimson smears across my reflection. The burn is so great, I can't breathe.

Blood trickles down my chest as I fall to my knees. I scramble to put pressure on the wounds. My magic cuts me from within. I wheeze though I want to scream—

"Amari!"

Tzain's voice is like shattered glass. His presence frees me from my mental cage. The pain fades ache by grueling ache.

I blink as I find myself on the tarnished floor, half-dressed with my silk tunic clenched in my

hand. The blood that smeared across the mirror is nowhere to be found.

My scars remain closed.

Tzain covers me with a shawl before taking me into his arms. I brace myself against his chest as my muscles turn heavy, winded from the burst of magic.

“That’s the second time this week,” he says.

Actually, it’s the fourth. But I bite back the truth when I see the concern in his gaze. Tzain doesn’t need to know it’s getting worse. No one does.

I still don’t know how to feel about my new gifts. What it means to be a Connector; to be a títán. The maji had their powers restored after the ritual, but títáns like me have never had magic until now.

Even when I learned Inan possessed magic moons ago, it never occurred to me that the sacred ritual would ignite my own maji ancestry. What would Father say if he knew his own children carried the blood of those he hated? The very people he regarded as maggots?

“Gods,” Tzain curses at the sight of my palms. The skin is red and tender to the touch, dotted with yellow blisters. “Magic’s not supposed to hurt. If you’d just talk to Zél—”

“Zélie’s not even using her own magic. The last thing she needs to see is mine.”

I tuck away my white streak, wishing I could just chop the lock from my hair. Tzain may not notice the way Zélie looks at it, but I always catch the snarl it brings to her face. For so long, she had to suffer because of her gift. Now those that hurt her the most wield that magic themselves.

I can understand why she despises my white streak, but at times it feels like she despises me. And she’s supposed to be my closest friend.

How will the rest of the maji feel when they learn that I’m a títán?

“I’ll figure it out,” I sigh. “I promise.”

I burrow into Tzain’s neck, running my fingers against the new stubble along his chin.

“You trying to send a message?” he asks, and a sly smile rises to my lips.

“I think it suits you,” I say. “I like it.”

He runs his thumb along my jaw, igniting a surge almost as powerful as my magic. I hold my breath as he lifts my face to his. But before our lips can meet, the ship groans into a sharp turn, jostling us apart.

“What in the skies?” I scramble to my feet, pressing my face against the smudged window glass. For the past three weeks, all it’s revealed were gray seas. Now vibrant coral reefs shine through turquoise waters.

Zaria’s coastline fills the horizon as the warship begins to navigate the ivy-covered cliffs jutting out of the ocean. A lump forms in my throat at the villagers gathered on the white sands for my rally. There are hundreds of people.

Maybe even thousands.

“You’re ready.” Tzain comes up behind me, sliding his arms over my waist.

“I don’t even know what to wear.”

“I can help you with that,” Tzain says.

“You’re going to help me pick out clothes?” I arch my brow and Tzain laughs.

“I’ve spent a lot of time looking at you, Amari. You’re beautiful in everything you wear.”

Heat rises to my cheeks as Tzain looks at the rejected clothes on my bed. “But no tunics today. You’re about to be Orisha’s queen.”

He turns me toward the suit of armor I wore to the ritual grounds when we brought magic back. It’s still covered with the blood of every opponent I cut down with my sword. Father’s blood stains the front, darkest along the royal seal.

“That’ll terrify people!” I exclaim.

“That’s the point. I used to see that seal and my chest would clench. But when you wear

it...” Tzain pauses and a smile like sugar comes to his face. “With you behind the seal, I’m not afraid. I actually feel safe.”

He rests his chin on the top of my head, grabbing my hand again.

“You’re the queen, Amari. Give everyone a new face to picture behind that seal.”