

## **Forsaken**

### **Prologue**

"Isn't it bad luck to celebrate early?" Vise asked, waving a pretty girl over for more drinks "No," Val said in mock disgust. "Tonight is the night before the battle... this, my good brother," he said gesturing to the less than clean tavern. "This is tradition."

The usual crowd of lowlifes and rabble packed the only tavern in the small village outside of their father's manor. Mismatched chairs and crates sat around over-sized barrels, which were used as tables. Lovely bar wenches served drinks in chipped glasses and slapped prowling hand while drunks sang sad love songs. The drinks were bitter and the smell even worse. Still, this was tradition.

Vise looked around his head dizzy with drink. "Val, we should go. Father will want us up early for breakfast."

Val was sitting across the barrel. With only a few oil lanterns, it was hard to make out his smile. "Alright, I will pay the barkeep, you wait by the horses." Vise knew full well that it wasn't the barkeep he wanted to see, but he nodded.

The harvest cold wasn't bitter as Vise exited the building. The night was clear, and he could see all the star patterns he learned as a child. Four staggered stars connected by thin lines of light to the fifth and brightest, called God's Crown. Ruin's Swords marked by three stars in a line, Kings Star the biggest and brightest, and a shooting star.

The tail was long as it shot across the sky. Vise stood there transfixed by the rare sighting. As it got closer and brighter, he could make out brown streaks in the white. As the white filled his vision and his head began to buzz.

He had to lie down.

Vise's limbs seemed to double in weight, and he collapsed, and with the light getting brighter and the very power of earth pressing him down, Vise looked out at his hand. It seemed to be melting in with the very earth.

## Chapter One

*“...father of four and master of all  
divided in power and equal to none  
two sons shall war as thunder above  
one son shall reign the other shall fall  
the daughters of heaven gifted with Tris  
their love of life sealed with a kiss  
one daughter will...”*

Author’s note: This is an old prophecy translated from page three of the Ironian Holy Book. Notice Tris was kept in the original language to retail the rhyme. This comes from the trio of holy words Tros, Tras, and Tris. Meaning vengeance, strength, and mercy.

## Vise

The door to his room creaked, and he shot out of bed. Silks and animal skins fell to the floor in a soft pile. “S-sorry sir,” the woman whispered, frozen in the doorway, she would not look at him. Instead, her eyes fixed on the uneven wood floor. “I was just getting your fire started.”

Vise stood there and stared at the young woman. She was wearing rough spun material dyed red and gold. Stray strands of her dark hair peeked out from her maid's cap. She was hiding her beauty. Under the cap, her face was flushed. Her skin was smooth and lovely. Why would she want to cover that up?

His brain was foggy. He wanted to move or talk, but his body parts were not reacting as they should. He could feel something all over his legs. Vise looked down expecting something to be crawling up them, but there was nothing. Just a feeling, tingling, it started at his toes and slowly crept up.

*What is that?* He thought.

Cold. His face lit up in triumph. His feet were cold.

“Sir?” She interrupted, her face turned as red as the morning horizon.

Vise looked up and tried to move his mouth. He tried to mirror her, but it came out as a grunt. She pointed to a large cabinet. “Clothes.” She turned to the fire and knelt.

Vise stood there. He looked at his bedroom. Feeling like he saw it for the first time in twenty-one years, the hand carved headboard and walnut wardrobe. The longer he looked, the more he understood. The fog was slowly clearing as understanding came over him. With the sun coming up and cutting away the morning chill, he knew. The tingling sensation on his arm when he put it in the light was called warm. Hot and cold were connected, or connected in a way that made them nothing alike. He tried to think of the concept. He shook his head and moved on.

Something popped and crackled, Vise looked up to see that the woman who hid her skin had left. There was something bright in the wall close to the floor. He approached, the warm light kissed the cold away and enveloped him. *What is this?* He thought. *It's hot and bright like the stuff coming from the out there.* He reached out. Vise put his hand into the hearth, and the fire didn't burn him.

“Gods, Vise! How much wine did you drink last night?” The door opened. A bearded, brown haired man strode into the room. He saw Vise stretching his hand close to the flame. “Stop!” Val grabbed his brother's hand and lightly shoved him back.

“Vise? Are you alright?” Val's brown eyes were dark with concern. The brothers stood eye to eye, though Val was three years older than Vise.

When Vise didn't answer, Val dropped Vise's hand with a huff. "Fine. Let's get you dressed. I can clearly see you're in need of my help. Father is waiting for us to discuss the battle at our doorstep."

Val helped his brother down the dimly lit hallway. They usually passed through at mighty speeds, without giving any thought to the generations that lined the walls. In their slow march, the brothers saw the giant tapestries of the Varamore family line. Each one portrayed former Dukes, Great, great, great grandfather Duke Vorthington Vallis Varamore's eyes seemed to follow them with the flickering torch light.

"When we get to the hall, you better be able to stand on your own. Can you now?" Val stopped and let go of his brother. Vise staggered like a drunken fool and caught himself against the wall. "Cold," he said. Val chuckled and grabbed Vise's right shoulder guiding him along.

They approached the Great Hall. The family crest was painted on the oak and metal doors. The Viper was green. Depicted in mid-strike, it's mouth wide open and bright red. The fangs, gilded Vs.

A horn shattered the silence.

Val stopped jerking Vise with him.

"It's over." Val said, his shoulders relaxing if something heavy was plucked from them, "we won."

They burst through the double doors, Duke Valant Varamore III was already standing at the head of the massive table, a smile lit up his usual stoic features. Their father looked more like Vise, black hair, and blue eyes. Anyone could tell they were related.

"My sons! Did you hear the horn? We won!" Valant exclaimed. "Sit down."

The brothers sat. The massive mahogany table took up the whole room. Rectangular, with twenty-one chairs perched around it, and their father at the head and them sitting at his right. The food was piled up in front of them. Quail eggs poached in spicy sauce, crispy bacon, baking powder biscuits, along with strawberries, blueberries, blackberries and raspberries picked from their gardens and fresh baked bread filled the space.

"Father?" Val said as he piled food on a plate in front of him. "Vise isn't feeling well this morning." Val cast a sideways look at Vise who was just staring at his plate. Val reached over and piled Vise's plate with food. "Eat," he said.

Vise just stared. His brain was slow at processing, but he was learning. Little by little he remembered how to be. His hand reached for the silver fork and stabbed the spicy egg. He lifted the food to his mouth. Vise stopped just as the food was in front of his face.

"Hot," he said.

Val smiled, his mouth full of food. "He must have had way too much wine last night."

"Well, we can't blame him. It was--"

The double doors burst open. A guard in the familiar red and gold uniform saluted and asked, "My Lord, what should we do with the survivors?"

Their father's eyes darkened, "I thought I told you. I don't want one of those Frekjian scum alive on my soil. Leave no survivors."

The guard's face paled. "Sir, there are healers among them. Surely they would be more useful alive than dead."

"They murdered my wife." His voice dropped to a low growl and enunciated each word with his fist. "I. Will. Have. No. Survivors."

Vise looked up from his food, his mouth half open. He squirmed and his brow furrowed. "Cold?"

## Jaena

*I'm a healer*, Jaena thought as she grabbed a tiny bone needle and threaded a silk twine through a hole on the knobby end. *I'm apprenticed to the Master Healer of the King's court*. She sliced the filthy linen pant leg, exposing a large gash. Dried blood crusted the outer edges of the wound. Dirt and grass made it hard to tell where it began or ended. Sights like this didn't bother Jaena anymore; she had witnessed much worse than she cared to.

"Warm water and cleans rags, please!" *I'm the daughter of a council member, blessed by the gods with healing hands*. She took a deep breath as a servant cleaned up his leg wound. *I'm blessed with Tris*. Jaena placed the tip of the needle into the furthest edge of the man's gash and looped it through the other side. She pulled it tight, and he groaned. *I can do this*. Her hands moved expertly, crossing over then pulling tight, crossing over then pulling tight. A servant periodically wiped blood keeping the leg clean. With the last stitch, she made a loop and tied it off. Jaena gave the twine one last tug to make sure it was secured.

"Thank you," he whispered.

She smiled and ran her hand through her short black hair.

"Jaena, help!"

Her hand went to the pendant hanging from her neck as the servants dragged in a man. A spear pierced his right eye and protruded out the back of his head. His hair was caked with dirt and dried blood. If the servants weren't supporting his weight, he would have collapsed. His hands opened and closed as he softly whimpered.

*This war is going to kill me.*

Jaena's hands didn't move. Her lips betrayed the obvious thought in everyone's head. "He is beyond saving. Put him over there with the others." This was the worst part of her chosen path. She couldn't save everyone. The guilt of that fact sometimes haunted her. Every time she crossed this dilemma she thought of the pendant. She could save them. She could save them all. With the help of her Tris.

*No, the price is too great.*

"Jaena!" Her name moved across the church, cutting through the moans and groans of the healing and dying. "You need to get back. We lost our front line and the enemy is moving in." Roy's voice was deep, but had a particular upbeat timbre to it. "Jaena. You need to go. We are moving the woman and children out first. Follow me."

Jaena felt her face flare up with indignation, but she pushed her feelings aside. "I'm not a child," She whispered. They had this conversation before, but as before, she has learned to keep her temper from flaring. "I'm a healer, and you need me here." As Roy approached, Jaena noticed the worry flicker in his brown eyes; the way he moved without his familiar nonchalant steps.

"Please," he said, stopping right in front of her. "I want you to be safe."

"I will be. There is no way we will be able to move all of the wounded out in time. I need to stay here with them." He went to ruffle her hair, but she batted his hand away.

"Roy. I'm a healer, and I told you to stop that."

His smile returned. "I know; you just get so angry."

"I think you forget I've been in this army longer than you, Roy."

Roy grabbed her hand. "I'm just worried. You know that."

She smiled. She liked him. He was a strong, handsome soldier and he was like a big brother to her, but his genuine concern and his protective nature was the thing that made her blush.

“I know, Roy.”

They parted with a tight hug. She gripped the pendant for a moment and went back to work. Jaena got lost in her duty. She put her mind, in full, to the task ahead of her. She cleaned and changed bandages. Gave water to the conscious and said prayers over the dying. As time passed the healthy gradually left and soon, she was the only one in the large stone church. When the second round of checkups and water was done, she sat down. She finally let her eyes wander around the room. It was the sanctuary of a large church. The wooden benches were cut up and used as firewood so the floor could hold the wounded. The windows were stained in a single shade of blue indicating this was a Church of the Sky.

“Open these doors!”

She didn’t respond.

They were easily smashed off their hinges, and the room flooded with Varamore guards. She was the only one in the large stone church surrounded by her people, the dead and dying.

“Miss, get on the floor.”

Jaena wasn’t scared. She was a healer, so she complied.

A boot was placed between her shoulders to keep her still, but she didn’t fidget.

“Clear,” another guard said.

She was pulled to her feet. The guard was tall, and his face was covered. “Did everyone retreat, Miss?” She nodded.

The guard swore. He shoved her back to the ground and stomped off.

Jaena didn’t move even though she could feel a warm stream of blood run down her arm.

“How are we supposed to do this? They are all wounded, and she’s a healer.” The guards’ voices echoed in the large chamber.

“The Duke said to leave no survivors.”

Jaena’s breath caught and the pain in her arm spiked. She held in a gasp. *How could they do that?* The ball in her throat grew, and she could feel the tears coming. Roy. No. She wasn’t going to cry. She could crawl to the back exit. There is a trap door in the floor behind the altar.

Still lying on the ground, she moved. Slowly, not hearing the guard’s voices, entirely focused on her movement. Straight was the fastest way, so she went right over everything. She could make it. Jaena was about ten steps away from the altar.

“Hey!”

She froze.

What am I going to do? The pendant around her neck tingled. No, I can’t. She thought. The price. She always has a price. Always.

Her will to survive screamed louder than reason. With the guard approaching and Jaena still on the ground, she pulled out the pendant. One side was black and the other side white. On the black side, etched in the metal, was the phrase, “the sweet release of death,” and the white side had the words, “the turmoil of life.”

Her hand trembled.

With the black side, up Jaena steadied her hand and opened her pendant. A small mirror reflected a smiling woman. She was ebon, from her eyes to the black pearl crown adorning her head.

“Save me,” Jaena whispered.

## Chapter Two

*"...We (humans) don't deserve  
some will lead others serve  
shown to us in light or dark  
better to give harder to receive  
the wicked easily take..."*

Authors Note: Scholars have pieced most of this together, although incomplete and missing the Holy Books obvious rhyme. This broken proverb is clearly referring to Tris. I believe we can also assume that there must be more regarding each of the trio.

### Vise

Val paced in front on the large fireplace. Dark purple covered the windows and Vise sat in a plush chair facing the fire, transfixed.

"You're clearly not okay," Val said. "Something happened last night."

Vise looked up at his brother. His mind was clearing. Vise knew he was in a chair, in a manor, and this man was his brother. The hot thing was fire, but it didn't hurt. *Why didn't it hurt?* Vise could understand more and more of the strange world around him, but words still eluded him.

"You went outside before I did," Val continued. "It's very foggy... but you kept repeating something about shooting."

He was in a night robe of Varamore colors. Fur lined silks draped off of his shoulders and fell to his knees with a cinch at the waist of black snake hide; Vise was in similar garb. With the snow season approaching, the nights got cold. Keeping every fire burning in the large manor wasn't practical, their father's voice still rung clear in the large almost empty room. "I won't have House Varamore win a war then run out of fire fuel halfway through snow season. Put on something warmer!"

He shivered and sat in the chair next to Vise. He stretched his hands to the fire and grimaced, "What happened Vise?" His shoulders slumped, and Val let out a long breath. "Please Vise, just talk to me."

Val backed his chair up, the heat from the fire made him recoil.

Vise looked up into the pain that covered his brother's face. He couldn't... he didn't know the words. He understood the look of pain and something in his chest hurt. Not his body, something else.

"Vise?"

Val shook his head, "Maybe we just need sleep." He stood to get up, but Vise grunted and grabbed his hand.

He reached out to the fire.

"Vise! What are you doing?"

Before Val could stop him, Vise put his hand into the fire. The red and orange heat danced on and around his fingers. Not one hair was burnt.

"Gods," Val swore. "Gods."

Vise held his hand motionless in the flame.

He spoke, the word fumbled from his mouth getting tangled and jumbled, but Val understood.

"W-why?"

As Vise pulled his hand out of the blaze, the fire seemed to be attached to his it. For a fleeting moment, it clung to his fingers and palm, casting his face into a new set of shadows.

"Why?"

This time, he didn't struggle with the word. He clasped his hands in his lap, the frustration clearly marked in the deep lines on his face.

Val shuttered. "Vise, what *happened* last night?"

The fire began to sputter and crack. Val threw a log on the dying flame. A plume of sparks puffed out of the hearth and were drawn to Vise. They swirled and danced right in front of his sitting form; they hovered before him and coalesced into four misshaped sphere. With three clustered above and connected to the lowest circle. A thin line of twinkling lights extended from the bottom sphere and reached the center of Vise's chest.

Before either of the brothers could react, the lights faded, and the door opened.

"Your father needs you in the sitting room."

They exited with the servant, following the swish of his red and gold robes. Val dragged Vise as they hurried down the passage. Vise's face was dull but the longer he was here and with his brother the better he could understand. Val held his wrist and as they walked down a dim hallway. Vise knew the heat he felt when he walked past the wall mounted torches, he was aware of the cold air that creaked through the uneven floor, and he knew the man leading him was his brother.

The servant stopped, bowed, and left them at the door to their father's study. It was a square room with a blazing hearth on the wall in front of the door and a huge block of a desk to the left. On the high back teak chair sat their father.

"Val," Varen nodded, "Vise. Sit."

They sat facing their father. His hands were busy organizing parchments, but his eyes were far away. "We need to discuss the debt," Varen said.

Vise understood, but his eyes didn't show it. Val nodded.

"When do I meet her?"

"The DevRee Duke will accompany his daughter, and they will be here next week. That is when we will discuss the marriage plans."

Val nodded again. They needed this alliance to strengthen their army, and DevRee helped with the last battle. This marriage was a duty, and part of the agreement.

"Father I am prepared, and I understand my obligation to you and the house."

Varen's face lit up, and his smile was reflected in his eyes. "This alliance needs to be honored, and Val, I am so proud of you." His voice grew quiet with emotion. "I am proud of both my sons. I just wish your mother was here to see you grow up."

Val reached over and put his hand on his fathers. The trembling stopped, and a resolve like ancient stone settled over Varen, he pulled his hand away.

"They will know my pain, and they will suffer."

Val recognized the dark cloud moving over his father face. He pulled his father's thought away from the darkness.

"How soon do you want us married?"

Varen's face lighted as the gloom dissipated. "By the full moon," their father replied. Reaching into the drawer of the desk. In his hand was a ring, a simple band of gold with rubies outlining a pea sized diamond.

"Very soon."

## Jaena

The black expanded from the locket, swallowing light and plunging Jaena into a thick darkness. The guard's voices and even the moans of the unwell were silenced. The darkness was so deep it felt like she was under water, it pressed against her body.

*Calm. This is just like every other time.*

Even with her previous experience, she shuddered at how real the presence of the dark was. Then a familiar voice stunned the silence and her ears popped.

"Tros tohen vi tris tohen vo."

As the Goddesses voice danced in the darkness, sweeter than honeysuckle and soft as spring rain, Jaena knew she had to fight it. The familiar rhythm of the Goddesses words rung in her head, but she focused on the pain. The pain in her arm.

*That is real.*

She could vaguely feel the warm blood running down her arm as it dripped on the floor. The words of the Goddess pressed and attached to the pain. Not only could she feel the phrase tinkling in her head, but they seemed to seep into her wound. It numbed and the very power sunk into her bones.

*No. Fight.*

Jaena's hand was sluggish, but she forced her arm to move. She jammed her thumb into the wound. Her cry was muffled, and her vision blurred, then focused. The pain stabbed clarity into her body, dispelling the power that was about to take her.

It was slow at first. The dark receded from her vision, starting at the edges and slowly making its way inward. The pressure was released, and the underwater feeling was left behind. Gradually the church came into view, leaving a pool of pure black in the center of the room.

Everything was as before... but the floor was empty. The guards, the wounded and even the dead, all gone. Her face was slack, dumbstruck.

*What? Where are they?*

The black pool rippled, and the Goddess rose. The black pearl crown was ebon and matched every single aspect of her form. She wore a simple black dress, the tattered hem fell to her knees and mingled with her silky hair. Her pure black eyes settled on Jaena and she smiled, even her teeth were the same lusterless black.

"Child, no one is out of death's reach." Her voice was like the rustle of leaves in the fall, as a cooling summer breeze from the sea. "The souls will only give me a few moments, and we have much to discuss."

Jaena's mouth hung open, and she was unable to speak.

"Yes, I completely understand. Now hush child and listen," Lalaris reach out a bare arm. An elegance only matched by a swan in flight or the brushing branches of a willow. With the barest of gestures, she summoned Jaena.

Jaena was blinked to the Goddess. She was standing only an arms width away. Her very presence was cold. She opened her mouth to speak, but her image grayed.

"We don't have much time child."

Jaena blinked. "W-what do you want?"

The Goddesses eyes sparkled. "You already gave me what I want; I am asking for a favor." Lalaris grayed again, this time, the edges of her frame turning almost white.

"Find my brother. Locate the man called Vise."



She faded out. Her form dropped and she sunk into the pool of black. Jaena looked down to see the pool pouring into itself getting smaller and smaller. Soon there was only the small circle amulet left. It clicked shut and echoed in the empty chamber