PRAISE FOR

REAP & SOW

'A fresh voice, an electric and twisty plot, and a romance that strikes the perfect balance between hot and tender. *Reap & Sow* should be on every romantasy fan's must-read list.'
Brigitte Knightley, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Irresistible Urge to Fall for Your Enemy*

'*Reap & Sow* is a must-read for any fantasy fan. One of the best books I've read all year.'
Katherine Webber, *Sunday Times* bestselling co-author of *Twin Crowns*

'A richly imagined gothic world, a fierce and compelling protagonist and a story that is both achingly romantic and refreshingly original make *Reap & Sow* an utterly spellbinding read!'
Catherine Doyle, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Dagger and the Flame*

'Darkly enchanting and irresistibly seductive.'
Jean Kwok, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Dominion*

'Perfection. I absolutely devoured this!'
Bookseller

'Set in a city brimming with secrets, corruption and lies, you will not be able to put down *Reap & Sow* – a pacy, thrilling fantasy novel with an amazing cast of characters and a delicious romance!'
Bookseller

'Charlotte B. Plumb's effortless writing had me hooked from page one. Eda is a force to reckoned with and her sparring with Kit is both witty and wonderful. I enjoyed every moment of this book!'
Bookseller

'*Do make a pact with a demon . . .* especially when said demon is Kit'rath.'
Bookseller

'Full of sharp wit and luscious world-building, *Reap & Sow* sparkles with dark wonder and potent yearning. I absolutely adored this debut!'
Erin A. Craig, number one *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Thirteenth Child*

'Dark, propulsive and feverishly good, *Reap & Sow* is an absolute dream for fantasy readers. I couldn't put it down!'
Kalie Reid, author of *The Sacred Space Between*

'Darkly captivating, with mesmerizing world-building and pitch-perfect, slow-burn romance. Readers will be rooting for Eda and swooning over Kit.'
Heather Walter, author of *Malice*

REAP & SOW

CHARLOTTE B. PLUMB



PENGUIN BOOKS

PENGUIN BOOKS

UK | USA | Canada | Ireland | Australia
India | New Zealand | South Africa

Penguin Books is part of the Penguin Random House group of companies
whose addresses can be found at global.penguinrandomhouse.com

www.penguin.co.uk www.puffin.co.uk www.ladybird.co.uk



First published 2026

001

Text copyright © Charlotte B. Plumb, 2026
Chapter artwork © Alessandra Fusi, 2026
Cover and prelim artwork © Christin Engelberth, 2026

The moral right of the author has been asserted

Penguin Random House values and supports copyright. Copyright fuels creativity, encourages diverse voices, promotes freedom of expression and supports a vibrant culture. Thank you for purchasing an authorized edition of this book and for respecting intellectual property laws by not reproducing, scanning or distributing any part of it by any means without permission. You are supporting authors and enabling Penguin Random House to continue to publish books for everyone.
No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner for the purpose of training artificial intelligence technologies or systems. In accordance with Article 4(3) of the DSM Directive 2019/790, Penguin Random House expressly reserves this work from the text and data mining exception.

Set in 13.3/18pt Bembo MT Pro
Typeset by Six Red Marbles UK, Thetford, Norfolk
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

The authorized representative in the EEA is Penguin Random House Ireland,
Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

HARDBACK
ISBN: 978–0–241–81139–9

INTERNATIONAL PAPERBACK
ISBN: 978–0–241–81140–5

All correspondence to:
Penguin Books
Penguin Random House Children's
One Embassy Gardens, 8 Viaduct Gardens, London SW11 7BW



Penguin Random House is committed to a sustainable future for our business, our readers and our planet. This book is made from Forest Stewardship Council® certified paper.

For Mum and Dad, who introduced me to stories –
and for Tristan, who encouraged me to finish writing them.



Chapter One

Whenever the shop bell chimed, Eda liked to guess: had they come to trade with their coin or their soul?

She considered their newest customer as he stumbled in, shaking rain from his fur-lined cloak. He hovered by the door uncertainly. *Wealthy*, she decided. *Skittish as a dog.*

This was promising.

'Welcome to Shaws' Antiques and Curiosities. Can I help you?'

The gentleman stared at her. Eda smiled back. She was used to smiling when she did not feel like it. Ben always said a kindly face was difficult to mistrust.

'I . . .' The stranger swallowed. He looked around the shop's interior: the towering shelves that brushed the ceiling, the low chandelier, the assortment of rugs strewn across lacquered floorboards. Cabinets and brass globes and strange pots littered the edges of the room, leaving meagre space to wander. If Lawrie were here, he'd enthusiastically regale the poor man with the origins of all their stock, right down to the hinges on the doors.

Eda tried again. 'Are you looking for something in particular?'

The man pulled off his brimmed bonnet to reveal tidy chin-length hair. 'Is there anyone else here? Any other patrons?'

'No, sir. You're our last customer of the day.'

Not that there'd been many. A snub-nosed woman spent an hour sniffing around their collection of antique tea sets, and a pair of academics purchased a tome from the Old Weslic collection. But no one else had crossed the threshold.

Eda suspected this man wasn't interested in teapots or dusty books.

He approached the counter, splendid in buckled shoes and velvet doublet. His face was nondescript – but the wild look in his eyes struck her with eerie familiarity. She'd seen it before, a hundred times in a hundred different faces.

'I need a mirror with no reflection.'

Eda's pulse found a new rhythm, fast and flighty as a hare. Her brothers did not share the passphrase lightly; if this stranger knew it, they'd decided he was serious.

She stepped around the counter. 'You know what you're asking?'

'Yes. I – yes.'

Eda peered through the bay windows. Blackbridge was a dark, noisy smear of wet stone and oil smoke, lanterns bobbing through the gathering night. Irregular bubbles in the crown glass made it hard to discern anyone coming up the street, but none of the distorted figures hurrying through the rain seemed like her brothers.

Never take someone to the mirror alone, Ben always warned. *If they come looking to make a Pact and neither of us are with you, you must turn them away. We're safest in pairs.*

In the glass, Eda's reflection hovered like a pale-haired wraith. She bit her inner cheek.

Ben would be furious. Lawrie would be disappointed, which was even worse. But how long had it been since they last found someone desperate – or stupid enough – to make a Pact? Eda knew from experience that with too much time to think came the niggling whispers of common sense. If she turned him away now, this man might talk himself out of returning. He could run his mouth to the Faithhood, unlikely though it was. What then?

Lawrie called them *dealies*. Those hopeless souls willing to pay the ultimate price for whatever wretched thing they sought. It had been months since the last.

And they were running out of time.

Eda set her jaw and flipped the sign at the door to CLOSED. 'What's your name, sir?'

'I'd rather not say.'

Smarter than he looks. 'He'll need a name, I'm afraid. No use hiding it.' She pulled the drapes along their rail, shutting out the door and windows. In the flickering light of the chandelier, shadows about the stranger's eyes yawned wide: empty sockets in a skull.

'He?'

'The demon you mean to make a Pact with.'

He swallowed. Steeled himself. 'I am Bartholomew. Your

family name is *Shaw*, I presume?' He scanned her from head to toe with a disdain common to noblefolk. 'You are rather young to be involved in . . . this sort of business.'

'I'm twenty, sir. And I've been involved in *this sort of business* since the cradle.'

That shut him up. Eda led Bartholomew to the back of the shop, through the maze-like shelves as tall as hedgerows and down two steps to a door in the back wall. She withdrew the key from her pocket with a jolt of unexpected dread.

She'd opened this door many times, but never without Ben or Lawrie present. Their absence was a phantom all its own. Eda knew the shop as well as she knew herself – it was her job to mind it while Lawrie ran errands and Ben worked – but this expectant quiet was unfamiliar. Oppressive. She felt it breathing down her neck.

The key rattled in the lock. *Steady hands, Eda, you damned fool.*

The door swung open.

Bartholomew's breathing quickened. She'd interacted with many dealies over the years, and guilt was a persistent companion, but Eda had grown adept at smothering it. This was necessary, and it needed doing quickly. Her brothers were not here to stop Bartholomew if he tried to run.

She lit the sconces as they descended the twisting iron staircase. The cellar was always cold, and the firelight did little to conjure illusions of warmth. It smelled vaguely musty down here, earthen and primal. She was reminded of tombs and catacombs. Places where the living did not belong.

Eda lit the final sconce before turning to Bartholomew.

He gripped the stair rail with white knuckles, staring. 'Is that it?'

She followed his gaze. The Shaws' cellar was entirely bare of ornament, save for the lonely mirror propped against the wall. 'Yes,' she murmured. 'This is a Gateway.'

The mirror stood more than six feet in height and half as wide. It was carved from a single block of thick obsidian. All Gateways were made of it, centuries ago when no one followed the teachings of the Faith or the Lordfather but instead a pantheon of pagan gods. Now, such deities were only worshipped by witches and heretics, if at all.

A wild age, she recalled Lawrie reading aloud from one of his history books. *A time when false divinities ruled and their unenlightened supplicants crafted for them terrible tools of power. Blackest obsidian from the deep mines of the northern mountains, where the veil between worlds is thin; this was their material. Blood magicks to imbue the rock with life – this is how Gateways were made.*

'How in the Lordfather's name did you *get* it?' Bartholomew tentatively stepped closer. 'And so well preserved. I thought the Faithhood destroyed every last one in Wesland.'

'My father found this mirror. None of us know how he managed it.' Eda's nails bit into her palm. She had no desire to speak of Oswin Shaw, least of all now. Better to move on. 'Are you ready?'

Bartholomew's voice quivered. 'For what, precisely?'

Good enough.

She approached the Gateway. Its frame depicted a riotous assortment of imagery, carved in such detail that each subject

might have simply grown from the rock itself – roaring mountain lions, hissing serpents, thorned flowers. Hiding betwixt the petals and vines were strange, less familiar creatures: the grinning face of a hook-nosed imp, fearsome birds, a fanged horse. Atop them all at the mirror's apex, a group of naked figures knelt in supplication.

Eda shuddered.

Despite the frame's grandeur, it was the mirror itself that held power. Its surface bore no reflection: black as a starless night, smooth as a still lake. Unease danced icy fingers down Eda's spine no matter how many times she looked upon it.

She touched the crystallised rock. Warm, where no warmth should exist. The cellar was frigid, but wherever lay on the other side of the mirror was not.

'Mr Night, I summon you.'

The surface rippled like water about Eda's hand.

Bartholomew made a wounded sound. 'That's its name?'

'The only one I know him by.'

The mirror turned as glossy as a jewel and undulated like tar. Eda retreated to Bartholomew's side, tried to calm her quickening pulse. She knew, logically, that she had nothing to fear. But her body never quite learned the same lesson.

'What's happening? Why is it taking so long?' Bartholomew's upper lip was moist with sweat. He clutched his cloak about himself as though he might disappear within it.

Eda grabbed his arm. He seemed to think she was simply steadying him, which was well enough. She only feared he

might make a break for it. 'He's not a dog, sir. He will come when he's ready.'

'It's – it's always the same one? I thought any demon might be called through a Gateway.'

'The mirror you see before you also exists on the other side, in the Otherworld. Most demons cannot keep a Gateway all to themselves.' She glanced sideways at him. 'Mr Night isn't most demons.'

This might have been the wrong thing to say, considering Bartholomew's stricken expression, but it hardly mattered. The mirror's surface turned suddenly iridescent, like an oil slick beneath a gloaming. Through it stepped a man.

He wasn't a man, of course. But he looked eerily close.

'*Eda*.'

'Mr Night.'

A silly name, but one that stuck. Eda was a babe in arms when he'd first walked through the mirror. Lawrie had been five. As Ben told it, the little boy had mustered a nervous 'Good night, mister,' every time the demon left them. The nickname soon followed.

For whatever reason, Mr Night found it charming. They'd used it ever since.

'This man would like to make a Pact,' she said.

Bartholomew flinched.

Mr Night's eyes – an icy grey – slid towards him. Eda imagined what it must be like for Bartholomew, seeing a demon for the first time. Mr Night's skin was pale, his hair even more so. It fell halfway down his back in a luxurious

snow-white spill. His clothes were just as fine: a black tunic and matching silver-trimmed jerkin, so soft they appeared more liquid than material. With his angular features and curved, smiling mouth, Mr Night was undeniably beautiful. There was nothing outwardly inhuman about him, yet something was decidedly *other* in his manner. It made Eda's hair stand on end.

The demon prowled towards Bartholomew. 'You may leave us, Eda.'

His tone was smooth as syrup, but she knew an order when she heard one. Eda gave Bartholomew's arm a reassuring squeeze. 'I'll wait upstairs.'

'Tell me, then,' Mr Night crooned as she retreated up the stairwell. 'What is it you desire?'

She was not supposed to eavesdrop. *Better not to know*, Ben would say. *Their business is none of ours.*

But Eda rarely denied herself the indulgence of morbid curiosity. Lawrie called her pathologically nosy. Perhaps, but Mr Night didn't mind, and he *always* knew when she'd been snooping. That was good enough for her.

Eda pulled the cellar door to – save a few inches – and squatted down to peek. The back of Bartholomew's head was just visible through the stairwell. Clearer still was Mr Night as he paced the room. He had an uncanny stillness about him even in motion, not a single iota of exertion spent without purpose, every step perfectly measured. His head sat preternaturally still upon his neck. No matter which way he turned, his stare never left Bartholomew. It reminded Eda of

the way some portraits followed you with their eyes in dark, haunted rooms.

Bartholomew said something in a thin voice. All she made out was the word *justice*. Her mind spun with fanciful ideas. Nothing so pedestrian as money, then. Revenge? She'd eavesdropped often enough to know both were common motivators. If only more dealies dared speak of their Pact, perhaps fewer would seek one out at all. Bargains such as these rarely ended well.

Once, Eda recalled, a poor man had come asking for gold – more than his children's children could ever spend. Mr Night turned stones into golden marks, which appeared overnight in the man's crowded boarding house, piled so high they spilled from the windows into the street like rain. Neighbours swarmed the place, snatching what they could in a giddy fervour before the Order of the Blade arrived to seize the rest. Rightly accused of Pact-making, the man returned to Shaws' Antiques, furious and desperate.

You failed to specify where and how you wanted your precious gold, Mr Night told him. *Now leave this place before I gut you where you stand. Unless you wish to strike another bargain?*

The Blades caught and hanged the man within a fortnight.

Sometime later, a young woman came weeping over her faithless husband. *I love him so, but his eyes wander. I fear I'll lose him. Let him see only me.* Mr Night gave her an enchanted ring. By morning, her husband was blind. In his ruined sight, he saw her alone – her gleaming ring, hovering like a spectre no matter which way he turned. He called it a curse.

Strangled her in their front room. The broadsides reported on it for days.

Eda's disgust warred with her intrigue as she considered Bartholomew. She thought little of anyone foolish enough to make deals with devils – resented that she must bring them to Mr Night at all. But at least when they wished for riches or beauty or power, her dislike felt justified. Greed and vanity were easy to despise. But to come here begging for revenge? To ease the pain of a broken heart or right a terrible wrong?

She pitied them.

Mr Night stopped pacing. 'My price, then.' He rubbed a finger against his lip. 'Twenty years.'

Eda hissed through her teeth. *Twenty!* It was not the highest sum he'd ever demanded, but it was close. Clerics of the Faithhood liked to talk about the perils of losing one's soul to a demonic bargain, but if souls were real, demons had no interest in them. Human *years*, however . . .

'T-twenty? That's absurd!' Bartholomew was no longer whispering. His voice rose in outrage.

'*No.*' Mr Night's eyes flashed. The sconces flickered. Shadows rose up the walls, bleeding across the ceiling like spilled ink. 'It is *exactly* the right price. But if you are not prepared to pay it . . .'

'I . . . I just . . .'

'Listen how the lamb bleats!' He laughed. '*I, I, I.* That is why you come, isn't it, you mortals? You *want and you want* so shamelessly. But no matter. I would never pass judgement.'

Mr Night slipped behind Bartholomew and touched him on the shoulder, as a friend might. 'I can fulfil your most fervent wishes. You need only offer me a little time in return. And what is *time*, to you humans?' His tone gentled. 'Your lives are so easily cut short, regardless.'

With a flourish, crisp parchment appeared as if from nowhere in the demon's hand. Eda recognised the familiar heading scrawled atop it in bold, swirling letters: *Binding Pact of Mortal Trade*. The details were lost on her save for that core stipulation common to all Pacts: should a demon fail to fulfil their side of the bargain, the proposed number of years would be taken from *their* lifespan instead. So far as Eda knew, this was one of only two ways a dealie might see their years returned to them.

The contract's ruddy penmanship shone in the firelight. Eda had never actually seen Mr Night bleed and often wondered at the art of forging a Pact. Did he cut himself? Dip some fancy quill into an inkwell full of his precious blood and sit scribbling away at a writing desk?

The thought was so silly she might have laughed. But Mr Night was leaning over Bartholomew's shoulder, mouth to ear. 'Sign here, sweet Bartholomew, and you will have your justice.'

The silence hung heavy. Flames crackled.

'I've nothing to sign with.'

Mr Night drew a small bone-white knife from somewhere Eda could not see. He was practically embracing the man from behind, blade and contract patiently proffered in each

hand. A serpent twined about its prey, neither crushing the creature nor letting it flee. 'Your blood is all the signature I need. Just a little cut, and it shall be done.'

Run, Eda wanted to shout. *Run now, you fool, and don't look back. Whatever he gives you, it won't be worth what you lose.*

But she did not have the luxury of doing the right thing. If she had, she'd never have brought Bartholomew to the mirror in the first place. Eda could only bite her lip and watch.

Bartholomew exhaled. He offered up a shaking hand to the blade –

The doorbell chimed.

Eda reeled and fell on her arse. The cellar door drifted shut.

Shit!

She scrambled to her feet and brushed down her skirts. Checked her plait and hurried back through the shelves. Curly as her hair was, it never suffered containment for long. Already she felt it coming loose around her ears in little wisps.

She rounded the hulking armoire that served as a backdrop to the shop foyer, and her frizz was the first thing Lawrie commented on – Eda knew he would.

'That thicket of yours is fighting for its freedom,' he sniggered.

'And you look like a drowned rat.'

'Still prettier than you.'

Lawrie was tall and gangly, all elbows and legs. The rain only served to make him look thinner, wool cape clinging to his shoulders. His curls lay plastered against his head.

Ben shut the drapes behind him and shook water from his hood. Where Lawrie was lithe, Ben was stocky and muscular. Square-jawed and rugged in looks, his mop of hair alone lent him some measure of softness. Eda liked to think he scared it straight in the womb, refusing to tolerate the unruly curls inherent amongst his siblings.

'Eda.' Ben looked at her properly. 'What's wrong?'

How does he always do that? Keeping anything from Ben was a fool's errand; he had the nose of a bloodhound and the eyes of a hawk. 'I don't know why you always assume there's something *wrong* –'

'There's a draught.' He looked pointedly at the chandelier's sputtering candles. His tone dropped. 'Is the cellar door open?'

Lawrie had been shrugging off his cape, but now he froze.

No point denying it. 'A man came asking after the mirror.'

Ben hung up his cloak in silence.

Eda scowled. 'He knew the passphrase, was ready to make a Pact. No one else was around. I checked. I wasn't sure when you'd be home, and I didn't want to lose him.'

'You complain that I worry needlessly, yet you always give me cause! How many times have I told you to never –'

'Never take someone to the mirror alone, *yes*. But despite what you tell yourself, Ben, I'm quite capable of handling these things properly. Or would you rather extend our debt as long as possible? We can't afford to turn down Pacts for no good reason.'

'Your safety *is* a good reason.' Ben took two quick steps towards her; she backpedalled. 'I won't have you alone with that demon more than strictly necessary.'

'Mr Night won't hurt me. He won't hurt any of us. He can't; it's in –'

'In our Pact, yes. I know the clause.'

Eda bristled. 'Not *ours*. Father was the one who got us into this mess.'

Ben's hazel eyes flashed. 'Eda . . .'

Bartholomew came hurtling into the foyer. He sent a bookend flying as he skidded past the shelves but stopped dead at the sight of them. His eyes were as round as those of a spooked horse.

Startled, Ben positioned himself in front of the door. At first Eda feared he was right to do so: that Bartholomew's terror had overwhelmed him at last. That he'd changed his mind, was trying to flee. They would have to threaten him. *Beat him*, if necessary, to keep his mouth shut. Her skin prickled.

Then she saw his hand. His fingers ran with dark fresh blood.

He'd been cut.

It's done.

Bartholomew took an unsteady step forward. He cupped his injured hand and looked at Eda, dazed. 'I don't . . . I don't feel all that different. Shouldn't I feel different?'

'I'm afraid I wouldn't know, sir.' She passed him her handkerchief. It was just sensible, she told herself, not to

have the man draw undue attention with an injury like that. Refused to consider the act a kindness. Nothing about this work was kind.

Bartholomew took it and wiped his hand. When he didn't seem prepared to say anything else, Lawrie silently pulled back the drapes and opened the door. Outside, rain pattered against black puddles. A dog was barking.

Bartholomew nodded, righted himself and left the shop.

They gathered to watch his distorted figure stumble down the street. Bartholomew wouldn't be able to speak of the Pact he'd made, either aloud or in writing. Such was Mr Night's way. Depending on the agreed details, dealies could not – or simply dared not – discuss their Pacts. Being in Mr Night's service meant Eda and her brothers were protected from tattletales, but the moment their debt was cleared . . .

Signee agrees to the expiration of all stipulations and amendments made upon completion of this contract.

Nothing could protect the Shaws from accusation then.

'Over there,' Lawrie hissed. 'It's that creepy bastard with the moustache again.'

Eda saw him – a tall, still figure cloaked in shadow across the street. He wore a feathered wool cap, the cherry glow of his cigarillo illuminating a thick moustache. The light didn't quite reach his eyes as he watched Bartholomew wander away.

The fine hairs along her nape prickled in alarm.

'I *told* you Lich has people watching us,' Lawrie said.

The name cracked through the room like a static shock. 'Let them watch,' Ben replied. 'If Severin Lich wants to

smoke us out, he's taking his sweet time about it. Don't let him spook you.'

'How, exactly, is one supposed to ignore a *crime lord* sniffing about our business, Ben? He obviously wants the Gateway!'

'He can have it,' Eda cut in. 'Soon enough, we'll be done with it for good. Bartholomew gave twenty years, which means –'

'A most welcome addition to my ledger.'

Eda's assurances withered in her throat.

Mr Night stood in the middle of the foyer.

Gathered before him like this, they were little more than children awaiting judgement. His staggering presence chipped away the years like an ice pick.

'Though I must profess, young Shaws, this boon comes late in the making for my tastes. How long has it been since last you brought me a wanting soul?'

'The terms are clear,' Ben bit out stiffly. 'We're to bring you fifty years, every year. We've time still to make the quota.'

The demon smiled without teeth. 'Perhaps. But autumn harvest looms. If sweet Eda had listened to *you*, Benjamin, then tonight you'd be twenty years poorer.'

Ben turned red.

He was right, of course. Rarely had they come so near to the season's zenith with years still owed.

In the darkness of the room, Mr Night was at one with the shadows. Only his pale smiling face remained distinct, hovering like a disembodied mask. 'Your debt is nearly repaid in full. Just ten years left to find! A shame, to falter now.'

Eda feared Mr Night, but she did not hate him. Not the way that Ben and Lawrie hated him. A demon did what he did because it was in his nature. People made Pacts because they *could*. As their own father had.

Oswin Shaw sought out the mirror. He called on Mr Night and made a Pact he could not afford – more years than any single life could provide. And so, in his madness, he agreed to bring Mr Night the sum required through others. As many as it took.

But should he die, his children were to inherit the debt.

'Your servitude is almost at its end, young Shaws. Your freedom at hand.' The candles in the chandelier danced as Mr Night's form unravelled, like blackest coal smoke. Silver eyes flared the colour of fire. 'You should be *happy*.'

The light steadied, and he was gone.

Shadows were Mr Night's domain – the cornerstone of his power – and he knew well how it unsettled them. Eda had never witnessed his other abilities first hand. She did not need to. The Pacts he forged were proof enough that he was capable of things beyond her ken.

Ben made for the staircase, shoulders high and taut as a bowstring. Lawrie followed with a sigh.

'Lawrie –'

'Not now, Eda.'

Rain pounded on the windows. Eda stood alone in the pool of flickering candlelight for some time, watching uneasily as shadows writhed beyond its borders. She clenched her fists.

Ten more years. Just ten.

Mr Night was right – they couldn't falter now. Not with two decades of servitude finally at its denouement. What would it be like, she wondered, to live outside his shadow? To be set free into the light, directionless and new as a baby bird? Eda did not know.

Hope stirred, chased by a writhing tendril of fear.

A new life. A new start. A chance to *find out*.

And only one more Pact in their way.