

IN A WORLD RULED BY MEN, ONE WOMAN WILL RISE

NIGHT OF THE SHADOW MOON

A.E. RAYNE

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THE FURYCK SAGA: BOOK THREE

SAMPLE CHAPTER

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CHAPTER ONE

'No!' Jael shook her head and slipped away, trying to hide her smile. The moon was bright, and she knew that he would see her face.

'No?' Eadmund followed her. 'Are you sure?'

The water was warm. There was still snow on the ground, but the water wrapped itself around their chilled bodies, cocooning them in liquid heat.

'Of course, I'm sure,' she insisted, batting him away as he crept towards her.

'Then why are you smiling?' Eadmund laughed, forcing his way through her half-hearted attempts to stop him, kissing her pursed lips. 'If it's *no*, then why are you smiling?'

'I promise you, if I were pregnant, I wouldn't be smiling!' Jael grumbled, letting him kiss her.

'No?'

'No! I couldn't think of anything worse!'

Eadmund sunk backwards, his smile vanishing. 'Really?'

Jael froze. She didn't know what to say without making it worse. 'I...'

Eadmund reached for her hands, his eyes down on the shimmering water. 'I understand, but...' He looked up, and his smile came racing back. 'You'll change your mind when it happens. I know you will.'

Jael squirmed away from his gaze, frowning.

'I know you will, Jael Furyck. You love me. I know that too. We're meant to be, remember? You and me...'

'Jael!'

Jael turned away into the darkness.

She blinked, squinting. Shivering suddenly.

'Jaaaeelll!'

'Grandmother?'

'Meena!' Berard tripped over a loose cobblestone as he ran after the woman whose red hair was flapping behind her like a sail as she scurried away. 'Meena!'

Meena sighed impatiently and stopped. She didn't know what he wanted, but she needed to leave. She had to go before Jaeger found her.

Before the sun set.

Berard panted, stumbling to a halt. He had spied Meena from the first-floor balcony of the castle and run all the way to try and reach her before she left. He looked down at her tiny sack. 'But where are you going?' he asked in surprise.

Meena tapped her head with her free hand, staring at her feet, avoiding those concerned grey-blue eyes. She did not want to stop; did not want to stay. Berard Dragos had always been kind to her, but she would not let that influence her decision. 'I, I, I am leaving,' she said resolutely, looking up at last.

'But you cannot!' Berard insisted.

'My grandmother is d-d-dead,' Meena sniffed. 'There is nothing here for me now. There is no one...' She shuddered, not wanting to think of Morana, creeping around that horrible chamber, so gleeful that Varna was gone.

'This is your home, Meena,' Berard said kindly. 'You have no one else, do you? No one who will take you in?'

'I have an uncle. He lives on Oss. I will find my way there!' Meena turned to leave. She had to go. She couldn't stay.

Berard reached for her arm. 'Please, why don't you come back to the castle, just for tonight? I know it's been a terrible shock, what happened to Varna, but you cannot run off like this. You won't survive out there all alone.'

Meena's shoulders slumped as she turned back around, her chest heaving. 'You don't understand. You don't...' she sobbed. '*She* let this happen. *She's* there. She'll kill me next!'

'Who?'

Meena shook her head, clamping her lips together, too scared to say another word. She looked behind Berard, to the castle which towered above them both, to the tiny window on the very top floor. Shivering, she imagined the cold, dark chamber that she would have to share with her evil aunt if she stayed.

The woman who had helped murder her grandmother.

Morana.

There was no pool, no Eadmund, no moon. Just darkness.

Heavy and cold.

Jael crept forward. 'Grandmother?' Her heart was thumping like a drum; her breath coming in short bursts. She listened but heard nothing. 'Grandmother?'

'Jael.'

It was faint now; so faint that Jael could barely make out which direction the voice was coming from.

And then light. Dull, afternoon light.

An alleyway. A body.

Jael ran towards the crumpled figure, sprawled in the dirt. 'Grandmother! No!'

Edela lay there, covered in blood, ashen-faced. Eyes closed. Chest still.

'Grandmother!'

'Jael?'

Jael opened her eyes, gasping for air, her head swivelling in confusion.

She was on *Sea Bear*.

Too far away.

Aleksander was at her side, gripping her hand; Axl, behind him.

'Nooo!' she screamed uselessly. 'Nooo!'

'What's happened?' Aleksander squeezed her hand urgently, trying to get her to focus on him. 'Jael! What have you seen?'

Eydis' head went up on *Ice Breaker*. 'Jael?'

Eadmund was quickly at his sister's side. 'What is it? Has something happened?' He turned to his helmsman. 'Bring us closer, Villas.'

Gisila was there now, gripping her daughter's other hand, her throat tightening with every moment. 'Jael?'

But Jael was barely there. She was in the alley, desperately wanting to reach down and pick up her grandmother. To carry her back to the house, to Bidy, to Entorp.

To help.

Edela needed help.

Jael closed her eyes, shutting them all out again.

Edela needed help!

She couldn't be dead. She needed help.

Thorgils, Jael thought. Thorgils.

She saw the alley, Edela's body. Still. Lifeless.

She needed Thorgils.

Thorgils!

Jael was sobbing now. 'Thorgils!'

She saw him, holding a curl of hair in his hand, smiling to himself as he walked towards the main square.

In the wrong direction.

Thorgils!

Thorgils!

Thorgils tucked the soft, golden curl back inside his pouch.

There was a ray of hope now, and he wasn't going to shut it behind that door again. He strode away from the alley, imagining Isaura walking beside him. His stomach growled, and his mind quickly focused on thoughts of Biddy's chicken and ale stew.

He stopped suddenly, frowning as the clouds darkened overhead, threatening a sudden downpour. Edela had not seemed well. She'd looked pale, unsteady on her feet.

Jael would never forgive him if something happened to her grandmother.

He turned back into the alley, deciding that it wouldn't hurt to make sure Edela was alright. And, perhaps he could encourage her back to the house and see how far along that stew was?

Jael opened her eyes.

Gisila was staring at her, kneeling on the wooden boards of the deck, her one open eye, pleading. 'Jael! What has happened? Please!'

'Edela...' Jael shook her head, trying to wake herself up. 'I had a dream. Someone tried to kill her.'

Aleksander gasped.

Evaine.

'Is she...' Axl didn't want to go on. His sister's face was streaming with tears, her body, visibly shaking. He'd never seen her like this. 'Is she... dead?'

Jael blinked. The dream had retreated now, but her ears were buzzing so loudly that she could barely hear her own thoughts. She pushed everyone's hands away and stood, limping quickly out of the wooden house towards Beorn. She saw *Ice Breaker* approaching; Eydis and Eadmund in the prow. 'Let them come closer, Beorn, and once I've spoken to Eadmund, get us back to Oss as fast as you can!'

Beorn nodded, disturbed by the look on Jael's tear-stained face. He jerked the tiller back and forth, slowing them down. 'Reef the sail!' he yelled to his men. 'Reef the sail!'

'Who is Morana?' Berard wondered.

Meena gulped as the black and white haired woman shuffled across the square towards them, her stooped frame pointing ominously in their direction.

Berard turned to follow Meena's gaze. 'Is that her?' he asked, remembering something Jael Furyck had said about a black and white haired dreamer. 'Is that Morana?'

Meena nodded, caught between the urge to run and the certainty that there was no point now.

Morana knew where she was.

'Is she a dreamer?' Berard whispered as Morana slithered closer.

Meena nodded again, trembling all over, curling her shoulders into a defeated heap. 'She is my aunt. Varna's daughter.'

Berard was shocked. 'Varna had a *daughter*?' He turned towards the woman, swallowing, his face as anxious, his shoulders as curled, as Meena's.

Morana glared down at Meena's tiny sack, then back up to her niece's terrified face, peering at her blotchy cheeks, her red, bulging eyes. 'You're *leaving*?'

Berard was surprised by the venom in the woman's voice as it rasped out of her twisted mouth. She didn't acknowledge him, and, although he was well used to being ignored by his father and disparaged by his brothers, he was not used to being so rudely disregarded by strangers. He coughed nervously. 'And who are you that is asking?'

Morana's eyes flared in annoyance, her head snapping to Berard, who was

barely taller than Meena and just as pathetic looking. 'Who am I?' she growled, her thick eyebrows sharpening as she intensified her dark-eyed gaze. 'I am Morana Gallas, your brother's new dreamer.' She laughed at the look of surprise on Berard's face. 'Didn't he tell you?'

Berard grabbed Meena's hand down from her head. 'No, he didn't,' he said boldly, forcing his eyes towards Morana's. 'Perhaps I shall go and speak to him about that? Come along, Meena, you can accompany me.'

Meena blinked, sensing her aunt's desire to claim her, her own desperation to run for the mountains, and now, Berard's offer of help. She shivered, confused, desperate to tap her head, but now she had no hand free. 'I, I,' she started, then felt the warmth of Berard's hand, the strength in it, as it squeezed hers. There was comfort there; much more than she would find in the mountains or with Morana. 'I... yes.' Meena ducked her head away from her aunt's scowl and allowed Berard to pull her back to the castle.

Morana frowned after them.

That girl. She was useless.

Useless for now, at least. She just had to make sure she stayed that way.

She would have to talk to Jaeger.

It was cold in the alley.

Thorgils thought of Odda's cottage, which was always cold. He'd need to bring in some more wood for the night. His mother was still unable to get out of bed. He had to make sure that she stayed warm while she recovered from her illness. And then he'd have to think about building a proper house; one with thick, plastered walls, like Eadmund and Jael's.

He stopped suddenly, squinting at a basket that lay abandoned up ahead.

Edela had been carrying that basket.

Thorgils ran, holding his breath, not wanting to be right, but then he saw her boots, her legs. 'Edela!' he cried, dropping down to the dirt beside her, instantly aware of the blood soaking through his trousers. He tore off his thick, bear-fur cloak and draped it over her. 'Edela?'

Her face was snow-white and cold to touch, and her eyes were closed, and she was not moving. Thorgils dug his hands under her slight frame and scooped her into his arms.

Standing up, he held her tightly against his chest and ran.

'What's happened?' Eadmund called over the row of battered shields lining *Ice Breaker's* gunwale. Eydis was sobbing next to him, unable to speak. He couldn't get any sense out of her at all. And there was his wife, across the rolling waves, looking just as upset.

'It's Edela!' Jael called back, swallowing, feeling the burn of tears behind her eyes. 'We have to go to Oss! She's been attacked!'

'Attacked?'

'We have to go! You carry on to Saala!' Jael waved quickly at him, then walked over to Beorn, who bellowed at his men to shake out the sails.

The wind was stiffening.

They needed to fly.

Biddy hurried out of the house as soon as she heard her name, the puppies charging past her to see who was coming.

'Get Entorp!' Thorgils yelled to Askel as he rushed past the stables. 'Hurry!'

Askel took one look at the limp body in Thorgils' arms, dropped his shovel and ran.

'Edela!' Biddy threw her hands over her mouth in horror as Thorgils rushed inside, blood dripping down his legs. 'Edela!' she cried, hurrying after him.

Thorgils placed Edela onto one of the beds that lined the walls of the main room. The fire was blazing, and the house felt warm. He unpinned her cloak, swallowing at the sight of so much blood. Edela's dress was soaked a deep dark red, her skin, pale and mottled. Shaking his head in disbelief, Thorgils stepped back to let Biddy through.

Who could have done this?

Biddy blinked away tears and tried to think as she bent her head towards Edela's face. She was so still. Her chest was not moving. Biddy reached for her wrist, desperately searching for a pulse. 'Edela?'

King Haaron of Hest looked morose as he slouched on his enormous dragon throne. His wife looked hardly bothered, yawning, as she stood next to him. In fact, she was almost cheerful. Amidst all the devastating events of the past few days – the decimation of their entire fleet, the destruction of their piers, their sons' injuries – Varna Gallas had died.

And Haaron was bereft.

Bayla could not understand why. She had been a vile, odorous crone who had manipulated him since he was a boy, keeping him on an unambitious leash of her own making. He had been controlled by Varna, and now he was free.

Bayla was savouring the moment.

Haaron was not.

'I have spoken to Dragmall,' Haegen announced somberly as he limped up to his father's throne. 'He will speak at Varna's burial tomorrow. Sitha is helping to prepare her body. She will be laid next to her mother and grandmother, as she wished.'

Haaron looked up, barely listening. He nodded briefly, wondering what he was going to do now. Everything had fallen apart so suddenly. It was as though the gods had removed their favour.

All of it.

All at once.

And now they had taken Varna from him, just when he needed her advice more than ever.

How were they going to dig themselves out of the pit they were sinking into without her guidance?

Bayla placed one hand on his shoulder, and Haaron turned to her in surprise. 'It was well past time for you to have a new dreamer,' she said firmly. 'Varna held on for such a long time. For you. But the shock of what happened out on the square... it was obviously too much for her. The shame that she had not dreamed of what would happen...' Bayla smiled widely at Haegen, who frowned at his mother's gleeful expression. She was the only person in Hest who saw anything to smile about.

Haaron sighed as he watched Osbert Furyck enter the hall. *King Osbert now*, he reminded himself.

Another problem to deal with. Amongst so many.

He stretched out his back, sighed irritably and stood.

'My lord.' Osbert limped forward, bowing briskly.

Haaron nodded disinterestedly, looking around for a slave. He was thirsty for wine and eager to be alone; desperate to talk to Varna. 'You are happy with your preparations, my lord?'

'I am,' Osbert said wearily. 'We will leave at first light. We must return my father's body to Brekka quickly.' He swallowed, feeling an unwelcome surge of emotion that he had no intention of acknowledging; not here, in front of Haaron and his family at least. 'I appreciate the loan of your cart.'

'Of course,' Haaron said, waving his hand dismissively. 'We are still allies. And we still have Helsabor to conquer together.'

Haegen raised an eyebrow, thinking that after the loss of all their ships and the deceit of the Islanders, there were more important things than Helsabor to turn their attention to now. But the eager look on Osbert's face reflected his father's.

Haegen sighed.

'Indeed,' Osbert agreed. 'Once I have put the Islanders to the sword, and taken my revenge on my cousins, I will come back to claim it with you.'

'If you can put the Islanders to the sword,' Haegen suggested. 'Jael is queen, and with Eadmund Skalleson and her brother on her side, I think you might find it harder than you imagine. Especially having just seen what they can do.'

Haaron frowned at his eldest son, then smiled at the sight of wine being hastily delivered to him. He took his silver goblet from the tray, inhaling the fruity scent, which reminded him of Varna, and their talks in his chamber. Instantly miserable again, he drank deeply. 'She is queen, yes, but a murderous one now, and the gods will not look favourably upon her, will they? Beheading a king? Her own family? A Furyck?' He smiled. 'Furia will not be pleased with her at all.'

It was dark now, and most of the crew were inside the wooden house, grateful to be able to shelter from the biting wind. But as much as Jael wanted to dream and find Edela again, she couldn't sleep at all. Her mind was full of her grandmother's lifeless body, and she felt far too tense to relax, so she limped around the deck instead, embracing the bitter cold as it numbed her face.

Aleksander handed her a cloak. 'You might need another one if you're going to spend the night out here.'

Jael turned and took the thick, woollen cloak, wrapping it around her

shoulders. 'Thank you.' Her lips barely moved. She didn't want to speak at all. Not even to him.

'Edela is strong,' he said softly. 'As strong as you.' Aleksander felt awkward, wanting to put his arm around Jael, to comfort her in some way; to be comforted by her in return. But he knew her.

He didn't move.

Jael glanced at him, swallowing hard. The moon shone above him, highlighting his sharp cheekbones, his hollow eyes. 'It was bad.'

Aleksander reached out then and pulled her frozen body towards him, wrapping his arms tightly around her. His wounded shoulder was throbbing so much he could barely see straight, but all he could think about was Edela.

Evaine had done this, he knew. He just hoped that they could make it back to Oss before it was too late.

'Brother,' Jaeger sneered, looking from Berard to Meena and back again. He stood in the doorway of his chamber, not inviting them in.

He was standing easily now, Berard noted. And he looked furious. Berard didn't blame him. Jaeger had just had his new wife stolen away while suffering through another humiliating defeat at the hands of Jael Furyck and her Islanders. 'Could we, perhaps, come in?' Berard wondered nervously, glancing at Meena who was jerking about beside him, desperately trying to squirm her hand out of his.

Jaeger moved aside and ushered them in, noticing as he did so that Berard had hold of Meena's hand. 'Is there something you have come to say, Brother? Some news, perhaps?' Jaeger followed them into his chamber but did not offer them a seat or a drink.

He was still too annoyed with Berard to be friendly.

Berard had let it slip that he'd spoken to Jael Furyck as she escaped the castle. But he'd been so drunk, that he'd simply let her go.

No one was that interested in talking to him at the moment.

'News?' Berard looked confused, then followed Jaeger's gaze to his hand as it held Meena's. He dropped it quickly and moved away from Meena, who immediately started tapping her head. 'No, I've just stopped Meena from running away. From leaving Hest.'

Jaeger frowned at Meena, who was doing her very best to avoid his eyes; whether from fear or displeasure, he couldn't tell. 'Leaving for where? Where were you going, Meena?' Jaeger growled irritably.

Meena wanted to run out of the room. She couldn't breathe. The day had been long and upsetting. Her grandmother was dead, and now, Morana loomed over her. A vicious, black-eyed threat.

And Jaeger. It was all his fault.

'You k-k-killed my grandmother!' she said boldly, lifting her eyes at last.

Berard gasped, horrified, turning to his brother.

'Me?' Jaeger was wide-eyed. 'Yes, I did. And she deserved it too, the stinking old bitch. And now we're all free of her and her scheming and plotting.' He stared at Meena, surprised by her anger. 'I thought you would've thanked me? You, who spent your life being terrorised by her!'

Berard was mortified. 'Jaeger!' he hissed. 'You killed a dreamer? *Father's* dreamer? But... but...'

'But what? And so what? Father will never know, not unless you tell him. Varna did nothing but turn him against me since I was a boy. Why wouldn't I kill her for all that she did to me? And you, Meena. How can you forget so quickly?' He grabbed Meena's hand, pulling it down from her head, staring into her frantic eyes. 'How can you forget so quickly?'

His eyes had more than anger in them now, and Meena blushed, remembering what he had done to her that night; that night that now felt so long ago. She looked away, trying to hide her face from them both.

Berard frowned, finding no satisfaction in anything his brother was saying. 'And what of this woman, Morana? She says that she's your dreamer?'

Meena shivered and shrunk away.

Jaeger smiled at his brother, not noticing. 'Morana... mmm. Yes, she is, I suppose. Varna's daughter. A dreamer, just like her mother. She can read the Book of Darkness, and she's going to help me get everything I've ever wanted.'

Berard was unsettled by the look in his brother's eyes. He shuffled his feet, trying to think of what to say.

'You go, Brother,' Jaeger smiled, ignoring Berard entirely. 'Meena and I must have a little talk.'

Meena gulped, tapping her worn boots on the dark flagstones.

Berard was hesitant. 'But -'

'I'm sure Father will be looking for you,' Jaeger said firmly. 'And you know how angry he gets when he can't find you, Berard.'

Berard thought of his purple-faced father and his ear-breaking curses. He looked to Meena, his face pink with guilt, then ducked his head and turned to the door.

‘And send Egil up if you see him,’ Jaeger added, without taking his eyes off Meena. ‘I’ve run out of wine.’

Berard nodded briefly as he turned the door handle and slipped away.

Jaeger’s smile dropped as the door closed. He grabbed Meena’s arms, trying to wake her up. ‘We need to talk, you and I. About what will happen now, with Varna gone, and your aunt here.’

Meena shivered, not looking up.

‘You’re truly *mad* at me for killing Varna?’ Jaeger laughed incredulously as he led Meena towards the bed and pulled her down to sit beside him. ‘*Varna?*’

Meena’s body tingled from his touch, but still, he was a murderer. She did not feel safe. ‘You shouldn’t have hurt her. She was o-o-o-old.’

‘*Old?*’ Jaeger smiled. ‘You think the old shouldn’t be punished? Even when they do terrible things? To you, Meena. Think of all that she did to you!’ He stroked his hand down her shuddering arm. ‘Think of what she *didn’t* do. How she didn’t care for you, didn’t show you any warmth or affection. None! Not in all the years you were with her.’ He leaned forward and turned Meena’s face towards his. ‘Tell me that you aren’t glad she’s dead? Grateful, that I ended her?’

Meena blinked as he bent forward and kissed her cheek. She fought the urge to move, caught between the danger she knew he posed and the desire she could feel weakening her limbs. ‘I...’ She closed her eyes and saw Varna. She heard Varna screeching at her, beating her, starving her, bullying her, hating her. ‘I am glad she’s dead,’ she whispered, at last, opening her eyes.

Jaeger smiled and kissed her roughly, feeling Meena relent as she came towards him, willingly now, kissing him back. ‘Good. Because I need you, Meena,’ he breathed, his stubble scratching her lips. ‘I don’t trust Morana, but I do trust you, and you are going to keep a very close eye on her for me.’

‘She is coming.’

Evaine glanced at her mother, wringing her hands as they walked along the beach. ‘Will she know it was me?’

‘Know?’ Morana laughed. ‘She will know. Of course! They will all know, but

there will be nothing they can do, not with Eadmund here to protect you.'

Evaine looked relieved. She was desperate to see him, to feel safe in his arms again.

'But you must make sure that he stays yours. They cannot be together. Ever.' Morana stopped and grabbed Evaine's wrists, pulling apart her nervous, twisting hands. 'Do you understand me, girl? A candle will not do, not for what we need. Not after what you did to Edela Saeveld. Killing a dreamer?' Morana frowned in annoyance at the mess Evaine had made. 'You must go to my book.' She shook her head, dismissing Evaine's protests. 'Not *that* book! Before Morac left Rikka, I gave him another book to keep for you. As soon as you wake from this dream, you must go to him and get that book. You will find the spell you need on the very last page.'

Evaine smiled, suddenly hopeful, closing her eyes, imagining Eadmund. And when she opened them, Morana had gone.



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