Norah and the other members of the Resistance have their first clue to help them find the Lemorian Crest. Unfortunately, Norah has some serious trust issues with some of the members of the Resistance. And she is quickly learning to fear Water.

**The Sina Bracelet**

I squeezed my eyes tightly, clutching the stone box in my hand until it bit into my palm. The smell of the salty sea was generally soothing to me, but nothing could calm the storm of fear raging inside me now.

“Are you trying to tell me that the Adolorian ruins are at the bottom of the Glindian Sea?” I managed to choke out.

“Of course. Where did you think they were?” Lylend asked.

“I don’t know—I didn’t—I just . . .” When I opened my eyes, everyone was staring at me.

Zuli was at my elbow. I jumped when she spoke. “The bracelet will keep the water from attacking you while we’re down there,” she soothed. “Just as long as you don’t use your fire.”

But her words didn’t sooth me. It was the perfect set up. Zuli was going to take me to the bottom of the sea and somehow take her revenge on me—for whatever reason she felt she needed to take revenge on me in the first place. And that would be that. Some hungry creature would probably come along and clear up any evidence of the dirty deed. That giant, snapping turtle perhaps.

Lylend was eying me now. There was concern in his stare. “Breathe, kyndie,” he said. “You’ve got to breathe.”

I felt two powerful hands take me by the shoulders and give me a gentle shake.

I looked up. Lev’s peacock green eyes glittered down into my own. “It’s going to be okay, Lune-kyndie,” he said quietly. “You’ve got to trust me on this. Think of Jamus.”

I glanced around quickly; making sure no one was listening. Everyone had moved away, except for Zuli, but she’d turned her back to us at least. “What does James have to do with it?”

Lev’s hands nearly crushed my shoulders when he squeezed them. “The sooner we find the keys, the sooner you’ll be able to go find him,” he reminded me.

I took a few more steadying breaths. He was right. James was at the end of this extremely dark, possibly fatal tunnel, and he needed me. I had to do this; there was no way I could find him without Lylend’s help.

“You’re right,” I said, with more determination than I felt.

I took Zuli’s bracelet out of the box and examined it more closely. It was actually really pretty. The band was thick and made of silver, and there were three different kinds of stones, all in varying shades of blue and green, used to make a beautiful swirling design of waves.

I slid the bracelet on and looked back up at Lev. “What if she tries to kill me out there?” I whispered.

Lev gave me a half smile. “She won’t. Yesterday aside, she really is quite nice. And if you don’t feel like you can trust her yet, trust me. I’m certain she won’t try to kill you down there because if she does, she’ll have to answer to me.”

I hesitated a moment, then nodded. His assurance wasn’t especially comforting, but it was better than nothing. I actually did feel a little better thinking of Lev crushing Zuli with his bare hands if she tried anything on me.

*James,* I thought. *Think about James.*

“All right, let’s do this before I lose my nerve,” I grumbled.

Lev grinned and left me, joining Pieter and Lylend. All three of them had already waded out into the water on the narrow sandbank. I kept watching as Lylend produced a ball of blue electricity. After jogging out to join them, Lev followed suit with his own green one. Pieter stood back with his arms crossed.

“What are they doing?” I asked.

Zuli came up beside me. “They’re catching their ride.” She pointed back out at the water.

I followed her gesture. Lylend and Lev had turned their balls of electricity into giant thick ropes that were lassoed. They were both swinging them over their heads now. With all the hooting and hollering they were doing, they reminded me of a pair of weirdly dressed space cowboys.

Then it happened. I was certain I’d swallowed my tongue when two enormous creatures jumped up out of the water and right into the lassos of both ropes.

“Ar-are those—.”

“Electric eels. They’re naturally attracted to the spark ropes,” Zuli explained.

Lev and Lylend both whooped and hollered again, just like two cowboys at a rodeo, as they jumped on the eels’ backs and wrestled them into submission.

Before long, all I could see of the creatures were two sleek, dark planks slithering along the surface of the water. Pieter mounted last, and then Lev and Lylend, with the electric rope wound snugly around their wrists and forearms, made the eels rear up out of the water, thrashing. Then they dove, leaving a giant ripple in their wake.

“Whoa!” I said, after Zuli and I watched as the ripples turned to waves, crashing into the shore like a herd of galloping horses.

“Yes,” Zuli agreed. “I suppose you’ve never seen something like that in the Olden Realm?”

I shook my head. “Only in the movies.”

“Movies?”

“Uh, yeah—they’re like moving pictures that tell a story.”

“Hm…,” Zuli said, and then led the way toward the water. “So,” I said, anxious to break the silence that followed, “how will they breathe down there?” I was pretty certain I already knew the answer.

“Breathite,” Zuli said, pointing to the lightest blue stone on my new bracelet.

“Let me guess, it’s a stone that helps you breath under water?”

“Right.”

“Nice.”

“We should get going,” Zuli said. “Their distraction won’t happen for a while now, but we need all the time we can get.” She glanced at me. “Are you ready?”

*James,* I reminded myself. *Think of James.* “As ready as I’m going to get.”

“All right then, follow me out into the water, and I’ll tell you when to submerge the bracelet.”

I did as she said, and followed her out onto the same sand bank the guys had used. As the water got higher, reaching my waist, I was careful to keep the bracelet up over my head.

“Where’s Iolyt, by the way?” I asked.

“She stayed behind to work on the antidite stone. The sooner she figures it out, the sooner we can start hoptioning again.”

“I see. And all this will go a lot faster with hoptioning?”

“Yes. New Cobbogoth isn’t that big overall—no more than a month’s journey by foot from ocean to ocean—but since he has access to hoption holes, Cifer is able to work much faster than us. If he has any idea about Lylend’s Lemorian Crest, you can bet he’ll find it soon.”

I nodded, feeling the urgency fiercer than ever to get looking for the Lemorian keys.

“All right,” Zuli turned toward me once we were a ways out. “You can put the bracelet in the water now.”

We were up to our chests. I was surprised to see that she’d already transformed.

I hesitated a moment. The bracelet had worked so far. I’d been in the water for a few minutes now, and it wasn’t attacking me, so I slowly lowered my wrist.

I sucked in my breath. The instant my wrist dipped through the surface, a slither of water curled around the bracelet, caressing like a piece of clear silk. Soon, the stream of water tightened around my wrist—so tight I almost cried out.

“Come a little farther out,” Zuli prompted.

I hesitated but then took another step. The next moment, I lost my footing. My entire head plunged beneath the water. The sandbank we were on was a drop off.

In an instant, my blood was like ice. I could hear it galloping in my ears. My eyes were blurry, and all I could see was a blob of yellow, orange, black, and red. I assumed it was Zuli hovering in front of me. She was close but just out of arms reach.

I scrambled to find the drop off, to push myself back up where I could breathe, but I couldn’t feel it anywhere. I tried to swim for the surface, but when I kicked my legs it was like they were glued together.

Blinking in the water, I turned until I found Zuli’s form again. I tried to motion her over for help. She swam nearer.

And then I felt a sharp, ripping pain on both of my sides, like someone had inserted a knife between my ribs and was trying to pry them apart.

*She’s stabbed me*! I thought.

Clawing my way toward the surface, I felt my breath running out—felt myself sinking. Man, I was tired of nearly drowning!

My entire body was tingling from lack of oxygen. My legs were still trapped and now a searing heat was bursting from my waist and spine—like I was being quartered with a hot iron sword. Then I realized Zuli was holding me down. She wouldn’t let me reach the surface. She was going to hang on until I went unconscious.

But then my lungs suddenly expanded. My mouth wasn’t open and my nose was plugged, but I was breathing. The air whooshed in and out of me like I was standing on the shore with all the air in the world to breathe.

I stopped struggling. Instinctively, I reached down, touching both of my sides where the sharp pain was quickly dulling. My shyntara was gone, and my skin felt strange—rough and smooth at the same time. That’s when I realized the Sina bracelet was working. Just below my armpits, along the diagonal space between my ribs, there were two long slits. I gasped, water rushing into my mouth and down my throat toward my lungs. Then a rush of water pushed out against my arms—out of the slits, and I could still breathe.

*Gills!* The word came to me, and I gave a little hysterical laugh. I had gills on both sides of my body. I tried not to freak out, forcing myself to remain calm.

My rushing pulse began to slow. The ice in my blood wasn’t so sharp anymore. My body was beginning to adapt to the temperature of the water. I still couldn’t see very clearly; Zuli was still a banded blob of colors, though she wasn’t holding me down anymore. When I looked down at my body, all I could see was a blur of white.

Then, as if someone removed a pair of Uncle Jack’s reading glasses from in front of me, I felt my eyes harden—sharpen—until everything came into focus, and I could see crystal clear.

Zuli hovered before me in the water, her hair still pinned back by the tiger’s eye comb. Her orange, black, and yellow tail waved back and forth like a tiger pacing in front of its prey. And she was smiling as though I’d just done something exasperatingly funny.

“What?” I said, then immediately brought my hand to my mouth.

It didn’t sound like me anymore. Instead, my voice was high and musical. It bounced around in the water like an echo.

Zuli shook her head in disbelief. “Of course you would have to look like *that* down here.” Her own, equally musical voice echoed back to me. It was mesmerizing.

“What do you mean?” I sang. She’d said it like I had some sort of choice in how I looked.

“Haven’t you ever heard of camouflage?” she said, gesturing toward my legs.

I looked down, and instantly felt sick. Would my complexion always be a burden? The platinum iridescence of my new tail and fins blended blindingly with my vanilla pale skin. I stood out in the dark water like the moon against the night sky. Zuli wouldn’t have to waste a single breath luring in dangerous sea creatures to finish me off this time. I’d do that all by myself.

“This is ridiculous!” I cried.

Zuli only nodded in amused agreement.