

A SONG OF ASH AND MOONLIGHT
The Middlemist Trilogy, Book Two
a (fairly) quick + helpful recap

In the world of Edyn—a realm built for humans by now-dead gods—the Middlemist serves as a magical barrier between Edyn and the Old Country, the dangerous parallel world where the gods were born and ancient magic runs wild.

After creating Edyn as a safe haven for humans, the gods destroyed themselves. They gifted some of their magic to humans; these people and their descendants, having been blessed directly by the gods, possess Anointed magic.

The remaining godly magic scattered across the world, and those lucky humans who happened to receive some of it by chance, and their descendants, possess low magic. They are neither as powerful nor as esteemed as those who were Anointed. Many humans possess no magic at all.

Each of the five gods ruled over a specific domain of magic: the senses, the mind, the earth, the beasts, and the unknowable. Any magic that a human possesses derives from one of those five foundational types.

Lady Farrin Ashbourne—the eldest of three sisters in her wealthy Anointed family—is a savant, meaning she works her magic through music and song.

Mara, the middle Ashbourne sister, is a sentinel like her father; she possesses superhuman strength and speed. She serves at the Middlemist as a member of the Order of the Rose, which protects Edyn from the Old Country.

Farrin's youngest sister, Gemma, has a volatile dual magic—elemental with a botanical affinity, like her mother, Philippa; and a power of the senses, like her father, Gideon, though instead of strength and speed, her power focuses on illusory glamours. Their parents hired an Olden artificer when Gemma was young to operate on her and attempt to stifle this emerging volatile power, which has left her with chronic pain exacerbated by the presence and use of magic itself.

A prologue shows a flashback of the night Ivyhill, the Ashbourne family estate, burned down in a fire set by the Ashbournes' enemies, the Bask family. 11-year-old Farrin is trapped inside the house and only escapes because a strange, glowing boy wearing a mask saves her. She names him “the shining boy.” Farrin alone observes her mother Philippa’s incandescent rage in the wake of the fire, which momentarily alters Philippa’s physical appearance.

24-year-old Farrin wakes from this frequent nightmare and begins yet another day managing her family's estate, a complicated and never-ending task that she excels at yet resents. Farrin was forced to assume a "head of the family" role at far too young an age, following their mother's disappearance and their father's subsequent grief and alcoholism. That early adultification has prevented her from ever truly grieving and processing the loss of her mother. It has also created a complicated relationship between her and her father, which has been degrading for years.

At the back of Farrin's mind is an upcoming ball at the capital, Fairhaven, to celebrate the new era of peace between her family and their enemies, the Bask family. Farrin's father, Gideon Ashbourne, despises the Basks and is resistant to reconciliation. Farrin worries he may commit an act of violence in protest. Her suspicions mount when he entertains mysterious guests unknown to her.

A letter from Mara arrives. Mara is convinced the Middlemist is dying. Passage between realms is becoming increasingly easy, which leads to accidental and intentional trespasses. Storms, fires, and sickness run rampant through the Mistlands. The Order is spread thin on multiple fronts. Mara suspects Kilraith—the powerful being to whom Gemma's lover, the demon Talan, was once bound—is behind this. At the end of *Crown*, when the Ashournes freed Talan from Kilraith's magical bondage, their actions hurt Kilraith but didn't kill him.

Stressed about this latest news and the upcoming ball, and irritated by Gemma's frank discussion of her sex life with Talan (who is deep in hiding from Kilraith and returns to Ivyhill as often as he can), which Farrin envies, her rising temper snaps and she punishes an undeserving housemaid. Farrin's best friend, Gareth Fontaine—a librarian and university professor—witnesses this. He's visiting Ivyhill to work in the Ashbourne family archives, searching for more information about the *ytheliad* curse, which he suspects is much more complex than the single branch of power that bound Talan to Kilraith. Gareth is an Anointed sage, which grants him extraordinary power of the mind, including eidetic memory and high intelligence.

Gareth scolds Farrin for taking her anger out on the housemaid. Farrin calls Gareth's work in his academic ivory tower frivolous, his recent string of throwaway relationships disgusting, and his neglect of his mother shameful. Gareth defends his "frivolous" work as essential to defeating Kilraith and his ilk, and suggests that if Farrin had a few "throwaway relationships" now and then, she might actually be pleasant to be around.

Gareth apologizes immediately, but his comments linger, exacerbating Farrin's confusion about her sex life (or lack thereof), her fear of and unfamiliarity with her body and sexuality, and the anger that rages constantly inside her. Later, Farrin tries to masturbate but, as usual, can't get out of her own head and feels frustrated and embarrassed by her inability to orgasm.

At the ball in Fairhaven, at the royal Citadel, Farrin and Gemma prepare to give a joint speech with gruff Ryder Bask and his sharp-tongued sister, Alastrina—both of whom are wilders who can control animals, and both of whom helped the Ashbournes free Talan at the end of *Crown*. Before the speech, a man attacks Ryder with a dagger. Farrin instinctively jumps in front of him to block Ryder. The man’s dagger tears her dress and scrapes her belly, but she is otherwise unhurt.

Once the attacker is incapacitated, a shaken Farrin insists on giving the speech as planned, dismissing Ryder’s thanks and the tension between them. During the speech, Farrin is struck with sudden pain and collapses. When she comes to, she is mortified to find herself in Ryder’s arms. She discovers an ugly black infection on her stomach; the knife that scraped her was laced with a deadly venom. Yvaine, ageless queen of Edyn and Farrin’s dear friend, absorbs the poison into her own body and nullifies it with her power, which is immense, unique, and uncategorizable. Farrin suspects her father was behind the attack; he can’t meet her eyes.

Yvaine dismisses everyone besides Farrin, Gemma, Ryder, Alastrina, and Gareth and escorts them to a lower level of the Citadel, where a magical sinkhole has appeared. A rotation of beguilers (magicians who specialize in spellwork) guard the sinkhole and work to slow its growth. Yvaine tells them that the sinkhole opened during the chimaera attack earlier in the summer (*Crown*, chapter 34). Even with her beguilers slowing it down, it will someday engulf the Citadel.

Yvaine bids Farrin and the others to be her eyes and ears out in the world and discover the source of this sinkhole. Who is attacking the Citadel and why? Farrin suspects the sinkhole and the weakening Middlemist are related—perhaps Kilraith attacking on multiple fronts?

Suddenly Yvaine becomes hysterical, speaking in Olden tongues and trying to throw herself into the sinkhole. Something has possessed her; Kilraith, working through the sinkhole? Gareth translates: “They awaken. Make them go to sleep. If they come here, they’ll die. Make them go to sleep!” Farrin subdues the queen with song. Yvaine’s chief adviser implies this is not the first time the queen has succumbed to such magical attacks. The Citadel goes into lockdown.

That night, Farrin watches over Yvaine as she sleeps, reflecting on her long friendship with the queen and Yvaine’s own friendship with Farrin’s mother. Restless, Farrin flees to the royal gardens and encounters Ryder. She is antagonistic toward him; she sees the wisdom in their families’ new alliance, but she doesn’t have to *like* it.

Ryder’s gruff patience prompts Farrin to confide in him despite herself: She feels like she can’t contribute enough toward this growing conflict. Her sisters can perform marvelous acts of

physical magic; Ryder and his sister can control animals and are superb warriors. What can Farrin do?

Ever since Farrin's catastrophic public recital when she was 14 years old, during which her music whipped the audience into a fervor and they stormed the stage and attacked her, she has been guarded around her power. She doesn't play her music for anyone and in moments of stress loses her focus with it.

Ryder offers to teach her how to fight and strengthen her body so she can more easily defend herself—and so they can all more effectively defend the continent of Gallinor and Queen Yvaine herself, who is clearly unwell. Farrin agrees to consider his offer. Sexual tension simmers between them.

Two days later, en route back to Ivyhill, Farrin confronts her father about his role in the assassination attempt on Ryder at the ball. He stubbornly clings to hatred of the Basks; Farrin is deeply disappointed in him and despairs at him ever seeing reason.

Two weeks later, the Ashbournes and Gareth arrive at Ravenswood, the Bask family estate in the mountains north of the Middlemist. Two other powerful Anointed families join them. Their goal is to discuss the Citadel sinkhole, the weakening Middlemist, and Kilraith, and plan strategy on how best to protect Edyn from the larger conflict that is surely coming. The meal is tense, Gideon and Lord Bask still full of hatred and distrust. It falls to their children to keep the peace, which infuriates Farrin.

As these meetings proceed over the next few days, Farrin trains with Ryder, strengthening her body and learning basic combat techniques. The process is exhausting, but Farrin has a breakthrough when she thinks of fighting in musical terms. Sexual tension slowly builds between her and Ryder as they spar. Farrin has been taught her whole life to hate this man, but his surprising gentleness, combat prowess, and wry humor endears him to her.

During one of their sessions, a series of alarm bells ring out. Panicked magical messages arrive from across the continent: A dozen Anointed magicians have disappeared in the blink of an eye, the only clues near the site of each abduction a flurry of swift shadows and a general sense of confusion and dizziness in those nearby. One of the abducted is Alastrina.

While everyone searches the grounds for her, Farrin encounters a brilliant Olden creature made of flames, with a form that is part avian, part woman. Suspecting the creature is responsible for Alastrina's abduction, Farrin pursues the firebird and calls others to help. The group loses the firebird in the mountains, and a fight breaks out between Gideon and Lord Bask. The latter accuses the former of facilitating Alastrina's abduction. Farrin uses her power to sing the

quarreling men into submission. “None of your children asked to be born into your war,” she tells them, “and yet we’re the ones doing all the work to end it.”

The group leaves Ravenswood for the Priory of Rosewarren—headquarters of the Order of the Rose—to consult with the Order’s leader, the Warden, about the abductions. En route they stop in Devenmere, a village in the northern Mistlands. Devenmere is under attack by chimaera who have broken through the Middlemist, which, thanks to its weakening structure, has surpassed its natural borders and is encroaching on settlements in the Mistlands. Ashbournes and Basks slay the creatures. Farrin subdues a particularly massive chimaera using the power of her song.

But the attack is devastating, and the nearby Anointed lords who help watch over Devenmere are gone, having vanished just like Alastrina. The group continues to Rosewarren, reunite with Mara, and confront the Warden. Villages along the Mistline are the Order’s responsibility. Why wasn’t the Order there to protect Devenmere?

The Warden reveals that she has magically bound the people of the northern Mistland—including the Basks—to secrecy about the true danger they face from the expanding Mist. The Order has limited resources, and the Warden has had to ruthlessly triage, focusing the Order’s efforts on the more populous southern Mistlands instead.

The Warden is also reluctant to petition the crown for help due to her own pride and her desire to protect Queen Yvaine. The Warden knows about the sinkhole and Yvaine’s deteriorating mental state. She will not unduly burden the queen. Bells signifying a breach in the Middlemist prompt Mara and other Roses to transform into their avian forms and fly off to battle. Gareth is transfixed by Mara’s transformation and is obviously smitten, which irritates Farrin.

Farrin describes the firebird to the Warden, who has never heard of such a creature. The Warden agrees to let Gareth take the Three-Eyed Crown—the anchor that once bound Talan to Kilraith and has been kept at Rosewarren for safekeeping—to Fairhaven for further study. In exchange, Farrin will petition Yvaine to enact a military draft. The Order needs more recruits.

The group disperses. Gareth takes the Crown to the university. Ryder goes home to Ravenswood to boost aid efforts in the northern Mistlands. Farrin and Gemma return to Ivyhill, where an ecstatic Gemma reunites with Talan. While living in hiding to protect himself and the Ashbournes from Kilraith’s wrath, he has been investigating abnormalities in magical rifts, like the Middlemist, on other continents. Envious of their happiness, Farrin thinks of Ryder and masturbates, achieving orgasm for the first time in years.

The next day, Farrin discovers that Gemma has been secretly corresponding with a distant relative to learn more about their mother and investigate the Ashbourne sisters’ powers,

particularly why being in the Old Country at the end of *Crown* enhanced their powers so extremely. What secrets lie hidden in their heritage?

Gemma's search angers Farrin. She wants nothing to do with the mother who abandoned them and left Farrin to pick up the pieces of her shattered family. She is also terrified of learning more about her and her sisters' power and what it could mean. Gemma scolds Farrin: They should be doing everything they can to protect the country and help Yvaine. Farrin's resistance to finding useful information is in direct conflict with that directive.

Frustrated and eager for a sparring session, Farrin travels her family's magical passageways to Ravenswood and finds Ryder grieving for the loss of his sister, Alastrina. She comforts him, sharing her own experiences with grief. While sparring, the tension between them culminates in passionate kisses that nearly escalate to something more. But Farrin stops him, telling him that, while she is not a virgin (her first time was with Gareth when they were teenagers and did not go well), she is not entirely comfortable in her body and needs to take things slow.

The next day at Ivyhill, embarrassed about what happened, Farrin is short with Ryder when he arrives to discuss next steps with the group. He, however, remains unbothered by her irritability. Talan tells everyone the unsettling rumors he has heard in his travels—rumors of a strange, beautiful city of endless revels called Moonhollow, which Talan suspects might be connected to the recent abductions. He also tells them of a northern forest protected by a magical barrier he can't penetrate. The group decides to investigate. But first they must fulfill their promise to the Warden by speaking to the queen.

In Fairhaven, the group discovers unrest stemming from civilians' fear about the recent unsolved abductions. Portraits of the abducted, including Alastrina, paper the city. At the university, Gareth shows the group the Three-Eyed Crown, which he has been studying. Using spellwork and Gareth's own considerable mental library of reference material, he has unearthed images from the crown's magical depths that suggest it was one of several anchors of the *ythelialad*—the curse that enhances Kilraith's power and allows him easy passage between the realms.

To further explore this, Gareth needs access to the royal archives. Another request to present to the queen. Farrin hates using her friendship with the queen as leverage, but she has no choice.

At the Citadel, which is surrounded by protesters, Farrin and the group are denied entrance. Talan uses his demonic powers of illusion to sneak Farrin past the guards. Farrin is horrified to see Queen Yvaine's mental decline. Yvaine seems scattered, distracted, frightened, and childlike. She confesses to periods of memory loss; sometimes entire hours are lost to her.

Farrin conveys to Yvaine the Warden's request for a draft. When she begins updating the queen on what she and the group have been up to, Yvaine begs her to stop. Given her precarious mental state, she should not be made aware of any sensitive information. She denies them access to the royal archives out of an abundance of caution; the Citadel is under ongoing lockdown procedures due to the growing presence of the magical sinkhole. Yvaine begins repeating a strange few sentences: "Moon by day. Fire by night. Come and dance. Don't try to fight. The beauty of shadows, the garish sunlight. Spin for the watchers, their revels so bright." Yvaine's protective advisers find Farrin and angrily eject her from the castle, considering her a provocation.

The group—Farrin, Ryder, Gemma, Talan, Mara, and Gareth—travels north to the strange forest Talan found. They are disturbed by Yvaine's strange mutterings and wonder if they are connected to the rumored city of Moonhollow. Mara shares with the group reports of mentally disturbed citizens in the Mistlands who have been affected by the deteriorating Mist. Their ramblings also contain mentions of a city that must be Moonhollow.

They stop for the night at an inn. A smitten Gareth flirts with Mara, much to Mara's amusement and Farrin's irritation. Later, Ryder comes to Farrin's room, and a nervous, tense Farrin asks him to kiss her. He does, and their kisses grow more and more passionate until Ryder brings Farrin to completion with his hands. In the aftermath, Farrin—not used to being so intimately vulnerable with her body—is embarrassed and begins to close herself off emotionally. Determined to reciprocate, despite her nerves and Ryder's assurances that she doesn't need to, Farrin sings to Ryder. The power of her music soothes him and brings him pleasure.

The next day, they continue north. As they near the strange forest, a snowstorm begins. A magical force lures Farrin and her sisters ahead of the men until they penetrate the forest's protective barrier and emerge into a clearing in full springtime bloom. In the clearing stands Phillipa Ashbourne, the sisters' long-lost mother.

At the sight of her, Gemma and Mara are overcome with emotion and embrace her. Farrin, however, furious and suspicious, attacks Phillipa, breaking her jaw with her staff. Phillipa's broken jaw quickly heals itself. She introduces herself as Kerezen, goddess of the senses. The Ashbourne sisters are part human, part god. They are demigods.

Phillipa allows Ryder, Talan, and Gareth to pass through the barrier and join them. She tells them all that she was born Phillipa Wren, a low-magic human with a talent for botanicals. But she was also born with the essence of the resurrected goddess Kerezen buried deep inside her like a seed. As she grew older, married Gideon Ashbourne, and had her daughters, that seed began sprouting.

At the time of Gemma's birth, she was quickly becoming both human and goddess, which meant that she possessed not only her botanical human magic but also Kerezen's power of the senses. This duality at the time of Gemma's birth is why Gemma herself possesses volatile dual magic. When Philippa began to understand who she truly was, she left her family to protect them. She created the secret forest up north—which she calls Wardwell—so she could safely explore her emerging godly power and hide away from anyone who might seek to capture and use her before she gained full strength.

Her story is extraordinary, but Farrin and her sisters know instinctively that it's true. It explains why their own power responded so extremely to the magic of the Old Country at the end of *Crown*. But the story does nothing to soothe Farrin's old anger at her mother for her abandonment. She flees the cottage and runs into the forest. Ryder joins her and soothes her.

The firebird—part woman, part bird, all fire—appears. Farrin tries talking to the creature, but Ryder is immediately on the defensive with his crossbow. The firebird attacks him, consuming him with flames. Farrin uses song to beg for his life. Her music soothes the firebird, who releases Ryder unharmed. He shoots the firebird; an arrow pierces her wing and pins her to a tree.

The firebird introduces herself as Ankaret and urges Farrin to develop the mighty weapon of her voice. She must not fear it; she will need it in the war to come. Ankaret speaks cryptically and in a strange rhythm; she doesn't seem entirely sane. But she has heard of the city called Moonhollow. In exchange for her freedom, Ankaret pledges to investigate the city and bring information back to them.

Ankaret gifts Farrin one of her feathers, which can be used to summon Ankaret for help. Ankaret also reassures Ryder that his sister Alastrina still lives. She has seen this in visions—visions, Ankaret admits, she doesn't entirely understand. Farrin and Ryder decide not to tell Philippa about Ankaret. They don't know if they can trust Philippa just yet.

Later that night, Philippa asks Farrin to stay at Wardwell, along with her sisters. War is coming, evil is rising, and Kilraith's plans remain unclear. At Wardwell, they'll be safe, and they can learn about the full potential of their powers with Philippa's help. Farrin refuses, accusing Philippa of cowardice. She may be able to hide in Wardwell and ignore the world's urgent problems—she may be able to abandon those she loves—but Farrin and her sisters cannot and will not do the same.

The group leaves Wardwell and splits up. Talan leaves to continue his traveling, stay on the move and hidden from Kilraith, and find more information about Moonhollow. Ryder sends a wilded Bask raven with him; Talan names the bird Ianto. Gemma and Gareth go to the

university, where they'll conduct more research about the *ytheliad* curse, the Three-Eyed Crown, and the concept of godly resurrection.

At Ivyhill, a drunk Gideon confronts Farrin, accusing her of sleeping with the enemy. Instead of taking care of him as she has done for years, Farrin leaves him stewing in his own filth and walks away from him.

A letter comes from Yvaine the next morning, telling Farrin she's feeling healthier and inviting Farrin and Ryder to a party at Fairhaven. The tone of the letter is playful but strained; Farrin suspects there's more to it than a simple invitation.

At the party, Farrin is shocked to see how thin Yvaine has grown. Yvaine's behavior is flighty and manic; she dances with Ryder and declares her approval of him as Farrin's match. She also asks Ryder about his childhood. He reluctantly tells them both about how his father abused their mother and how Alastrina took it upon herself to protect the younger Ryder.

Farrin, furious at Yvaine for pressuring Ryder into sharing his story—and disturbed by how strange Yvaine is acting—leaves the party early and takes Ryder with her. They retire to their rooms for the night and finally have sex, though Farrin—still unused to intimacy and still learning how to relax her protective barriers and feel comfortable in her body—has to take things slowly and keeps much of her clothing on as they make love. But Ryder is completely patient and understanding, and Farrin is bursting with love and happiness. (WE LOVE THEM!!!)

The next morning, Farrin, Ryder, Gemma, and Gareth have breakfast with Yvaine, who is still behaving erratically. She knows they're hiding something from her and prods at them irritably. The group has decided not to tell her about Philippa, the sisters' demigod status, or Ankaret. Yvaine said it herself a few chapters ago: She's not herself. She can't be trusted with sensitive information.

Yvaine loses her temper and uses her power to pull information out of them against their will. She learns about Gareth's work with the Three-Eyed Crown and that he now thinks, through his studies of its magic, that there are four other anchors of Kilraith's *ytheliad* curse: an egg, a goblet, a key, and a black lake under a full moon.

Farrin tries to sing Yvaine calm, but Yvaine attacks her and pulls the word *demigods* from Farrin's mind. The word spooks Yvaine. Ryder and Gareth try to subdue Yvaine, but their efforts are futile. It's as if something—or someone—is possessing her. Gemma calls upon her botanical magic and uses tree roots from outside to subdue Yvaine, who then runs out of the room in horror and downstairs to the sinkhole, which is expanding rapidly.

Thinking the sinkhole allowed entry of foreign magic that possessed her to attack Farrin, Yvaine manages to close it, severely injuring herself in the process. Before she succeeds, a wave of shadows surges outward from the sinkhole. In the aftermath, everyone realizes more people have been abducted—one of whom is Gareth. In the aftermath of this second wave of abductions, protests in the capital increase, the populace frustrated with the queen's isolation and perceived inaction.

Farrin and Gemma travel to Rosewarren to help Mara placate the Warden, whose request for a national draft to support the Order remains unanswered. Mara shows them a harpy named Nerys, whom she and the Warden have been torturing for information about Moonhollow and Kilraith. The presence of all three Ashbourne sisters and their demigod powers (still unknown to the Warden) weakens the harpy's resolve. Nerys confirms that Kilraith rules the city of Moonhollow, and that its true, Olden name is Mhorghast. She describes the city's wild revels, implying that the humans taken there are used as entertainment for Olden beings.

Farrin and Gemma are horrified to witness this torture; Mara tells them that *this* is the reality of war, that the Order is the front line of defense, and that they need help. Mara is obviously conflicted but stands her ground nevertheless.

Troubled and grieving the loss of Gareth, Farrin goes to Ravenswood, seeking comfort from Ryder. He takes her to his private room in one of the Bask stables; it's a small but cozy space, luxuriously appointed. He used to sleep here as a child to escape the violent gloom of his parents' house.

For the first time Farrin bares her entire body before Ryder—a huge step for her, and a sign of her trust in him. Ryder is reverent, and Farrin delights in relinquishing her control to him, allowing him to gently dominate their passionate lovemaking. She feels safe and taken care of—a rarity in her life—and for once, she isn't the one making all the decisions.

They awaken to find the stable on fire. Ankaret, the firebird, is outside in the forest. Farrin convinces her to stop the fire. Ankaret is clearly upset about something. She confirms the existence of Mhorghast and the ongoing torment of captive humans taking place there. She claims to know how to locate it, but will withhold that information until Ryder confesses the truth to Farrin. If Farrin is going to love this man, and trust him, she must know the whole truth.

Farrin is baffled; Ryder, stricken. He confesses that he is the shining boy who saved Farrin from the fire at Ivyhill when Farrin was a child. Young Ryder, having long spied on the Ashournes at his father's behest, observed Farrin singing one day, and it was puppy love at first sight. He often snuck back to surreptitiously watch her sing and play the piano, and when he learned of his parents' plans to burn Ivyhill, he saved Farrin from the deadly flames.

Ryder never told Farrin this, even over the past few months as they grew close, because he was afraid that the opportunity to confess the truth had passed. He dreaded earning her ire for keeping it from her and dreaded losing her even more.

Farrin is stung. In the stable, she literally bared herself to him, body and soul. And all the while, for all the months she's been falling in love with him, he was keeping this secret from her—this truth from one of the most traumatizing nights of her life. There has been an embarrassing imbalance of knowledge and therefore of power between them. Her thoughts and emotions run wild, and she can't stop their spiraling. She accuses Ryder of falling in love with her all those years ago simply because of her voice. Therefore she can't trust that his feelings are genuine, especially after this latest revelation. She can't trust anything. Part of her knows these accusations are untrue, that her brain is lying to her. But she can't stop herself from believing it.

Ankaret, abashed but satisfied, gives them the promised information, which is frustratingly cryptic: "All the storms that now live belong to him. Follow them to the place where they are born, and you will find his city." Farrin leaves a devastated Ryder and returns to Ivyhill, already berating herself for throwing her indignation and confusion at Ryder so cruelly. It's like she's caught up in the memory of that long-ago night's trauma, and its claws are stirring her emotions beyond reason.

At Ivyhill, Farrin finds the distressed raven Ianto and a severely wounded Talan, who claims to have found the location of Moonhollow. Gideon readies the household staff in case the wounded Talan has led his attackers to Ivyhill. He seems apologetic for his past drunken treatment of Farrin, but Farrin keeps her distance. Ivyhill's healer tends to Talan's wounds, aided by Farrin and a distraught Gemma. The wounds were clearly inflicted by a magical being and are infected with poison. The treatment is brutal. Farrin sings to comfort Talan and help the healer focus.

Ryder arrives, summoned by Gideon—a gesture of goodwill, but not enough to earn Farrin's forgiveness. Her love of Ryder has given her the clarity to see her father's faults and no longer make excuses for them. For the first time she's beginning to acknowledge the trauma of being forced to look after Gemma and the entire household on her own, at too young an age, due to her father's neglect and alcoholism.

A weakened Talan shares with the group what he has learned. He followed a trail of strange storms and found a path of moonlight that lured him to the city of Mhorghast. He describes the beautiful city and the abducted humans he witnessed being abused for the entertainment of Oldens. Talan was found out by clans of demons and chimaera, who attacked him. Other beasts helped him back to the moonlight road, which led him out of Mhorghast and to Ivyhill.

The group suspects the road, being magical in nature, was influenced by Talan's empathic, demonic powers and led him right where he wanted to go. Talan thinks the beasts that aided his flight must have been wilded by someone in Mhorghast—a captive human, perhaps. He even thinks it might have been Alastrina. Maybe she sensed the presence of Ianto—a Bask raven—and realized what was happening.

Farrin and Ryder leave to report this to the Order. Tension between them is palpable; Farrin hasn't found the courage to apologize, and Ryder feels guilty for keeping the identity of the shining boy a secret. En route to Rosewarren, they are waylaid by storms. The moonlight road appears, calling to them. They are helpless to resist following it to Mhorghast.

Mhorghast is a vast and eerily lovely city. Buildings of opalescent stone, lights twinkling everywhere, a golden river running through the streets, parties raging in every building, and a sky lit only by the moon. Mhorghast is obviously hidden in the Olden country; as soon as the air touches Farrin, her skin and hair begin to glow with a demigod sheen. To disguise them both, Farrin sings, imbuing the notes with thoughts of disguise and deception. They witness gruesome torment of captive humans by various Olden beings—titans, nymphs, vampyrs.

Ryder is able to wild birds that are clearly not Olden but rather from Edyn. They lead him to an arena where Alastrina is fighting a chimaera for the entertainment of Olden beings. She wins and is escorted to a tent, where she is being kept as a fae's prized fighter.

Farrin uses song to disrupt Mhorghast's influence on Alastrina, allowing her to recognize them. The change in Farrin's song leads to their discovery. They flee Mhorghast with many Oldens in hot pursuit. All seems lost until suddenly a godly figure appears—beautiful and terrible and somehow familiar—and whisk the three of them away to safety. Farrin recognizes their savior as Philippa, her mother, in her natural state: that of the goddess Kerezan.

They arrive at Ivyhill—Farrin, Ryder, a bewildered Alastrina, and Philippa. The reunion of Philippa and Gideon after so many years apart is stormy. The love that still remains between them is obvious to Farrin. But many years have passed, all of them painful, and she doubts they can reconcile. Farrin bristles at Philippa's appearance even as she is grateful for her rescue. She can't trust a woman who would abandon her family, yet she has no choice but to do so.

Alastrina lashes out at everyone, her mind still influenced by Kilraith and the city of Mhorghast itself. Philippa is determined to return to Wardwell and hide herself from Kilraith and his spies. Farrin sees the larger-picture wisdom in this but nevertheless is angry about it; such a departure will echo Philippa's long-ago abandonment.

A letter arrives from Fairhaven; the queen is dying. A distraught Farrin requests Ryder come with her; he immediately agrees. Farrin feels hopeful that they'll be able to reconcile. In Fairhaven, churning storms blacken the skies. Farrin and Ryder discover that Yvaine is fine; the letter was a ruse to ensure Farrin's quick arrival. Yvaine, surrounded by advisers worried about her health and a populace angry that she can't save them, is desperate for the company of real friends.

They retire to the nearby Green House, long ago gifted to the Ashbournes by Yvaine. Farrin is furious with Yvaine for her deception and for wanting distraction from the danger imperiling her country. And yet she pities Yvaine, and fears her deteriorating mental state. Yvaine asks to hear about Ryder and how Farrin loves him. Yvaine confesses that she herself was in love once, though the memories confuse her.

A huge storm attacks the city in the form of a massive bird: Kilraith. Farrin rushes to defend the city and fights Kilraith using her voice. But his power dwarfs her song. Pinned down, Farrin is saved by Ankaret, who attacks Kilraith as a giant firebird. Fire and shadow battle above the city rooftops. Ankaret engulfs Kilraith; they both disappear. In the aftermath, Farrin discovers there have been more abductions. Ryder is gone.

Farrin is devastated, but there's no time to grieve. She returns to Ivyhill and opens it up as a hospital and safe house for any refugees fleeing the attacked capital or the besieged Middlemist. Breaches are increasing; Olden beings are invading. And the Order can only do so much.

A formal invitation arrives from Kilraith, who bids them join him in Mhorghast for a revel. It's most certainly a trap. Alastrina remains extremely unwell. Through her babbling, the group deduces that one of the *ytheliad* curse anchors—the egg—might be hidden in Mhorghast. They'll have to return there, retrieve it, and destroy it. Without also destroying the anchors feeding his power, Kilraith will just keep coming back, no matter what they do to him.

A plan of attack forms. The moonlight road arrives ominously. Kilraith is expecting them. The group—Farrin, Gemma, a healed Talan, and Gideon, plus Mara and her Vilia friend Nessel—leave for Mhorghast while Gallinor's human armies prepare for war.

In Mhorghast, Kilraith forces Farrin (aided by Gideon), Gemma (aided by Talan), and Mara (aided by Nessel) to each navigate a house of horrors based on locations from their past—Talan's house, where Gemma fought Kilraith in *Crown*. An Olden lake, where young Mara was initiated into the Order of the Rose. And Ivyhill, aflame, on the night the Basks set it afire.

In each room of Ivyhill, Farrin encounters a traumatic memory of her past, many of them warped by Kilraith. She sees her teenaged self rejected by Gareth after their attempt at sex. She sees

Ryder, disgusted to see Farrin naked in the stable. Farrin persists, helping her younger self escape the house. Her sisters escape their respective houses as well.

Kilraith and his Olden soldiers battle Farrin and her family and friends—including Ryder, with whom Farrin has a tearful reunion. Farrin uses Ankaret’s feather to summon her, and when Ankaret arrives, she battles the stormbird Kilraith in her own firebird form.

Meanwhile, Farrin finds an old man bound to a throne. Her demigod blood helps her recognize him as an uncle—the god Jaetris, specifically, held captive in a frail human vessel. Kilraith has imprisoned the weak, newly resurrected Jaetris and is using the god’s powers of the mind to enhance his own, keeping Mhorghast’s captive humans in thrall. The egg anchor is inside Jaetris’s body, much as the Three-Eyed Crown was hidden in Talan’s.

In a rush of disjointed images, Jaetris shares with Farrin much knowledge, including memories of Kilraith’s origins. He was created during the Unmaking, when the gods destroyed themselves after creating Edyn as a haven for humans. Kilraith burst forth from the cataclysm of their deaths in the form of a comet and plunged into an ocean in Edyn, where he stewed in the abyss, alone, for years. After finally clawing his way to the surface, he is bent on revenge—against the gods who created and abandoned him, and the humans he deems undeserving of the gods’ favor.

Another creature was created at the same moment. She was named Ankaret, and fell to Edyn as a comet identical to Kilraith’s. But whereas Kilraith fell into fathomless darkness and was trapped there for an age, Ankaret’s landing was softer. She fell into the Bay of the Gods in southeastern Gallinor, and when she emerged she was a young woman with no memory of her origins. This woman took the name Yvaine and became the queen of Edyn.

Farrin is overcome by these revelations. The memories and knowledge are too immense for her part-human mind to bear. She and her sisters begin tearing apart the human body Jaetris is imprisoned in to find the egg and destroy it. Mara uses her strength to hold the man in place while Gemma uses her power of glamours and plants to break through the body Jaetris is bound in and pull the egg free. Meanwhile Farrin uses a multi-faceted song to protect them.

When they free the egg, Ankaret tells Farrin that she can destroy it. Farrin sees both Ankaret’s fiery form and Yvaine’s human one. A devastated Farrin instinctively knows that if Ankaret destroys the egg, it will destroy her too. But they have no choice. Ankaret uses all the ancient power she possesses—the power of all five gods, as Kilraith also possesses—to destroy the egg. And herself. Before she dies, she says to Farrin one last, cryptic sentence: “Come and find me.”

Kilraith, distraught, weeps in Ankaret’s ashes. Through the memories Jaetris gave her, Farrin understands that during their blazing fall to Edyn, Ankaret and Kilraith lived entire lifetimes

together. They have always been at odds—Ankaret, loving humans; Kilraith, despising them—but the love between them has never fully faded.

Mhorghast begins collapsing. The surviving Oldens panic and flee. Farrin and the others—including an unconscious Gareth, whom they rescued from among the captive humans—escape to Edyn before the city vanishes.

After the battle, Farrin, still reeling, explains what she has learned from Jaetris to her family and friends: the gods are all awakening—just as Kerezan did in Philippa—and Kilraith wants to destroy them. Mara is furious that Philippa/Kerezan didn’t come to their aid in Mhorghast, but Farrin, grieving Yvaine’s death, can’t find it in her to be angry anymore. She has held onto that anger for far too long and is finally beginning to accept that she and her sisters can’t depend on their parents, and that they don’t need to. They have each other.

All of this sobers the group. They now not only have to find and destroy the remaining *ytheliad* anchors; they also have to find the remaining gods before Kilraith does. Some of them may not even yet know what they are, just as Philippa didn’t for many years.

At Fairhaven, the late queen’s will is read. She has left care of the royal archives and the Citadel itself to Farrin. Farrin will serve as regent and help the queen’s advisers through the war that is now fully upon them all. Ryder will remain in Fairhaven at her side.

The book ends with the following lines:

War would come, but tonight, in this house that had seen so much sadness, there would be only this: only the two of us and the silk of my bed. Our hands joined, my legs hooked around his as he moved in me, his voice rough and tender around the shape of my name. The violet gold of sunset paid silent tribute to Yvaine as it danced across our skin. We were alive, and we were together. I buried my face in his neck and held on tight, pressing all of myself against him—my body, my heart, every song my power carried. We were alive, and I would cherish every moment of it.

War would come, but not tonight.