

FATED TO DARKNESS TRILOGY

THE
KINGDOM
OF
FLAMES
AND
ASH

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

JEN L. GREY

THE KINGDOM OF FLAMES AND ASH

FATED TO DARKNESS

BOOK 3

JEN L. GREY

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NAME GLOSSARY

Lira (LEE-rah)

Tavish (TAH-vish)

Eiric (AY-rik)

Faelan (FAY-lan)

Finnian (FIN-ee-an)

Caelan (KAY-lan)

Eldrin (EL-drin)

Lorne (LORN)

Moria (MOHR-ee-ah)

Torcall (TOR-kahl)

Finola (fi-NO-lah)

Rona (ROH-nah)

Dougal (DOO-gal)

Malikor (MAL-ih-kor)

Moor (MOOR)

Struan (STROO-an)

Pyralis (pie-RAL-is)

Brenin (BREN-in)

Hestia (HES-tee-ah)

Erdan (ER-dan)

Sylphia (SIL-fee-ah)

GENERAL GLOSSARY

Ardanos (ard-AN-ohss) – Realm Name

Aetherglen (AY-thur-glen) – Unseelie and Seelie joined kingdom

Cuil Dorcha (COOL DOR-kha) - Unseelie Kingdom

Dunscaith (DOON-skah) – Unseelie Castle

Gleann Solas (GLYAN SO-las) – Seelie Kingdom

Caisteal Solais (KASH-tul SO-lash) – Seelie Castle

Aelwen – (A-el-wen) - River in Seelie Kingdom

Tìr na Dràgon (CHEER na DRAY-gon) – Dragon Kingdom

Cù-sìth (koo-shee) – Wolf-like Unseelie creature



TAVISH

Watching the gigantic, crimson-colored dragon flapping past the last of the dilapidated Unseelie village toward the sea at the end of the ruined island, with Lira dangling from his talons, obliterated my heart. She was angled toward us, her long, blonde hair blowing in her face, hiding the cobalt-blue eyes I knew better than my own. The dragon had bound her arms and sparkling sea-green wings so she wouldn't have a chance to escape.

The blasted ashbreath.

Eldrin, my cousin and former father figure, straddled me on the stone ground at the bottom of the Unseelie castle stairs with the tip of his sword pressing into the skin over my heart.

"If you'd just *listened* to me, none of this would have had to happen," he spat, his white eyes almost a faint gray similar to mine, barely contrasting with his pale skin. "You're the reason we've come to this, and it's only proper for you to die knowing that you couldn't keep your *fated mate* safe."

Lira, I'm coming, I connected, using our fated-mate link, determination like I'd never experienced before flashing through me. Eldrin had betrayed me in so many ways. He didn't get the luxury of feeling as if he'd accomplished anything when it came to me.

I was the blasting king of nightmares, frost and darkness, and I refused to lie here like a victim, especially when Lira needed me the most.

With strength that I hadn't been aware I possessed, I bucked my hips, causing Eldrin to fall forward and over my head. The tip of his blade sliced up my chest with a burning sting, but the wound wasn't deep. Ignoring it, I jumped to my feet and stepped on Eldrin's dark wings, pinning him to the ground.

"I never listened to you because you weren't my king. I was yours, and I did what I believed was right," I gritted out. I pushed the sword into Eldrin's back, ready to end his life. I'd wanted to make his death slow and painful, but not at Lira's expense.

I don't need you to come for me; I need you to go after my sister, Lira responded. Her fear and desperation thickened in our bond.

Averting my gaze for a moment, I spotted Eiric about twenty yards away, running with the giant cù-sith, Nightbane, toward me. Her emerald eyes shone with fear, and I didn't understand why she wasn't flying after Lira. *Your sister is fine. I'm staring at her right now. You're my concern.*

"Now you won't be a threat to any of us any longer." I needed to end Eldrin and get to my mate.

"Stop. Wait," Eldrin cried. "I know a way to get Lira out of her agreement with the dragon prince. A way other than killing him, and it's simple. Let me live, and I'll tell you."

I didn't have time for games, but the import of his words couldn't be ignored. Right now, the only option I had was killing Prince Pyralis, and that feat alone would be damn near impossible with our weak and shaky guards, thanks to Eldrin's attempt to dethrone me.

"Watch him, and don't kill him yet," I called to Finnian and Caelan. I hated that, once again, Eldrin had something to hold over me, but I didn't have time to be rational... not with Lira getting farther from me every minute. "I need to go after Lira." My voice broke.

"You aren't going alone." Finnian bent down, his blue wings blocking my view of my cousin, but his fist struck, the hilt of his sword going first. There

was a thud, and then Finnian straightened. “There. Problem solved, though I would’ve preferred to kill the wildling. Now, let’s save Lira from the ashbreath.”

Black blood seeped from the back of Eldrin’s skull, mixing in with his white hair. From the way he didn’t move, it was clear that he was unconscious and would be out for a while.

Caelan fought another Unseelie on the ground because Eldrin had injured one of his wings minutes before. He was fighting against some of the townspeople who were unaware that Eldrin had lost. I shouted, “Eldrin has fallen. The fighting stops now. Caelan, take him inside the prison and watch over him to ensure no one lets him out.” Under normal circumstances, I’d want Caelan to come with us, but he couldn’t fly, and I needed someone I trusted to oversee Eldrin’s capture once again. Last time, he’d managed to escape.

I stood and sheathed my sword as my leathery onyx wings flapped, lifting me from the floor. Lorne had proved his loyalty to Lira once again, flying after the dragon prince alone.

Pyrallis spun around and expelled flames at him, and Lorne screamed in agony and dropped into the water below.

Taking to the sky, Finnian remained at my side. My magic was dangerously low, but I could try to use my nightmare illusion magic on the dragon while Finnian used his frost. His magic wasn’t half as strong as mine, but it would still counteract the flames.

Tavish, be safe, Lira linked, her concern slamming into me. *I wish I could fly to help you.*

My heart squeezed. I hadn’t considered how much agony Lira had to be in with the dragon holding down her injured wings. The fact that I couldn’t feel her pain told me she was trying to protect me from it.

I pumped my wings harder, racing toward Pyralis, who was now at least one hundred yards ahead of us. He flew a little slower, clearly believing that we were preoccupied and wouldn’t give chase. Still, I needed to move quicker

because I wasn't certain I was strong enough to fly a long way with Lira in my arms.

Don't fret. I'll reach you soon. I won't let him get away with this. The dragon had come onto what was now our land and killed some of our own before kidnapping my mate. I wasn't sure how he'd known she was here, but that was a separate problem we would contend with later.

"What's the strategy?" Finnian's pale-blue eyes homed in on me. His ash-blond hair blew back as his forehead lined with worry. "I mean, besides attacking the ashbreath, I'd like more specifics. Though, personally, for me, I'd aim to remove his testicles so he can't produce any heirs, in case—"

"Stop right there." I bit back rage, feeling as if I might burn alive. The mere suggestion of the dragon prince forcing Lira to conceive a child with him made me more bloodthirsty than I'd been in my entire life. No one mistreated my mate... including me. I still had eternity to grovel and make up for what I'd done when I first brought her back here. "Or I will kill you for suggesting it." The only positive thing that came out of him speaking was that I flew faster, even more desperate to reach her.

Finnian flinched. "I didn't mean with her... although she is betrothed to him, so I could understand how it'd be implied."

"She is *mine*." I pounded a hand against my chest, ignoring the warm liquid it landed against. The wound burned, but it wasn't deep. The injury would heal within a day or two, but not my heart if I couldn't get her back. This was worse than when the Seelie had taken her... at least then, she'd been returned to her people and parents. The ashbreath knew about our fated-mate connection, and he still wanted to force the chains of marriage on her.

My chest constricted to the point where it felt as if I couldn't even breathe. All I could focus on was getting Lira back.

Finnian sighed. "I know she's yours. I'm not arguing that fact. I'll make the plan then. I'll distract him while you free her from his grasp."

"Fine." I curled my free hand into a fist, ready to do whatever it took to save her from him.

We were closing in on them, and Lira's eyes met mine, her fear pushing me harder.

I raised my right hand, preparing to cut off his talons to free her as Finnian pushed forward, his wings moving so fast they blurred.

I tugged at the darkness magic that sat heavy in my chest. If I could blanket the dragon in horrible illusions, it would allow both Finnian and me to get closer. However, each time that I yanked, the inky magic flared faintly and fizzled out.

I'd drained myself by arriving here and using my magic to reinforce that I was the true leader and rightful heir to the Unseelie throne. If only I could go back in time and not be so flamboyant.

Prince Pyralis's wings stiffened, and he turned his head, focusing his amber eyes right on me. Smoke trickled from his nostrils as he called his flames.

"Finnian," I warned, but before I could say more, red-hot flames shot toward us.

Finnian lifted his free hand and shot frost from his palm.

The flames cut through the frost as if he hadn't done anything at all.

I gripped Finnian's ankle, dragging him down with me out of the flame's path.

"Blighted abyss!" he grunted but shifted his wings to fly down quickly, keeping pace with me.

The flames followed us, the ashbreath turning so he could chase us with his fire.

Tavish, Lira connected, her terror choking me and adding to my own.

The two of us barreled toward the ocean, and I took a deep breath a half second before I dove under the surface. The water heated as the flames hit it, causing my body to warm even more than it did in the Seelie land. I stalled my wings and kicked my arms and feet to move quicker under the water.

Once we outpaced the flames, I swam in that direction and flew out directly under the beast. Luckily, the ashbreath must have expected us to give up and was already facing Tìr na Dràgon, the dragon kingdom.

I shot upward, trying not to make a noise as Finnian soared out in front of the dragon prince.

A lump formed in my throat. Finnian had said he'd serve as a distraction, which meant that I couldn't take my time. I had to hurry before he got killed.

As quickly as possible, I flew upward, seeing the belly of the dragon extend as he readied to engulf Finnian in flames once again.

I reached toward his talons, coming within touching distance of Lira, whose eyes widened.

Everything will be okay. Trust me, I linked, wanting to reassure her despite my own racing pulse.

Be quick, Lira replied. *Please. I don't want any of you to get hurt.*

Flames were expelled, and I lifted my sword. *Be still. Don't move.* Then I swung, the movement making a *swooshing* noise.

Lira gasped and jerked back as my sword hit the end of one of Pyralis's talons, cutting in about an inch. Red blood squirted from it, hitting me in the face as the ashbreath's fire quit for a moment and he turned his attention toward us. I readied to swing again.

He spun around, and I grabbed Lira's leg, anchoring me to her.

The strangest thing happened.

The buzzing of our fated-mate connection didn't spring to life between us.

That had never occurred before, even when I'd been chained and held prisoner by the Seelie. Something had to be extremely wrong, and before I realized what I was doing, I let go.

The dragon prince twisted and hit me with his tail, propelling me back in the direction of the ruined land. I tried to open my wings, but the pressure of the wind crashed into them, causing a bone-deep ache.

Tavish, no, Lira cried through our bond.

Just as I got traction to head back for her, Pyralis doused Finnian in flames. Finnian dropped like Lorne had, then hit the water and sank.

No. I had to save him, but Lira was being taken. I was torn.

Save Finnian, Lira shouted. Otherwise, he could die. Struan and a few other guards you trust are coming to help you.

My chest tightened, and the dragon prince flew quicker now, getting away.

I'd failed Lira.

Again.

But at least I could rescue Finnian before he died. Then I'd regroup with the guards who were loyal to me and bring my mate back home.

I was able to catch air and rush back to the spot where Finnian went under. My wings ached, but I managed to reach the site just as four others caught up.

Inhaling deeply, I dove back in, searching for Finnian. The water was clear and easy to see through, but Finnian was nowhere in sight.

I turned toward the shoreline, hoping he was swimming back that way, but all I saw were fish swimming in the opposite direction, trying to get away from me.

And then I looked down and spotted Finnian halfway to the bottom.

My lungs were already aching, but I didn't have time to resurface for a quick breath. Not with him being submerged as long as he'd been. I pushed myself to swim faster.

Pressure built in my ears, and my lungs screamed, but I finally reached him. His face was charred along with his clothes, which were blackened and stuck as if molded to his skin. There wasn't a healed place for me to touch, so I wrapped an arm around his waist and kicked my feet and wings upward.

Thankfully, more guards were already swimming toward me.

Struan took one side of Finnian while one of the female guards took the other, and I relinquished my hold, needing to get above water. They'd be able to bring Finnian to the surface quicker than I could. And I needed to ensure the fighting had stopped so we could get Finnian to his bedchamber as quickly as possible.

Please tell me you're okay, Lira asked, her worry flowing into mine.

You're gone, I answered. *Of course I'm not okay*. I freed myself from the water and darted back to the ruined land. I wasn't sure what I'd see, given my people were fighting one another. My wings ached, my heart hurt, and fury still thrummed inside me from losing Lira.

Thorn, I haven't gone anywhere.

Communicating through our fated-mate connection wasn't the same as having Lira in my arms and at my side. However, I didn't want to burden her further. And I refused to let him keep her for long.

If Eldrin had a way to free her before it was too late, then I'd allow him to breathe.

I made it back to the kingdom to find the fighting had stopped. Dead bodies lay everywhere, but Caelan had managed to remove Eldrin from the street.

I had to speak to the people and make them see, once and for all, that I was their king. Then throw everyone who'd risen against me into prison, though I didn't relish the thought. Still, it had to be done because they'd proven their allegiance to Eldrin.

Which meant there were fewer people to help me fight the dragons to get Lira back.

Eiric and Nightbane stood with Isla by the double doors of the castle. My heart grew heavy, knowing Eiric would blame me for Lira's capture and be desperate to get her back.

Eiric's dark-brown curls blew in the breeze as she placed a hand on her chest. "Tavish," she said brokenly.

I landed before her, ready to appease her and ask for her help, when she ran forward and buried herself in my arms.

My body buzzed against hers, causing me to step back in surprise. Even though the contact felt right, she wasn't the woman I loved.

What the blast had Eldrin done?

LIRA

When Tavish wrinkled his nose in disgust and his forehead lined with confusion, my heart shattered. His eyes darkened to slate, the very shade I'd seen in my nightmares during my time on Earth.

He held out both hands so I couldn't step closer and rasped, "What the blast?" His dark hair dripped past the bottom of his ears, contrasting with his pale skin.

Nightbane growled, coming to my side. The cù-sìth resembled a wolf but was the size of a horse. The green-tinged tips of his dark fur rose, and he was clearly ready to intervene.

I threaded my fingers through his fur, wanting to calm him as my bottom lip trembled after Tavish's rejection.

Watching Eiric be abducted by Prince Pyralis, Tavish trying so desperately to save her, and Finnian, Lorne, and him getting injured by the ashbreath had been awful. The only reprieve had been Tavish returning, but it had resulted in *this*, the most agonizing torment I'd ever experienced in my life.

"Your Majesty, what's bothering you?" Isla asked from her spot next to me in front of the dark Unseelie castle. Her crystal-blue eyes glanced from

me to him. Her light-blue hair appeared gray in the darkness. “You triumphed over Eldrin.”

I placed a hand on my chest, trying to steady the pain flaring inside. I wanted to figure out what was going on with Tavish but didn’t want the girl to feel ignored. “Sometimes, winning doesn’t actually feel like a victory. Sometimes, important things get taken from us that make it still feel like losing.”

“Oh, Lira. Right.” She winced. “I forgot about their connection.”

I had no clue what she was talking about, but I needed to focus on Tavish, whose face had twisted into despair. “Did I do something wrong?”

Maybe he was angry with me for pressuring him so much to save Eiric. One of his best friends and solid guards had gotten severely injured because of my request.

“No, but Eldrin must have done something to me.” He frowned, scanning me. “If this is what he meant about not needing to kill the dragon prince, I’ll slit his throat and enjoy watching him bleed out.”

“What?” My brain felt foggy, and intense pain from my injuries made my wings ache. “What did Eldrin say and do?” I took a step toward him but paused, unable to handle his rejection once again.

“You don’t feel the connection between us? Maybe it’s an illusion he somehow pushed onto me, and I need to find the magic to release its hold.” His terror and anger intensified.

“Tavish, did you hit your head or something?” A chill ran down my spine. Something was truly wrong. I squinted and looked him over, searching for some kind of injury. “We’ve had this connection since you took me from Earth.”

His eyes widened. “I didn’t bring you here. I brought Lira.”

But I am Lira. I looked downward, noting my tan complexion, which was several shades lighter than my sister’s. I didn’t understand what was going on until realization washed over me and relief flooded through our bond. I faced Isla again, remembering her strange comment from moments ago. “Who am I?”