

Chapter 1

Tuesday 2025

Not a good Tuesday, not just because I was late, no, we got the math work back. I still had a little hope, but that quickly shattered like a glass falling to the ground. A five, one point away from a six!! When I get home, a five is no longer an easy five - she's a disgrace. She'll scream! Screams from my stepmother that make me drown again and make me small.

To hear her say that I'm a disappointment, a disgrace, that she should never have let me into her life, because all I can do is steal her hope for a better life, bury her and let her rot underground.

These thoughts never let me go, they haunt me, circling in my head in turbo gear all day - until it comes, the bell at the end of school that heralds my doom.

Now I'm standing here in front of our house.

The mahogany door is firmly closed, the golden latch gleaming before me in the sun. Do I want to go in? No, I'd love to turn around, but I can't do that to my dad. Even if I don't have anything left in the world, I still have him.

A bad grade at home is like a storm breaking over me, a war where everyone is against me, and I will have to face that war. That's how I give myself courage.

Even when I go to the ground, I stand up and I win my first battle - the battle against my fear.

These are my last words to myself before I turn the key in the lock and the door creaks so loudly that the whole house shakes.

Shoes on and off into my personal nightmare, because I could hear her throwing the bowls out of the cupboard in the kitchen. She had heard me.

"Disgusting, how can you just concede the cupboards like that, Isabel?" she screams so loudly that she can still be seen three houses away.

„And what about the math work? Written so sloppy again?" she hissed at me. Meanwhile, I stood motionless in the kitchen door, watching her bang all the bowls out of the cupboard on the floor with full force. They bounced off, if they weren't made of plastic, they would have smashed to the ground.

But now, annoyed, she snatched the backpack from my shoulders and scrambled it for my math work.

"Oh, and what's that?" she asked. In her hand was my crumpled work, squeezed into a small scrap of paper. I almost hoped she'd think it was rubbish.

'A five?' she grabbed me by the hair - she grabbed me so tight I thought she was pulling the hair off my head. I was pushed up the stairs. 'Useless blag, what an embarrassment! You can't do anything - how hard can eighth grade be?'

She stopped at my door, her hand still firmly in my hair, pushed me in and I fell to the ground.

The last I heard of her was slamming the door, locking it and running away cursing. Then came the flood!

A flood of warm tears, running down my cheeks and finally dripping from my chin. Breathing in and out, in and out...

I need to calm down, keep a clear head, dry my tears.

My sea calms down. I close my eyes and all is still. I know now: I have to get out of here!

Chapter 2

The smell of old books is in the air.

My fingertips glide over the leather covers of the books on the shelf. Others hate it, but for me it's wonderful, soothing and pleasant - the silence. This big room seems so quiet, so quiet that you can hear your heartbeat and your own breathing.

That's why I love the library, because it's the only place where no one screams, where no one looks at me with contempt, the only place where nobody finds me.

The feeling of the old pages in my hand, the paper so old that it almost rips!

I'm sure I've read at least half of the books, but it never gets boring, it's like I'm having a new adventure every day, like I'm breaking out of my everyday life to fight dragons, cross the ocean or find the big love.

So today I stroll through the corridors of my shelter, looking for a new adventure, a new world to dive into.

Suddenly it catches my eye, a book bound in red leather with a coat of arms on the back. It must be new, because I'd never seen this book before, it was almost mystical, how it stood there so isolated. I'm supposed to discover it!

Everyone in me agrees, I need to read this book!

In my hand it feels so noble, expensive yet so modest, so simple yet so special. I open the book and the first sentence grabs me: "How could you cheat on me like that?"

Which author wrote this book, what adventure is for me to discover here?

I can't help but feel even more strongly dressed I keep scrolling through the pages, they feel really old, fragile, like they turn to dust in my hand if I make even one wrong move.

Then I notice - a page is missing, it's heartbreaking that such a beautiful book has been so desecrated.

The only thing visible on the torn out side is a single note of music that I can't take my eyes off of, but the longer I look at it, the more my head spins.

I want to close the book, but I can't, somehow it pulls me under its spell. My body is frozen, frozen, I can't put this particular book out of my hands.

How paralyzed I see my body sitting there, my breath faltering, the light begins to flicker, the shelves blur like a waterfall and suddenly, suddenly everything is black.

Chapter 3

Madam?

„Madame, are you all right?“

I felt a hand on my shoulder, my eyes still firmly closed.

„Madam?“

With a jolt, I sat down, my head drooping, and a man in some sort of disguise stood in front of me. He had dark hair and a big nose. His beard was groomed and reached just above his chin, and his voice was pleasant, deep but melodic.

„Where am I?“

I was still quite dazed, but even so I knew that I was no longer in the library, for there I would neither hear the chirping of the birds nor feel the warming rays of the sun on my face.

The shelves of my beloved books were gone, and in their place stood trees with their crowns far above, almost in the white clouds that adorned the sky.

But it was clearly a beautiful, unique sight, just as I had imagined it in my daydream stories, very different from the vistas in my small, bleak town. It had something fairytale.

The man came a little closer, and his eyes widened as if a flash of spirit had hit him.

'You're not a witch, are you?! Oh, please forgive me my insolence, I kneel before you, but please let your curses off me, oh please great witch!'

My God, what happened to the man? Witch he called me, my God, where was I, I just landed?

Where - when I looked at him more closely, his clothes were really strange, he wore a kind of hood that completely covered his head and neck, it looked a bit like the hood of a sweater, but also quite different. Also his shirt, it had brown leather buttons and was egg-shell-coloured, his trousers were made of a fabric like linen. It was very strange and reminded me - but it couldn't be - of a medieval festival on the banks of the Rhine.

These thoughts made me nervous and insecure, almost anxious. Clearly, I didn't even know where I was, this man who had approached me was my only hope for answers to my insecurities.

'Excuse me, but do you know where I am? I think I'm lost. But I'm not a 'witch' at all!' With my energetic sentences, my head slowly stopped spinning like crazy and everything became a little clearer.

The man in front of me had a slight stature, a large nose that was curved, his black hair slightly peeking out of his headgear, and he stared at me with his deep brown eyes. 'Where will they go? Where will their glorious path take them?'

I understood his language, but it was foreign to me!

I asked back, "Am I not in Emmerich?"

For all the love, it couldn't have been Emmerich. The trees too high, no house far and wide, even in the little patch of forest that I often go to, you see the houses and hear the street noise, the people complaining, so if that was Emmerich, then I'm really a magician. "Where are you from, where is your family?" he asked, didn't wait for my answer and kept talking. But I was too confused to listen. You could see that in my face.

"Madame, are you listening to me?" he asked. The man's voice seemed to mix with the wind whipping through the treetops. My breath quickened again, my head felt as if it was wrapped in cotton wool. What was going on?

To calm down, I forced myself to look into the eyes of the man who was visibly worried – or was it some strange fear that was rising in him?

"I really don't know where I am," I stammered, as I stood up. My hands reached for the rough bark of the tree. The world around me was so different, so alive. Even the air seemed full of energy, as if whispering stories.

The man nodded slowly, his forehead in deep folds. "Your condition worries me, Maid," he said. Maybe you were cursed, or you cast a spell that went wrong? He took a step back, now I could see his fear that my touch might enchant him, too.

'I'm not cursed, I'm not a magician. I'm not from here,' he said.

The man - Gerald, as I now knew - shrugged and turned around. "I'm coming, Mother!" he called back, before turning back to me.

'Listen, maid. If you don't know where to go, come with me to the village. It's not safe to wander around in the woods. Maybe there's someone there who can help you.' I hesitated. Everything in me was crying out to trust this stranger, because I had no other choice. At the same time, I knew this world was so foreign that every step would lead to even more unfamiliar territory.

"Good," I said finally, my heart still beating wildly in my chest. "I'm coming."

Gerald seemed relieved, but his gaze remained alert. Together we began to walk the narrow path through the forest, the birds singing and the rustling of the leaves being our only companions.

„What is this special book you were talking about?“ he asked as we approached the edge of the forest.

'It was red, with a coat of arms on the back,' I replied. 'It felt old, very old and very valuable. Unfortunately, it had an almost missing page. Only one line of note was visible on a small scrap of paper.'

Gerald stopped abruptly. His face turned serious, almost frightening. A crest, you say? And a missing page? Maid, I hope you didn't hold something in your hands that should be better kept hidden.'

„What do you think?“ I asked, with goosebumps running down my arms.

But before Gerald could answer, the clearing opened in front of us, and the sight of the village of Embrica decora in front of us took my breath away.

The place before us lay on a cracking river, surrounded by a gentle mist. The houses seemed to be from another time - their roofs made of straw, the walls of irregular stone. Smoke rose from the chimneys, mingled with the fresh forest air, giving the place a homely yet mysterious atmosphere.

Undaunted, Gerald led me further into the village on a narrow path, but his steps became more hesitant the closer we got. The residents of Embrica decora who met us paused and surveyed me with undisguised curiosity. A girl with a basket full of apples dropped her load, her eyes widened when she saw me.

„Gerald,“ she whispered hastily, “who is that?“

'Did you get them out of the woods? Don't you know strangers can bring bad luck?'

'Be quiet, Marta,' Gerald replied, waving away, but his voice was tense, as if he didn't want to draw too much attention to me. 'She's just lost. I'll take her to Master Humbert, he'll know what to do.'

"Master Humbert?" I repeated quietly. Gerald nodded as we took the bumpy path through the village.

'He's the sage of the village, a scholar. If anyone can help you, it's him.'

The eyes of the people stuck with me, even as we got deeper into the village. The air felt heavier, full of unspoken questions and subliminal hostility. Gerald led me to a small house on the edge of the town. It was built of dark wood, and on the door hung bundles of dried herbs, rustling quietly in the wind.

„Wait here,“ Gerald said before knocking on the door.

A moment passed, then the door opened a gap wide. An elderly man with snow-white hair and a long, furrowed face stared at us, his eyes, clear as blue glass, piercing but not unfriendly.

„Gerald, what do you want?“ he asked in a calm but determined voice.

"Master Humbert, this young lady ... she was found in the woods," he said. She speaks of a book with a coat of arms and a missing page. I thought maybe..." Gerald let the phrase hang in the air, but Humbert's expression changed noticeably.

"A book, you say?" he said. His eyes narrowed and he stepped aside to let us in. "Come in," he said.

The interior of his house was full of shelves reaching to the ceiling, laden with books, bottles and strange objects. The smell of old paper and dried herbs filled the air.

"Sit down," he said briefly, pointing to a chair in front of a narrow table. Gerald stood still, like a guard at the door.

„What do you know about this book?" asked Humbert as he translated across from me.

I swallowed and said, "Not much. I found it in a library. It was... strange and magical at the same time. Old, with a red cover and a coat of arms on the back. When I opened it, one page was missing, and only a snippet of music was on the left. After..." I hesitated, searching for words.

Humbert leaned back, his fingers pounding on the tabletop. "A book with a coat of arms and a missing page," he murmured, as if weighing the words. "That sounds like "The Book of Lost Voices.""

„The Book of Lost Voices?" I repeated.

"It's more legend than truth," he said slowly, "but they say this book is a key. It opens doors at other times - but every door has its price."

„What price?" I whispered, my heart pounding in my chest.

Humbert looked at me for a long time, as if to make sure I was ready to hear the answer. "It depends on what you put through the gate," he said, "or what you left behind."

I felt the blood froze in my veins. And how do I find out what the book wants from me?

Humbert smiled weakly, but it was a smile without warmth. The book found you, not the other way around. You will find out whether you want to or not. But I can tell you one thing: As long as the missing page is not found, the gate remains open - and you remain in danger.

The words of Master Humbert weighed heavily on me. A book that opens doors at other times - and a price I had to pay? It felt like the ground was shifting beneath my feet, but Gerald and Humbert didn't seem very surprised. Maybe this was a time when such things were normal.

"Thank you, Master Humbert," I said finally. "But ... how do I find this missing page?"

Humbert rose slowly and reached for an old book adorned with symbols on his shelf. "The Song of the Lost Voices," he murmured as he opened it. It's part of the legend. It is said that the missing page contains the first verse of the old song, which shows the way to its source."

„His source?" he asked.

Humbert nodded. A river, a passage, a place where times meet. But beware: the song attracts not only those who seek, but also those who seek to hinder you.

The words were barely spoken as an eerie feeling ran through me, like an invisible hand touching my neck. I felt this was just the beginning.

Chapter 4

The next day, Gerald led me into the center of the town. A market had been set up, and the air was filled with voices and the scent of spices, fried meat and fresh bread. But amid all the hustle and bustle, something special stood out to me - a melody.

It was a delicate melody played on a lute, and yet it was powerful enough to push everything else into the background. The voice that sang to it was clear as a mountain spring, and its words seemed to speak directly into my soul:

"Listen, how the voices whisper softly, a song that never forgot time. A river that leads on an eternal journey, into the sea that holds every truth."

I froze. It was as if every word echoed in me, like an echo calling me. Without knowing what I was doing, I followed the melody that echoed through the alleys as if by magic. The world around me was still audible, but faded, and I found myself on the banks of a river. Was it the wide river that I had already seen when I arrived in Embrica decora?

I watched everything closely. The water glittered in the sunlight, but it wasn't the usual kind of glitter. It was alive, as if the light were dancing, and the river was moving to the beat of the song.

On the shore lay an old ship, a kogge - a term I knew from one of the books in the library - whose massive wooden hull was decorated with ornate carvings. The three tall masts carried white, slightly worn sails that fluttered in the wind, and the figure on the bow represented a proud grip, guarding the waves.

I felt my feet drift as if by themselves, closer and closer to the ship that lay majestically in front of me. The melody was muted, but an echo still seemed to hang in the air. At the jetty leaned a boy, barely older than me, with tousled brown hair and a jacket that seemed too big for him. He looked up when he noticed me, and a curious smile spread across his face.

"You're here for the melody, aren't you?" he asked, without waiting for an answer. His voice sounded warm and inviting, with a slight accent I couldn't identify. "That was my sister," he said. She practices on the shore a lot. But she seems to have brought you here.

I nodded hesitantly. It was as if the melody had called out to me ... and then I ... suddenly found all this.

He laughed softly and pointed to the ship. 'It's a ship. It belongs to my father. It's a merchant ship that sometimes carries more stories than goods.'

„Where is she going?" I asked, still in a trance of the beauty of the ship and the river, not knowing exactly why I wanted to know.

"To Harderwijk on the Zuiderzee," he said with a touch of pride. "We'll leave in an hour," my father could use someone like you - you seem to be looking for adventure.

I looked at him in surprise and a spark of excitement began to glow in me. Maybe it was just what I had been looking for: an escape, a fresh start, a journey into the unknown.

"Adrian," he introduced himself, stretched out his hand and smiled. "And who are you?" he asked.

„Isabell," I said at last, my voice low but firm enough to be heard.

Adrian nodded contentedly. 'Well, Isabell, if you're brave enough to sail with us, you're welcome. My dad likes to have new faces on board, as long as they're not afraid of work.'

I hesitated for a moment, but then I realized that nothing kept me here, not at that time, or any other time. Gerald, who had led me out of the woods, Humbert, who had introduced me to the mystery of the book - they would understand me. Maybe they already knew more than I did. But deep inside I felt the clarity that this was the beginning of something bigger.

An hour later, I was standing on the deck of the Kraweel. The wind was blowing through my hair, and I could smell the salty scent of the river, mixed with the now familiar smell of wood and rope. Adrian showed me the main areas of the ship, while the crew was busy setting sail.

"Harderwijk is a commercial port," he explained as he tied a rope. Many ships dock there, some stay for days, others disappear as soon as they arrive.

There are also secrets hidden between the trade stories."

„Secrets?" I asked curiously.

Adrian grinned. "Yes, but I won't tell you that until you've sniffed a bit of sailor air," he said.

The ship slowly began to move, and I felt the world around me changing. The air grew cooler, the sun disappearing behind a thick cloud cover. I knew something big was waiting for me - something beyond my imagination.

And although I felt fear, curiosity and excitement at the same time, I knew one thing for sure: there was no going back – and I didn't want to go back either!

Chapter 5

At dawn, we approached an unknown shore. The coast of Harderwijk slowly appeared on the horizon, at first as a hazy shadow falling from the sky. The city was a tangle of nested roofs, tall towers and narrow alleys that looked like a living work of art from the sea. But the closer we got, the more I realized that something was wrong.

The harbor was strangely still, and an ominous tension was in the air.

Adrian jumped off the board first and helped me down the plank. "Here we are," he said, looking around. His face was suddenly so serious, and I sensed that he too was tense, noticing my tension.

Suddenly there was a scream. "Fire! Fire!" People around us froze for a moment before panicking. Dark smoke rose into the sky, and orange flames suddenly lit up the night like an ominous light.

"The inn! It's on fire!" someone shouted. Without hesitation, Adrian ran. "Stay here!" he shouted over my shoulder, but I couldn't help but follow him.

The fire had already spread even further, eating its way through the old buildings. Adrian threw himself into the chaos, helping carry buckets and rescue people from the flames. His

face was covered in soot, his movements determined. I wanted to help, too, but could only watch helplessly as he ventured further and further into the danger zone.

Then he paused. Through all the loud commotion - the screams, the blazing of the flames and the crackling of collapsing beams - there was a tender melody - both familiar and foreign at the same time. It was the voice of a child singing in the face of imminent danger:

"Time passes in the sea of flames, where shadows silently guard the dream. A fire burns, breaks through suffering, to a world that carries hope."

The words penetrated through the flames and reached us like a desperate cry. Adrian shot off without hesitation, and I followed close at his heels.

Then I saw him pause. Through the smoke he recognized a small child crouching in a corner and coughing violently. Without hesitation, Adrian rushed to him, took the child in his arms and brought him out of the flames. But when he reached the safe ground, he noticed something unspeakable.

The child stared at him with large, glassy eyes, and a hint of smiles raced across his face as tears ran down his soot-smeared cheeks. Adrian knelt down, the child trembling in his arms.

"You're safe now," he said softly, but the child's cough grew weaker. It opened its mouth to say something, but only a raucous whisper came out. Finally, it raised a small, trembling hand and handed Adrian a torn piece of paper. "Please... preserve it," the child gasped.

Adrian clutched the child tighter as his heart seemed to break into a thousand pieces. "No, no, stay with me," he pleaded, but the child's eyes slowly closed, his breath faltered, and his little body went limp.

A desperate scream gripped Adrian's throat. He sank to his knees, the lifeless child still in his arms. The world around us seemed to fade, and for a moment there was only the unbearable pain of loss. But just as Adrian was about to gather himself, a burning roof beam collapsed above him. I screamed, but I couldn't reach him in time. The beam hit him, knocking him to the ground.

I ran to him, pulled him out of the danger zone with all my strength and dragged him back to the harbour. He was unconscious, his breathing shallow, but he was alive. On the ship, I tended to his wounds as best I could, and stayed by his side all night.

As the morning wore on, Adrian finally opened his eyes. His voice was hoarse as he said, "Where am I?"

„You're safe," I answered quietly.

He slowly sat up, his gaze drifting across the deck of the ship before falling on his hand. Only now did I notice that he was still holding the burnt sheet of paper.

„What's that?" he asked, carefully taking it out of his fingers.

When I took it off the page, something fell out. It was a small, worn-out coin that fell on the wooden deck with a faint twinkle. Its surface was dark, but when the first sunlight touched it, a golden sparkle shone through the patina. I held it closer to my face to see the details. It had been elaborately embossed, with a coat of arms on one side and circular lettering on the edge.

'That's no ordinary coin,' I said, handing it to Adrian. 'Look at that.'

Adrian picked up the coin and examined it carefully. He turned it in his fingers until he could decipher the inscription. "Lubeck..." he muttered thoughtfully.

A faint trembling ran through my body. 'It's a long way from here. What could a coin like this have to do with the fire in Harderwijk?'

Adrian frowned. "Lübeck is one of the most powerful cities in the Hanseatic League," he said. Such coins could have been minted for commercial purposes or as a sign of alliance. But why should they be hidden in a burnt sheet of paper?

Isabell looked at the piece of paper she had taken from Adrian's hand. The burnt edges crumbled slightly, and the soot left dark spots on her fingers. But when she held it against the light, she noticed that beneath the ash and the burns was something hidden - fine writing that had miraculously withstood the flames.

With careful movements, she brushed off the remains of the burnt surface. Underneath, words emerged to a melody written in a delicate, almost calligraphic handwriting:

"Time passes in the sea of flames, where shadows silently guard the dream. A fire burns, breaks through suffering, to a world that carries hope."

The words seemed to gain new meaning with every syllable. Adrian looked at me, his eyes full of determination. "We have found another verse of the song, the strange melody," he said quietly.

I nodded, also convinced. The journey had taken more toll on us than I had ever anticipated. But deep down I knew we were far from finished.

Chapter 6

The next morning, after the last plumes of smoke from the fire had faded and the port city was slowly recovering, Adrian's father appeared on the scene. His face was serious, the worries clearly in his features.

"Adrian," he began in a heavy voice, "we have taken on an order. A merchant ship from Lübeck, which is no longer seaworthy, has commissioned us to transport wheat. The cargo is valuable, we will earn good money from it, so we must leave quickly.""

Adrian nodded, but the wounds, fatigue and exertion of the last night still seemed to be in his bones. His father put a hand on his shoulder. 'You don't look well, son. You're exhausted and could get sick. It's better if you and Isabell stay here in Harderwijk. Your aunt will take care of you.'

Adrian wanted to protest, but his father wouldn't allow it. 'That's my last word on it. Rest and I promise you, I'll be back soon.'

But Adrian couldn't come to terms with his father's decision. That same evening, as the Kraweel's crew was busy making final preparations, he secretly pulled Isabell aside.

'I can't stay here,' he whispered. 'My father needs me, and I want to know what happened to this coin and Lubeck.'

Isabelle hesitated. "What if we get caught?" she asked.

'We'll accept the punishment. But I can't just sit idly by.

Eventually, she was overcome by his determination. Together, they sneaked into the crowbar, climbed aboard quietly and hid in the lower deck among the sacks of wheat.

The first few days at sea were calm. Adrian and Isabell only dared to come out of their hiding place at night to steal some water and bread. They kept themselves hidden, so that the crew and even Adrian's father knew nothing of their presence.

But one night, as the sea lay still under the moonlight, they were woken by a sudden noise. Screams echoed through the ship, the thunder of cannons, followed by the deafening splinter of wood.

„Pirates,” Adrian whispered in a trembling voice.

He and Isabell carefully crawled to a small hatch. Through the hatch, they could see the chaos on the deck. Men with drawn swords and pistols stormed the hatch, overwhelming the crew and capturing Adrian's father and the crew.

„We have to do something!” Isabell whispered, but Adrian held her back.

„If we're discovered now, we're done. We'll have to wait.”

Days passed as the pirates headed for Lubeck. When they reached port, the men immediately began unloading the wheat. Adrian and Isabell knew this was their only chance. They crawled deep into the sacks of wheat, held their breath and carried the sacks off the ship.

Barely having solid ground under their feet, they took advantage of an unobserved moment and slipped between the warehouses. Breathless they ran through the narrow alleys until they finally reached the great hall of the Association of North German Merchants.

'Help!' shouted Adrian out of breath. 'Pirates have attacked our ship! They're holding our crew captive!'

The merchants, outraged at the brazen heist, did not hesitate for a second. Armed men gathered, while messengers ran through the city to call for support. A short time later, a large, determined force stormed the port area.

The attack was fierce. Bullets flew, swords crossed and screams echoed through the night. Many pirates were captured, others crushed in the bloody fighting. Eventually, the Krawell's crew was freed, and Adrian ran through the chaos toward his father. For the first time since his father's order to stay in Hardewijk, they faced off again.

"Dad!" Adrian's voice trembled with relief.

His father turned to him, an exhausted but proud smile on his lips. "Adrian, you have ..."

Then - A sudden, relentless bang broke the tense silence. A powerful shot.

Adrian saw the smile on his father's face fade. For a moment, it seemed as if time had stood still. Then his father slowly slumped into himself.

No! NO!"" Adrian's cry echoed through the night as he rushed forward, clutching his father in his arms. Blood stained the captain's shirt. His breath was rushing, his gaze searching Adrian's eyes.

'Stay with me! Please, Father! We made it - you're free, you're free,' Adrian's voice broke as his father brushed his cheek with trembling fingers.

"My son..." His voice was little more than a whisper. "I'm so proud of you..."

Then he took his last breath.

"Father?" Adrian's voice was a whisper, then a desperate cry. "Father!"

But there was no response!

An irrepressible pain pierced young Adrian, making him gasp for air as if he had been wounded himself. Tears burned in his eyes, he could not hold them back. With trembling fingers, he pressed his father's blood-smeared hand to his lips.

Behind him rose a cry of anger. One of the merchants had spotted the hidden pirate - a gaunt man with a pistol, still smoking from the fatal shot. Before he could pull the trigger again, the merchants lunged at him.

But for Adrian, everything was blurry. The world around him blurred into a dull noise. The revenge, the victory - all that meant nothing.

It was too late.

His father was gone.

Chapter 7

Isabell lay awake. The silence of the night was deceptive, a storm raging in her head. The images of the battle, the screams of the wounded, Adrian's broken voice as his father died in his arms - all this did not let her go.

It's my fault!

The truth hit her like a blow. Without her, Adrian wouldn't have gone back to the battlefield. Without her there would have been no pirate attack. Without them, his father would still be alive.

Thoughts raced through her head: If I had never found this book...

Was it a coincidence that the pirates found us? Or did the book attract them?

A shudder ran down her back.

I'm the cause of all this. I'm bringing misery on the people around me. I can't stay.

The decision was made in a single moment.

Without hesitation, she sat up, pushed the blanket aside. Her hands trembled, but she ignored it. She had to go. Away from Adrian, away from the crew, away from everything. Even if she didn't solve her own mysteries like this!

Quietly, almost silently, she snuck out of the cabin. Her footsteps echoed dully on the damp planks. A cold wind blew towards her as she entered the deck, but the cold inside was far worse.

At the edge of the ship, she stopped. The water below her was black as ink, the waves beating gently against the hull. For a moment, she closed her eyes.

I have to do it.

One last look back.

Forgive me, Adrian.

With a deep breath, she grabbed a rope and began to lower herself. The ropes cut into her fingers, but she ignored the pain. Soon they would be looking for her. Soon Adrian would wake up and realize that she was gone.

But she would not stay.

Not as long as her shadow brought death and suffering to those to whom she felt connected.

Chapter 8

Isabell was walking lost through the streets of the Hanseatic city of Lübeck at night, not even noticing where her feet were taking her until she suddenly stopped. Above her in the sky shone a single, bright star. He sparkled as if he were showing her the way. Her heart beat faster. Was it just imagination? Or should it follow this sign?

As if in a trance, she continued on her way. The cobblestones shone in the faint light, as if the star were casting its radiance upon them. Finally she reached St. Mary's Church, the church of the merchants. Why did she know this? In front of the venerable building stood a large statue – a representation of Mary herself, softly illuminated by the starlight.

Exhausted, Isabell sank to her knees, put both hands on the cold floor.

Why am I here? Why did it have to come to this?

Her fingers trembled when she touched the cool stone pavement. Suddenly, a soft rumble swept through the earth. Directly in front of her, a hidden staircase opened with a deep crunch that led into the darkness. Their search didn't seem to be over yet!

Isabelle froze. Her eyes followed her down the stairs, but nothing but blackness lay beneath her. Her breath was quick, and she wanted to get up, but at that very moment the coin slipped out of her pocket, clattered onto the stone steps, rolled slowly, then faster - and disappeared into the depths.

A shudder ran down her back. There was no other way - she had to follow the coin.

Carefully, she set one foot on the first step, then the second. Each step creaked as if the church were warning its intruder. The darkness slowly swallowed her as she descended further.

When she got down, she scanned the floor for the coin - but it was gone. Instead, she found only cold, dirt and damp rocks. Disappointment set in.

Exhausted, she slumped to the ground. Her strength left her, and for the first time in a long time, she couldn't hold back her tears.

At that moment, when all hope seemed to fade, the melody sounded.

The sounds came from far away, echoing through the darkness. Isabell held her breath, the melody strangely familiar to her.

Her heart ached painfully.

That melody ... that sounded like warm comfort, the scent of lavender, the gentle hands stroking her hair.

A choked sobbed from her throat. This melody had drawn her to these strange places and suddenly reminded her of her childhood, of her mother.

She saw her mother in front of her, the soft smile on her lips, the tired but loving eyes.

The arms they held, the heartbeat that calmed them.

The only time she ever felt safe.

She made it so clear - I want to go back.

I want to feel that feeling again.

But then from one moment to the next – darkness.

An abyss, a feeling of loss, a fact that wrapped itself around her heart like icy fingers.

But there's no turning back. Mother is gone. I'm alone.

Isabell gasped. And something like courage returned.

No. She couldn't stay here, she couldn't die here.

My mother wouldn't have wanted that. She always said I should be strong.

This new courage overwhelmed her. With trembling legs, she rose and strode forward, magically drawn to where the music was coming from. But before she could take another step, she tripped and fell hard to the ground.

Pain crept through her right hand. She gritted her teeth, tried to move them - and suddenly felt something under her fingers. It was small, round and cold. There she was!

The coin.

The Lübecker coin?

She closed her fingers, pressed them against her chest. Then she took a deep breath, lifted her head - and carried on.

The melody got louder.

Something was waiting for her.

Something she should have found long ago.

Isabell stepped carefully into a round room. The faint light of the star that fell through the barred window was the only source of light, plunging the room into a ghostly shimmer. The dust in the air danced in the silver rays as her heart beat faster.

In the middle of the hall stood a pedestal of dark stone, smooth and worn by time. On it rested a casket - old, strange and mysterious.

The melody she had magically drawn time and time again on her long journey came from this casket.

The tones were now so soft that they could hardly be heard, yet they echoed deep in her soul. Suddenly it was clear to Isabell: it was her mother's familiar song, so clear and yet like an echo from a distant past.

Isabelle swallowed hard.

Slowly, she approached the casket, her gaze gliding over the unknown symbols carved into the dark wood. She didn't understand their meaning, but she sensed they were telling a story - a story long forgotten.

Where normally a castle should be, there was a round depression.

A coin print.

Isabell's gaze wandered to her hand, in which she still held the Lübeck coin tightly.

Was that the key?

A shudder ran down her back.

Should I do it?

She hesitated.

What if something opened up that should have stayed closed?

But the melody did not let her go.

Her heart pounded hard as she took a deep breath. Then she lifted the coin and carefully placed it in the recess.

For a moment, nothing happened.

Then – a quiet click.

The air seemed to stand still for a moment.

Then the casket began to shake.

The symbols on her surface began to glow dimly, as if an ancient mechanism had been set in motion. Isabel stumbled a step back, her breathing quick.

With a last, gentle sound, the lid popped open.

The melody fell silent.

An eerie silence spread.

Isabell approached cautiously and looked inside the casket.

There it was, a book.

Isabelle's heart pounded. She knew this book well. It was the same one she'd found in the library, the mysterious book with the coat of arms on the back.

But how could that be?

Slowly, she picked it up in her hands. The cover felt familiar and warm, almost as if the book had been waiting for her. Trembling she flipped through the pages until she finally found the page with the song.

The missing side.

"The world promises us gold and splendor, but empty hands hold treasures. Hope lives completely in the heart, where love counts and not possessions."

As soon as she had spoken the words, the book began to vibrate in her hands. An icy breath swept through the hall, as if someone had pushed open a door to the cold night.

Isabell took a step back.

The air became heavy, as if something invisible were awakening.

Suddenly, the ground began to move under her. Fine cracks ran through the stone slabs, as if something deep beneath the church was reacting to her words. A dull rumble filled the hall, dust trickled from the walls, and an invisible undertow drew on Isabel.

„Isabell!"

A voice broke through the chaos.

She raised her head - suddenly there was Adrian in the opening to the room. His eyes were wide with worry as he scrambled against the invisible storm that swept through the room.

„Isabell, give me your hand!" he cried, reaching out to her.

But she couldn't.

An unstoppable force tugged at her, pulling her down to the book, as if it were about to devour her.

„Adrian!" she cried, her voice lost in the thundering magic around her.

Her fingers clawed into the empty space, her body became lighter, more translucent – and then the book fell out of her hands.

The world around her dipped in a glaring light.

A cold shiver ran over her skin.

Then - silence.

Chapter 9

A soft voice penetrates her ear.

„Girl, are you okay?"

Isabelle blinks confused. Her breathing is quick, her heart pounding in her chest.

Slowly, she perceives her surroundings. At the same time, she remembers.

She's no longer in the church.

No crumbling hall, no glowing symbols, no cracks in the floor.

Instead – the warm scent of paper, the high shelves, the muffled light of the familiar library.

She's back where it all started.

She holds the book in her hand.

But this time, she sees it immediately, it's complete. The page with the song is there, as if it's never been torn out.

Unrealistically, she runs her fingers across the paper.

„Isabell?"

She looks up. In front of her stands the librarian - the familiar older man with snow-white hair, a furrowed face and kindly eyes.

Isabelle opens her eyes.

„Master Humbert?" she whispered incredulously.

The librarian frowns.

'Master ... what?' He shakes his head and laughs softly. 'To you, I'm Herr Kirchhoff. But ... you're right, my first name is actually similar. My name is Hubert.'

A shiver runs through Isabell's body.

Coincidence?

Or is this a shadow from another time, an echo of the world she has just left?"

"How do you know my name?" he asked curiously.

Isabelle can't answer.

She looks at the book, then into his eyes, and she knows it now!

It's over.

She's back in her own time.

And Adrian...

A cold stab pierced her heart.

Adrian is gone and gone.

She would never see him again.

A deep pain settles on her chest, but she forces herself to smile. She hands the book to the librarian with trembling hands and mumbles:

„It belongs as it is, in the library."

Then she rushes out.

The cold evening wind blows against her, but she barely feels it. Her thoughts whirl, her head full and empty at the same time, her heart so heavy.

But with each step, reality becomes more tangible.

She's back here.

Not Adrian.

Chapter 10

When she gets home, she feels an excitement. But this is an excitement she would master now. After everything that's been, she's determined and confident.

At least she thinks so.

When she opens the door, her father is alone in the room.

He looks at her with a serious look and points to the chair across from her.

„Isabelle, we need to talk.”

She sits down slowly.

Her father takes a deep breath. 'I've thought about it for a long time. The marriage with your stepmother ... it's not working. I've broken up with her.'

Isabelle stares at him.

The words slowly trickled through to her.

Your stepmother's gone?

No more screaming? No more fear?

„Really?” whispers Isabell.

Her father nods.

For a moment, she can only sit there breathless. Then she jumps up, runs to her father and throws herself into his arms.

'Daddy!' Her voice breaks as she clutches him tightly. 'I love you so much!'

He's holding them up as well.

„Me too, girl.”

And for the first time in a long time, their home feels like home again.

The next morning, Isabelle wakes up with a smile.

A new life lies ahead of her.

She gets up, quietly hums the song's familiar melody, and prepares breakfast for herself and her father.

But life has one last surprise in store for her.

In her first year of school, she's got biology.

As usual, Isabell sat alone, the seat next to her remained empty.

She sighs at the teacher. 'Mr. Neumann, can I get a partner? It's hard to do it all alone.'

The teacher grins.

„That will change today.”

At that moment the door opens.

The headmaster enters, and next to him a boy.

Isabelle gasps for air.

Her heart stopped beating for a second.

Adrian!?!

'This is our new classmate,' the headmaster explained. 'He's moved from Harderwijk to Emmerich with his sister and aunt. His name is Adrian van Ruyter.'

Was it a dream?

Adrian sits down next to her, puts down his backpack and looks at her.

A gentle smile envelops his lips.

„Adrian?“ she whispered incredulously.

He bows his head.

Then he says quietly:

„It's been a long road to find you, but now I've found you.“

"Listen, how the voices whisper softly, a song that never forgot time. A river that leads on an eternal journey, into the sea that holds every truth."

"Time passes in the sea of flames, where shadows silently guard the dream. A fire burns, breaks through suffering, to a world that carries hope."

The world promises us gold and splendor, but empty hands hold treasures. Hope lives fully in the heart, where love counts and not possessions.

Refrain:

Listen, the world sings softly songs, of love that conquers pain. Hope grows and returns again and again, a light that never lies in the shadows.