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# THE OTHER WAY

PASSAGE TO DAWN: BOOK TWO

We hope you have enjoyed *The Other Magic*, the first book in the *Passage to Dawn* series. We're pleased to present you with a sneak peek of *The Other Way*, the second book in the series.

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## AYNWARD

... **T**HE IMPOSING, OAK DOOR SWUNG soundlessly to reveal the vast study connecting father's bed chambers. The room was circular, following the design of the rest of the palace architecture. A collection of rare, leather-bound books lined the west wall, while straight ahead a Kingdom tapestry hung between two windows accented by floorlength curtains on either side. Aynward noted the large desk positioned in its normal place in the center of the room occupied by a man so invested in whatever it was he studied that he failed to notice his son's arrival. This was nothing new. The dozen chairs positioned in a half-circle with the desk at its head *was* new. *This is interesting*, thought Aynward. *Has father been holding meetings with his advisers right here in his personal study?* That would be yet another sign of... concern? Fear? Paranoia?

Aynward stood awkwardly for a moment before deciding how to draw his father's attention. He coughed into his elbow. It worked. His father looked up and seemed to freeze before shaking off the haze of deep thought. Then, to Aynward's surprise, the king rose from his seated position. His hair was still shoulder length, accentuated by a sharp widow's peak, and his face held that same unyielding expression Aynward remembered so well, though his strong jaw featured sprouts of stubble that had gone days without attention. Aynward could not recall ever

having seen his father's face in such a state of dishevelment; therefore, he couldn't say whether or not the dusting of grey within the beard was new. It was certainly an unexpected sight. His father had seemed almost ageless, stuck in a perpetual state of unchanging adulthood for as long as Aynward could remember. He had little time to digest the oddity. The king rounded the desk and moved forward, his stride remaining regal in spite of the outward signs of age.

His deep voice echoed about the study as he closed the gap between them, "Son, it is good to see you returned and in one piece."

"Yes, well—" Aynward was without a witty retort, especially as his father prepared for an embrace. Strong arms pulled him in tight, though Aynward's confusion made his own movements perfunctory. Once separated, the king's ordinarily stony face formed a slight smile. Another rarity.

"If the reports are to be believed, you survived quite an ordeal, and not without some manner of heroics, if perhaps a foolhardy decision to remain behind in the first place."

*What is going on here?* wondered a helplessly befuddled Aynward. "I must admit, father, I was expecting a bit more of a—stern homecoming."

"Yes, well, I can't honestly say that I was expecting word from the Count of Brinkwell singing your praises. In fact I doubted the truth of his account altogether until your new counselor, Gervais, corroborated such events." He exhaled loudly and shook his head. "Son, I was hesitant to send you away as I did, but it seems Brinkwell managed to carve a good man out of you after all."

"I..." Aynward fought against the growing lump in his throat. "I...I believe much of the credit goes to the late Counselor Dolm... Dolmuevo."

The king placed a hand upon Aynward's shoulder, "He was a decent man, but it was greed that caused his death, not you."

Aynward's head shot up, "What are you talking about? Greed? He was killed in the defense of *my* life. He didn't have to come back for me."

"Perhaps you should sit."

The king returned to his desk and gestured for the flustered Aynward to take the seat closest the desk. The chair was situated at an awkward angle so Aynward took hold of the arms and turned it to face the king directly.

His father spoke again, “Aynward, it has been uncovered that Counselor Dolmuevo had designs to deliver you to the Lugienese. He was tasked with ensuring you remained behind, but alive to be captured. We suspect you would have been held for ransom.”

Aynward could not believe what he was hearing. “No. There is no way Dolme would have betrayed the Kingdom. He was one of the most loyal men I have ever known!”

The king lowered his head, a sad expression, or perhaps one of pity, as he said, “Son. We have letters confirming his involvement with the Lugienese. I’m sorry. I, too, was skeptical, but it is the truth.”

Aynward scrutinized Dolme’s every action under this new light, looking for proof that these accusations were unfounded, but everything Dolme had done *could* fit. Everything except—

“But how could he have known I would jump from that first ship? How would he have delivered me if I were safely ferried away?”

His father shook his head slowly, “He knew you too well, Aynward. Why do you think your friend’s name wasn’t on the list for your ship? Was that an honest oversight, or could it have been a calculated move to keep you in the city long enough for the Lugienese to arrive?”

*No. This just can’t be.*

“Listen, son. None of this is your fault. In fact, whatever guilt you were carrying over his death must be cast aside. He was a traitor. The gods delivered their justice. And I fear he was not the only traitor in our midst.”

Aynward could hardly comprehend what he was hearing.

“I just...he seemed so...”

Aynward’s statement trailed as movement to the right caught his attention. A dark shape emerged from behind the dark blue curtains. It was so unexpected that Aynward hardly registered what he was seeing.

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The shape wore all black, but Aynward spotted the glint of steel. He carried a sword!

Aynward sprang to his feet, "Father! Behind you!"

The shadowy figure glided toward them, slashing just as the king spun to face the danger, toppling his chair with a crash.

The swing missed, or mostly missed. The king let out a grunt of pain as his arm deflected the weapon away from his body. The assassin was not dissuaded, flowing directly into his next move. This, too, missed as his father stepped away and into the open space between the windows and his desk. "Guards!" he yelled. This was followed directly by, "Aynward, run!"

His father was weaponless, as was Aynward, but he couldn't flee while his father was cut to pieces. Besides, the guards should enter at any moment, but his father had to survive long enough for that to matter. Aynward raced to help.

Even as he dashed forward, his father buckled, the assassin having decided to hamper the king's mobility with a deep slash to the thigh, a spray of blood trailing the shimmering steel of the blade. The king remained upright, one knee on the stone floor, the other leg helping him balance. Aynward was only two strides away. He let out a bellow, hoping to draw the assassin's attention away from his father.

The assassin turned, but kicked out with his leg as he did, knocking the king to the ground as he met Aynward's charge. Then he swung.

Aynward came to a halt, the metal hissing as it swept past his throat. The figure immediately closed the gap and swung again. This time Aynward had no doubt that he would die. He just hoped the guards would arrive in time to save his father. "Guards!" he yelled. *Where are they?* There should have been two standing on the other side of the door.

The blade arced down then across on its way to cleave his chest, but it changed course at the last moment, the assassin spinning away. Instead, a foot struck him hard in the face, knocking him to the cold floor. As his world righted and his vision cleared, Aynward heard the groan from his father. It was a dignified sound filled with pain, the

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sound of a great man, a proud man, but a dying man. Aynward crawled to his knees, ready to die when he heard the clang of steel upon stone.

Looking up, he saw the assassin dart for the window. It opened soundlessly. Aynward scrambled to his feet to give chase but the assassin was too quick. Aynward watched helplessly from the window as the cutthroat landed far below. With the flick of a wrist, the snare holding the rope to the stone fell loose. The assassin collected it with practiced hands and stole away unseen.

With pursuit no longer an option, Aynward rushed over to his father, whose breathing was ragged. He lay on his back, blood oozing from the wound in his chest.

“Father...” Aynward whispered, pulling him close, cradling his head. He didn’t know what else to do. He cried out again, “Guards!”

The king attempted to sit up, but lacked the strength. He spoke, but his words were garbled by blood. “Betrayal. More betrayal. Your—” A crimson river flowed from his open mouth, choking his speech. His body spasmed then went utterly still in Aynward’s arms.

The door to the study burst open and guards barrelled in, swords at the ready. They were breathing heavily. An imposing figure dressed in formal military garb followed close behind. It was none other than Aynward’s eldest brother, heir to the throne, Perja.

The king apparent stared down at the grisly scene before him then pointed at Aynward. “Guards, seize him.”

Aynward didn’t understand. Not until he caught sight of the sword left behind by the assassin. *That’s...my sword.* The blade was still slick with the crimson blood of his father...

*The Other Magic: Passage to Dawn Book 1*

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Publishing consultant: David Wogahn, [AuthorImprints.com](http://AuthorImprints.com)