

PROLOGUE



I SPENT MUCH OF MY FIRST six years afraid of my mother's throne the way most children are afraid of monsters lurking under their beds. It was a terrifying thing to behold: tall and shadowy black, sharp-edged, carved to look like dark flames. I remember the bone-deep certainty that touching it would burn.

Every day, I would see my mother sit upon that throne, and I believed that it held her there, its obsidian fingers digging into her skin. I watched it transform her into someone else, someone I didn't recognize. Gone was the woman at the center of my world, the soft-spoken mother who would kiss my forehead and hold me on her lap, who would sing me to sleep every night. In the throne, a stranger took over her body—her voice boomed, her back was ramrod straight. She spoke carefully and authoritatively without a hint of a smile in her voice. When the throne finally released her, she was exhausted.

Now that I'm older, I know that the throne wasn't a monster in the way I believed. I know that it didn't have a physical hold on my mother. I know that when she sat on that throne,

she was still herself. But I also understand that in some way, I was right. She was never quite the same person on that throne that she was off it.

Usually, my mother belonged only to me; when she sat on that throne, she belonged to everyone.