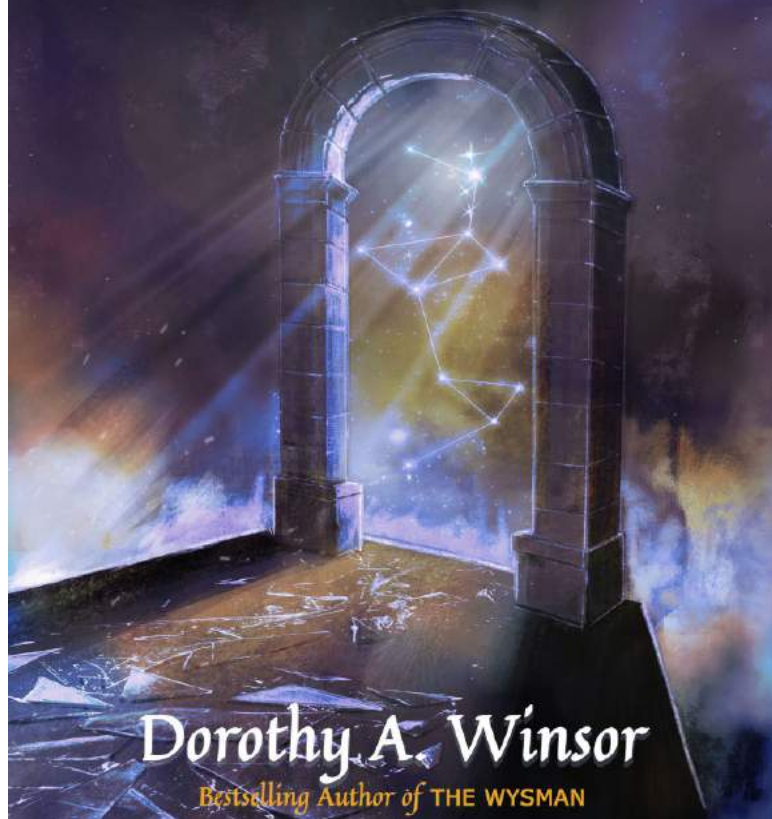


Glass Girl



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Dorothy A. Winsor



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Content Warning: This title contains written references to murder, physical assault, kidnapping and miscarriage.

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Praise for Dorothy Winsor

A gripping Young Adult fantasy story, brimming with danger, magic and intrigue, set in a richly imagined world, with a superb cast of characters.

– Mary Simms,
BookCraic

Dorothy Winsor's novel presents an intriguing and well-drawn world, with a very likeable lead. An exciting, adventurous, and thoughtful YA fantasy novel.

– Dr. Una McCormack,
New York Times Bestselling Author

A delightful coming-of-age story about finding out who you are when everything about your life is changing; when you can't go back but aren't sure you see a path forward; and when the gifts you've counted on most may turn out to be not to be the ones you need to save the people counting on you.

– Rachel Neumeier,
author of Winter of Ice and Iron

Dorothy A. Winsor is a meticulous writer who expertly balances intelligence and delight.

– Saladin Ahmed,
Hugo, Nebula, and Gemmell Awards finalist

Journeys: A Ghost Story, is a very good tale that, without any real surprises, still manages to surprise. There's a well-wrought aura of melancholy that permeates the story, even in the funny moments. Another author I'll keep an eye out for in the future.

I swear to use my work to share the vision the dragon shows me.

I will treat that vision with reverence and care.

I will bring the best of myself to my work so it is all I can make it.

I will not allow my work to lead others away from the
dragon's truth.

I will be ever faithful to my craft.

—Crafters' Oath, The Dolyan Islands

The dragon of Kural was said to have red-gold eyes that gleamed like glass with light shining through it. He loved learning, insight, glass, and spies.

—*A History of the Dolyan Islands* by Mara of Basur

Chapter 1

THE PIECES I'D cut for my stained-glass window glowed on my worktable. My fingers itched to put them together. Behind me, the door to my workroom opened, and my mother entered. "It's late," she said, pushing a sweat-darkened strand of hair off her forehead. "Time to quit and eat something."

"I finished cutting the pieces," I rushed out. "I'm ready for you to approve them."

Her tired face broadening in a smile, she put one arm around my shoulders. "You're not excited, are you?"

I rewarded her with a laugh. "How could you tell?"

She squeezed me close, then let me go. Face sober, she bent over the glass shapes, running her gaze slowly along the table. She had slipped into her role as craftmistress. Even though I was her daughter, the glasswork had to be right. Not that I'd want it any other way.

I clasped my hands first in front of me and then in back.

"I feel you staring at me," she said without turning. "Go bring in some wood for the furnace."

She might be craftmistress now, but that tone of voice was pure mother. I refrained from rolling my eyes and left her to her inspection. The big workshop was empty when I walked through. The furnace, banked for the night, still glowed with heat. The tools had been put away, and the other glassmakers were gone. I stepped out into the chilly yard. The oncoming late winter darkness left just

enough light for me to see as I gathered an armful of wood from the shed and started back inside.

As I reached the doorway, I glimpsed movement near the gate and recognized the solid, middle-aged form of Miriv, my mother's deputy and the woman she loved. A man I didn't know was talking to her. When he saw me, he stopped.

"Who's that?" he asked.

Miriv glanced back. "None of your business. Clear off. You're not welcome here." She strode toward me, mouth tightly set.

"Tell Calea I was here," the man called after her. He was still standing by the gate when Miriv put her hand in the small of my back and hustled me inside.

I dropped the wood in the box next to the furnace. "Who was that?"

Miriv shrugged. "Someone your mother used to know. How's your window coming along?"

I lost all interest in the man. "I'm about to find out."

"I'll make you some eggs." Miriv set a pan on the brazier.

I hurried into my workroom where my mother still bent over the table. She was nothing if not thorough about glass. The work was good. I was sure of it, but I wasn't certain how she'd judge it. She'd been tense lately. She'd worked well into the night at least twice. I didn't know if she was worried about something or just driven to finish a project. In my nearly seventeen years, I'd seen her both ways. I had time to notice a new burn hole in the sleeve of her red glassmaker tunic before she straightened.

"You changed the design I approved," she said.

I grimaced. I knew I shouldn't have done that. I was still an apprentice. "Rhyth's representative asked me to make their island larger than the others. I didn't think it was a big enough change to need your permission." Also, I'd been afraid she'd say no. Sometimes she oversaw my work down to the littlest detail, as if she assumed I might be doing it wrong before she even looked.

"The design is dragon-inspired," she said. "You altered it to please a powerful buyer."

Her face was unreadable. I couldn't tell how seriously she thought I'd gone wrong. My stomach tightened with worry. "Miriv says sometimes I indulge myself in work that's too fanciful for anyone else to appreciate. I was trying to be practical with this one."

"Be careful, Emlin," she said, voice sharp. "The dragon doesn't force his inspiration on us. We have to be open to it. And if you trifle with what he gives, he may abandon you."

In my opinion, she was being overly dramatic, but since I wasn't a fool, I kept that thought to myself. "This is still the same idea. And you have to admit, it will be beautiful."

She stared at the glass pieces on the table, chewing her lip. Finally, she sighed. "Yes, it will. You can go ahead."

"Thank you!"

She kissed my forehead. "Still, I prefer the window you made for the Great Bookhouse. It could have been made by no one but you, and I know the Sage is thrilled with it."

"I had to give that to them because no one would buy it." I was still annoyed by that, but even apart from the oddity of some of my work, stained-glass windows were hard to sell. Most people couldn't afford even ordinary window glass, and those who could often didn't want to reduce the light by adding color. Unfortunately, stained-glass was the only work the dragon inspired in me. So, two months' work, and I'd had to give it away.

We were apparently finished. My mother untied her leather apron and lifted it over her head as I went to look at the window pieces again.

"A man was here asking for you," I said.

"Who?" she asked, voice muffled by the apron.

"I don't know. Miriv says you used to know him. By his accent, I think he was Lyzian." Lyz was the island closest to Kural. A number of their merchant ships had been in our harbor lately. "Maybe he wanted to buy glass." If my mother's distraction came from worry about the business, a new order might cheer her up. Not to mention making life easier for the rest of us.

The silence was so complete, I glanced back to make sure she hadn't left the room. She was still there, standing motionless, the apron twisted in her hands. Maybe it was an effect of the moonlight washing through the room's window, but her face looked ashen beneath its usual bronze color.

"Are you all right?" I asked.

She loosened her grip on the apron. "Of course. Tidy up." She went out to the main workshop, closing the door behind her.

So much for the idea that news about the Lyzian would make her less tense. Oh well. She'd settle down eventually.

I put away my various knives and files, hung up my apron, and followed her out to where a plate of scrambled eggs and a hunk of bread waited for me. As I wolfed them down, my thoughts turned to the ceremony that would happen on my birthday next month. With it, I'd earn the right to wear a crafter's ring. After that, I'd no longer be an apprentice. I'd be able to design my own patterns and projects with no one's approval. It was time. I was ready.

I washed my plate, put it away, and started up the stairs to my room. As I passed the set of rooms belonging to Miriv and my mother, my mother's tense voice penetrated the door. "But what's he *doing* here?"

"I told you, I don't know." Miriv sounded exasperated.

After a beat of silence, my mother said, "It's my night to watch the furnace."

The door jerked open, revealing her with Miriv close behind. My mother narrowed her eyes at me. "Did you want something, Emlin?"

"No, no." I backed away, embarrassed at having been caught eavesdropping.

"Go to bed." My mother turned back to Miriv. "You too." She kissed Miriv's cheek. I went on upstairs, and before I closed my door, I heard my mother climbing down to the workshop. Surely they'd been talking about the man Miriv met at the gate. Both of them were more upset than I'd have expected if he was just a

customer, no matter how big an order he might place. But it was clear neither of them thought he was my business.

How interesting.



I WOKE FROM a dream of flying – a dragon dream – a sign the dragon asleep on the Heights was remembering the days he soared overhead. I wished I could go back to the dream, but I needed to use the privy. Reluctantly, I slid from under my warm covers, shoving my feet into my slippers before they touched the cold floor. I was almost all the way down the stairs when I saw my mother buttoning her cloak under her chin. I halted. She couldn't be leaving. It was her night to feed the glasshouse furnace. If it went out, it would take hours to grow hot enough to make glass again. She'd have docked the pay of anyone else who left that post.

To my utter disbelief, she opened the door and left. That went way beyond her dealing with something that made her tense. That was downright shocking.

As soon as the door closed, I rushed down the stairs, grabbed my own cloak from its hook, and followed her. Whatever the matter was, it had to be important for her to leave the furnace. The man at the gate flashed into my mind. Maybe she was going to meet him. I couldn't resist the chance to learn something about this man from her past. The mystery was just too enticing.

Fumbling to wrap myself in my cloak, I followed her as she walked rapidly along Wood Road until she reached the bottom of the steps leading up to Merchant Street, where the road narrowed up against the wall supporting the higher street.

A man emerged from the dark next to the steps. "Well met, Calea. How have you been?"

Sheltering in a house doorway, I recognized him as much by his Lyzian accent as by his appearance. Excitement bubbled in my chest.

"As Miriv undoubtedly told you," my mother said. "I don't want to see you."

That was not what I expected her to say.

"Just for a moment." He put his hand on her arm, but she shook off his touch.

"I have no time for you," she said. "None. Go away and do it now or I'll call the Watch."

He backed off a yard. "I'm on Kural for a while," he said. "I'll try you again." Without waiting for an answer, he climbed the stairs to Merchant Street.

Not a customer, then. She'd sounded like she did when talking to me or Miriv. This was personal. In the back of my head, I'd been thinking he might be an old boyfriend. She'd had one or two in the years between my father's death and the blossoming of her affection for Miriv. If he was, she didn't have fond memories. I knew a bad breakup when I saw it.

My mother pulled her cloak tighter around her and walked on even faster than before, probably even more aware than I was of the furnace waiting to be fed in the glasshouse.

Now she led me into the big square in front of the palace. So she'd had a goal other than seeing the man. She crossed the square and spoke to one of the night guards while I pressed into the gap between two houses.

In the dark, the dragon-work wall around the palace glowed like a pink pearl. I hardly ever got to see it like this because I hardly ever went out at night. In one of my earliest memories, though, my mother was holding my hand in the square and telling me the tale of the dragon breathing fire over the palace soon after it was built. When the fire faded, she said, the glow remained, a sign that the first drake of Kural and his dragon were bonded, the way the fire and stone in the wall were. I'd been fascinated. She'd struggled to keep me away from the fire in the glasshouse furnace for days afterwards.

The palace guard opened the gate, and my mother vanished inside. Leftover rain on the cobblestones oozed through my slippers, making my toes curl up in protest. The moments slid past. The square remained quiet but, hidden behind the houses on the steep hill down to the beach, the surf pounded. I shifted, uncomfortable

because, waiting like this, I couldn't avoid noticing that I still needed to use the privy.

In front of the palace, one of the guards moved, and I pulled farther back into shadows. He opened the gate, and my mother's voice pierced the dark. "Good night."

"Good night, Mistress Calea." The guard's voice bounced off the buildings surrounding the square.

Footsteps tapped across the cobblestones, and she appeared, walking briskly toward Merchant Street, apparently going straight back to the glasshouse. I still had no idea what had drawn her out tonight, and now I had new questions about the Lyzian man. Now though, I needed to beat her home. She'd be furious if she knew I'd gone out in my nightclothes, snooping on something she obviously meant to keep secret. If I waited until she struck off into Wood Road, then ran farther along Merchant Street, I could take the stone steps down the hill, and get there first.

I padded softly after her, keeping to the shadowy edge of the street. The shops lining it hunched in on themselves, quiet and dark. When we were almost to Wood Road, I sped up to draw close and be ready to run once she'd turned off. My foot skimmed over a broken cobblestone, sending a chunk rattled off into the dark.

She whirled to face me. "Emlin?"

From the mouth of an alley on the right, a patch of deeper darkness lunged out. My mother jerked away from it, but an arm shot out to hook around her waist and draw her close. She gave a choked-off scream and fell forward, thudding face first onto the street.

For a disbelieving moment, I froze. Then my body came to life, and I ran to them. The man planted a foot on either side of her hips. He grabbed her hair, yanked her head back, and put something to her throat. Starlight glinted off metal. I grabbed his arm, my hands closing around bunched muscle. He smelled of wood smoke. With an oath, he flung his arm wide, knocking me to the cobbles.

"Help!" I shrieked, scrambling to my feet. "Somebody help."

The man turned toward me, his brows black slashes over the top of the kerchief covering his mouth and nose. A spot of color gleamed like glass in the darkness: a stone red as a drop of blood in the earring at the top of his right ear. Warm fluid ran down my legs. Somewhere close by, a Watchman's whistle shrilled. Cursing, the man tore off into the darkness. I hurtled myself across the filthy street to where my mother lay, face up now, open eyes reflecting the stars.

"He's gone," I gabbled. "He's gone."

I laid one hand gently on her cheek, then stared at the dark smear I'd made. Now I saw the cut across her throat, saw the blood, black in the moonlight, the smell of it tingeing the night air like the metals the glasshouse used in its dyes. One of her hands lay in a puddle of it, fingers curled up like the petals of a flower.

I tried to scream again, but the blood smell had soaked up all the air in my chest. Then the breath came in a long, wobbly inhale, and I began to cry.

The Watchman's whistle sounded from the direction the running feet had gone. I pushed myself to sit up, snot running from my nose. "Help!" I shouted again, though part of me knew the moment when help would matter had passed.

Night Flights 1

Kural's dragon is dreaming of the color blue: the pale blue of a summer sky, the murky blue of the ocean after a storm. The blues swirl in his head like a contrapuntal song. He stirs and tries to shrug, but his wings are pinned.

Chapter 2

“E^{MLIN?}”

Heart pounding, I startled awake to find my fellow glass maker Renie bending over me. The familiar slanted ceiling of my room rose above her. I blinked. What was she doing here? Hadn't she gone home? Light flooded through the window at the foot of the bed. It must be morning.

I stared at the bandage wrapped around her head, binding back her straight, dark hair and making her face look thinner than ever. Someone had been hurt... but it wasn't Renie, was it?

The previous night's events poured back into my memory. I sat up, gasping for air, pain clogging my throat. My mother was dead. Someone had killed her. That had really happened.

“I'm so sorry to disturb you,” Renie said in her gentle voice. “A Watchman has come to ask you about last night. Miriv wants him to do it in Calea's—” She stopped and started again. “In the office with her there. Can you come down?”

I blinked at her, fishing for words that would make an answer. My brain muddled through the problem. I finally swung my legs out from under the covers while Renie grabbed a shawl from the foot of the bed and draped it around my shoulders. My slippers had gone missing. I vaguely remembered Miriv carrying them away the previous night. The soles had been stained dark. I shuddered and gulped.

Renie helped me to stand, took my arm, and guided me out of my room as if I were an old woman. I felt like one, like pain had bent all my bones.

I clutched the rail as we went down two flights of stairs to my mother's office, where Miriv waited, her red shawl wrapped over the nightdress she'd been wearing when the Watch brought me home the previous night. Her face and body sagged. The door to the bedroom she'd shared with my mother stood open. The blankets were rumpled, but Miriv looked as if she hadn't slept at all.

She held a hand out to me and drew me into the chair next to hers. "Renie, would you bring the Watchman up?"

Face scrunched in worry, Renie left.

"What happened to her head?" I asked. It was stupid, but Renie being hurt confused me.

"A tile slipped off the roof while she was bringing wood in this morning." Miriv let go of my hand to pour me tea from the pot at her elbow. "How are you doing?"

The surface of my tea rippled, making me realize my hand was shaking. I set the cup on my mother's desk, then clasped my hands in my lap. "Those tiles are heavy."

"I know. She was lucky it just grazed her."

I caught myself thinking someone should tell my mother so she could order repairs. I closed my eyes, as if that would shut out the now-empty place where she had always been.

"I suppose I should see if there's a leak," Miriv said vaguely.

Miriv would have to run the glasshouse now, I realized. She'd been my mother's deputy. This would be her office now. Her rooms, alone.

A knock sounded at the door, and Renie escorted a Watchman in. He was gray haired and wore an officer's sash. In sending him, the Watch was treating this murder as important. Of course they were. My mother had been Kural's craftmistress. The Watchman's shoulders hunched as if he were uncomfortable.

"Is it all right?" He pointed to the chair on the other side of the desk. When Miriv nodded, he sat and took out a wax tablet, ready to

make notes. He aimed his sober gaze at me. "Tell me what happened."

I stumbled through an account of what I'd seen. Miriv took my hand again, her grip so hard it hurt. I didn't explain why I'd gone after my mother, and he didn't ask. I wasn't sure I knew any more. The thing that had happened was so big that it wiped out everything else.

"So you didn't recognize him?" the Watchman said.

I shook my head. "He had a kerchief over his face. He wore an earring," I said, suddenly remembering. "With a red stone. In his right ear, I think."

The Watchman wrote it down without comment. Many men wore earrings. He was finding me useless. "This man who stopped her, could he have followed her to the square?"

"I don't know. I didn't see him go after her." I lifted my free hand helplessly. "You know who I mean, Miriv. The one who came to the gate. Who is he?"

She drew a breath and talked to the Watchman rather than me. "His name is Dain. Calea knew him years ago."

"Was there bad blood between them?" he asked.

"I don't think so," Miriv said. "He's Lyzian and hasn't been on Kural in years as far as I know."

"I'll talk to the palace guards. Maybe they saw the killer." He stood. From his pocket, he took something small and laid it on the desk. "I think this belongs to you now, lass."

I stared at my mother's crafter ring, the one she'd always worn on her right forefinger. Indeed, once the dragon accepted her as a crafter, the ring would have fit her finger tightly enough that she couldn't take it off. Around the outside curled the etching of a dragon. I'd never seen the inside, but I knew what was inscribed there too, the final words of our oath: *Ever faithful to my craft*. The cremation would have been this morning. Miriv and I weren't expected to go, of course, but the other glassmakers would have. The fire that consumed her body would have left the ring.

The Watchman said, "I'll let you know what I learn. I'm sorry to have disturbed you." He bowed and took his leave.

I clutched my mother's ring hard enough that it bit into my palm. Cold anger knotted in my chest. Whoever did this wasn't going to skip happily away into the rest of his life. Not if I had anything to say about it. "She knew this Dain?" I asked Miriv.

"Years ago. He might as well have been a stranger yesterday."

"But how did she know him? Were they enemies? Could he have wanted to hurt her?" I bit back a question about them being sweethearts because I was afraid it would hurt Miriv.

She shook her head. "I don't think so. When he came to the gate last night, he sounded... friendly."

"But my mother was angry when she talked to him."

"Emlin, believe me when I tell you that Dain is unlikely to have killed her," Miriv said. I wanted to ask more, but she was crying now.

"Do you want me to stay with you?" I asked. The tears swelling behind my own eyes were pressing hard. If they slipped out, I feared they'd go on forever. Miriv and I would weep in one another's arms endlessly, both of us broken open by our loss.

So, I was ashamed but relieved when Miriv said, "I'd like to be by myself for a while. Do you mind?"

"No. You do what you need to do." I hugged her and went back to bed, but not to sleep. I'd been right that once I started to cry, I wouldn't be able to stop.

I SPENT THE next month – the mourning month – crying, sleeping, and spinning questions in my head. The Lyzian man – Dain – the night he showed up, neither Miriv nor my mother had wanted to talk about him, at least not to me. That meant he mattered somehow. Maybe he was an old boyfriend, maybe not. Judging by my long knowledge of her, Miriv had told the truth when she said she didn't think he was the killer, but his appearance struck me as too big a coincidence to ignore. Had he worn a red earring? I wasn't

sure. He could have followed her. He would have had time to hide in that alley while she was in the palace. And when she left, the guard had called her name loudly enough that he would have known she was coming. Something had drawn her out when she never should have gone. Someone wanted her alone in the dark where she'd be an easy target.

The day the mourning month ended, I got up, braided my hair, and dressed for work. It was time to get moving. I'd asked every day, but the Watchman hadn't come back yet. If he didn't come today, I'd go to Watch Headquarters and make them tell me what they'd found about Dain or her trip to the palace or anything else. I needed to know. I owed it to my mother to make sure that whoever hurt her paid a price.

At the last moment, I put on the blue glass beads my mother had made for me to wear on my seventeenth birthday, only a little over a week away now. At a ceremony then, I was supposed to take the oath, get a ring of my own, and become a fully-fledged crafter. That would be my deadline. Before I could move on, I would find my mother's killer.