



ALLARA KATADIN

ON LIFE AS THE SEARCHER

INTERVIEWS WITH ALLARA Katadin, Searcher and Queen of Lael, are always nerve-wracking. She quite obviously sees them as invasions into her privacy and always seems more than a little suspicious of the questioner's motives. But today I've braved her majestic iciness to try to get a better sense of what it meant to grow up as a Searcher.

She's already sitting in her throne in the palace at Réon Couteau—still the one on the left, reserved for the Searcher, even though she could properly sit in the middle one, now that she's queen. Wearing the green-gemmed crown of state and a white gown, she waits impassively for me to curtsy. She then gestures to the chair that has been set up in front of her own—a respectful six feet away.

A quick clearing of my throat, and then it's on to the questions:

How are you coping in the aftermath of Chris's sacrifice?

[Her mouth twitches a little to the side, then firms into a line.] I don't believe that's really what you've come to discuss, is it?

No, but many people *do* want to know.

[She hesitates a long moment. She glances away, then raises her chin and looks back.] To begin with, that's none of anyone's business but my own. But I will say this, it's been difficult. Surviving a disaster is one thing, but that doesn't always make surviving what comes after any easier.

But you *are* surviving, we hope?

Yes. I'm surviving. It's what I do. Let us move on, if you please.

All right, yes, of course. Um, tell us about the Searchers if you would. How are they chosen?

How they are chosen isn't something any of us knows. The Garowai knows perhaps. At any rate, he is the one responsible for carrying out the wishes of the Almighty and alerting the parents of the chosen Searcher, so the child might be brought up to understand his or her duties.

Are the chosen children always of noble blood?

No, certainly not, although there do seem to be a larger percentage of noble blood than not. If the child is *not* of noble blood, he will be brought to court for a portion of every year while he's growing up, so he will be equipped to negotiate society and politics when the time comes to guide the Gifted.

What's your first memory of being told you were a Searcher?

There isn't really a memory. When I look back, it's just sort of a knowledge that was always there—like knowing who my parents were. It's always been a part of me. It wasn't really until my first Gifted crossed that I realized I was called to so different a life from other children's.

How did you train?

Searchers are given the most extensive education possible, so they'll be prepared to guide their Gifted. Aside from academics, horsemanship, and self-defense, I also spent months out of every year at the Gloamfall with the Garowai. It's not required to spend that much time with him, but I loved being there. I loved him. I loved that he saw past my child exterior into the heart of a complete person. And, then, after the disasters surrounding Harrison Garnett's advent, his home was the only place I felt truly safe.

How did people react when Harrison Garnett crossed when you were still so young?

[She raises an eyebrow.] Don't you already know that?

Most of us don't know the details. Only that bad things came of it.

So they did. Well, I was so occupied with my own reactions—trying to catch my breath and my balance at the same time—that I honestly didn't give much thought to how others reacted. As far as I know, I am the youngest Searcher to have ever encountered her Gifted. Really, I felt—still feel—as if I were hardly ready for it.

I think most onlookers were either worried I wouldn't be able to handle it, or enchanted by the drama of it all. Most people probably didn't give it too much thought. At that point, most people still believed that whatever happened with the Searcher and the Gifted was destined to happen for everyone's greater good.

What's the best thing about being a Searcher? (I won't ask about the worst.)

The best thing? [She taps her finger against the throne's armrest, as if she has truly never considered it before.] Well, Chris, I suppose. [She actually blushes, then brings her hands into her lap and rubs her crooked finger.] Yes, Chris. [Her voice softens.] Even after everything, he was worth it.