



The Dream Thief (The Drakon, Book 2)

By Shana Abe

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In the remote hills of northern England lives a powerful clan with a centuries-old secret. They are the drákon, shape-shifters who possess the ability to Turn—changing from human to smoke to dragon. And from the very stones of the earth, they hear hypnotic songs of beauty and wonder. But there is one stone they fear....

Buried deep within the bowels of the Carpathian Mountains lies the legendary dreaming diamond known as Draumr, the only gem with the power to enslave the drákon. Since childhood, Lady Amalia Langford, daughter of the clan's Alpha, has heard its haunting ballad but kept it secret, along with another rare Gift....

Lia can hear the future, much in the way she hears the call of Draumr. And in that future, she realizes that the diamond—along with the fate of the drákon—rests in the hands of a human man, one who straddles two worlds.

Ruthlessly clever, Zane has risen through London's criminal underworld to become its ruler. Once a street urchin saved by Lia's mother, Zane is also privy to the secrets of the clan—and is the only human they trust to bring them Draumr. But he does nothing selflessly.

Zane's hunt for the gem takes him to Hungary, where he is shocked to encounter a bold, beautiful young noblewoman: Lia. She has broken every rule of the drákon to join him, driven by the urgent song of Draumr—and her visions of Zane. In one future, he is her ally. In another, her overlord. In both, he is her lover. Now, to protect her tribe, Lia must tie her fate to Zane's, to the one man capable of stealing her future—and destroying her heart....

From the Hardcover edition.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Set in 18th-century England and the Carpathian Mountains, Abé's lively sequel to *The Smoke Thief* continues the saga of the drákon (or "dragon-people"), "magnificent, terrifying creatures who have the ability to exist as humans but may transform into dragons at will, especially at night." Zane, a handsome thief, and the Lady Amalia "Lia" Langford, who can see the future, join forces to search for the lost Draumr, a dangerous jewel that can control the drákon. Zane, a delicious anti-hero, finds himself captivated by the delightful Lia, who has been dreaming precognitively about him for years, certain that Zane is her destiny, though he might cause future problems for the drákon. When Lia finally "Turns," first into smoke, then into full drákon power, their passion for each other is tested in an exciting, fire-breathing resolution. Paranormal romance fans will be well rewarded.

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About the Author

Shana Abé is the award-winning author of nine novels, including **The Smoke Thief**. She lives in the Denver area with four surly pet house rabbits, all rescued, and a big goofy dog. Please, please support your local animal shelter, and spay or neuter your pets.

From the Hardcover edition.

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Chapter One

Darkfrith, Northern England
1768

In the dream, she was always blind.

That's what would come first, the utter darkness, settling over her like a soft, soft blanket. But it wasn't a hopeless or desperate kind of blindness. In fact, it always seemed absolutely normal. Because the dream was never about what she could see, but all about what she could hear.

"Lia."

"Yes," she would answer.

It was a man speaking to her in the dream. A man's voice, one she knew as well as she knew the flow of water over the rocks of her favorite streambed, dark and familiar and smooth.

"Lia," he would say, an imperative.

"I'm here."

"Come to me."

And she would, because in the dream there was nothing she wanted more than to obey that voice. It was her only ambition.

"Tell me about today," the man invited, still so smooth.

"The peaches are ripening. The wheat is hip-high. The Dartmoor ruby has a buyer in Brussels. He wants the emeralds as well."

"Good."

And, oh, how it pleased her, that one single word. How it shimmered through her like warm, sunlit honey, filling her with sweetness.

"Where is the marquess?" the man asked.

"Kimber is in the drawing room, awaiting you."

That part was wrong. Even in the dream Lia knew it was wrong, because Kimber wasn't the Marquess of Langford yet. Their father was. Kimber was just a boy. But the man never noticed.

"And tonight, my heart?" the man asked, his voice stroking.

"Tonight is the Havington dinner party. The viscountess will wear sapphires and silk."

She did not know anyone named Havington. She did not know how she knew about the sapphires, or the silk. But she knew that it was all true.

"Which sapphires?"

"A necklace of one hundred thirty-two stones, set in gold, the center stone round, twenty-nine carats, with a spray of opals all around. A bracelet of thirty-five stones: twenty sapphires, fifteen opals. An anklet of eleven sapphires, twenty-one opals—"

"Very good. That's enough."

In the dream, she expanded with that sweetness once more.

"What time will the viscountess be removing her jewelry, Lia?"

"Twelve thirty-seven. Eleven minutes after the last guest leaves. The necklace is heavy," she added. "And you're going to have to kill the second footman. He sees you on the way out."

The man said nothing. His presence broke the darkness around her like a prism of pure, humming joy. Like a song. Like a reverie.

"Lia."

"Yes?"

"Twelve-thirty isn't late. Wait for me in bed."

"Yes, Zane," she would always answer. And then she'd wake.

She wasn't ready.

Kim could see that she wasn't ready, even though they had waited the requisite fifteen days and sixteen nights for that one perfect June dusk without sun or moon or even stars. The sky above them was smoke and purple-blue, framed by the black cathedral of oaks and willows that made a rough enclosure around their circle of five.

Her face was still visible, pale, elfin-sharp, very clear to him even through the fading light. Lia didn't share the famous beauty of their sisters, Audrey's regal walk or Joan's silver-bell laugh. Fourteen years old, both earnest and shy, the essence of Lady Amalia Langford was all contradictions: elbows and a bumpy grace, wheat-gold hair and almond dark eyes, and a face that appeared close to ordinary until she smiled. Even then, she wasn't beautiful. She was, he considered, trying to be fair . . . arresting.

In fact, despite her powerful bloodlines, Lia didn't look like anyone else in the tribe. She was all corners and angles, always too tall, too thin, even as a little girl.

He'd been back from Eton only a few days. Kim would have thought that by now his youngest sister would have grown into her heritage, but to him she still seemed like a changeling stuffed into someone else's shawl and lacy pink gown.

She felt his stare. From her seat on the forest floor her head turned. She met his look—her braids fraying loose from their pins, her cheek smooth with the last glow of twilight, no cap—then glanced quickly away. The corners of her lips pulled back into a faint, unhappy line.

That was how Kim knew she wasn't going to finish the ritual. She returned to watching the pair of wrens in the scrolled metal cage near her feet. They fluttered from bar to bar, breathing in small, impassioned notes. It was the only noise that broke the forest silence. There were no crickets sawing. There were no mice or badgers or moles rummaging through the fallen leaves.

This was Darkfrith, after all.

One of the wrens slammed too hard against the wires. Kim caught the flicker of emotion that crossed Lia's face, so fleet he doubted any of the others noticed.

But he was the eldest. He'd had the most experience reading hearts. That flicker had been pain, and sympathy. She'd always longed for a pet.

Hell. She'd be useless tonight after all.

Something dark scored the sky above their heads, something serpentine. None of them bothered to look up. The highest fingers of the oaks shivered in its wake.

"Daughter of the tribe," Kim intoned, going on with it anyway. By God, the carriage ride alone back home had taken over a week; he wasn't going to let her off easily. "What dare you offer us?"

But his sister was distracted again. This time her head cocked, her chin lifted, as if she could hear something the others could not.

"Lia," muttered Rhys, the third oldest, from across the circle. "Pay attention. This is your part."

"I, daughter of the tribe," said Lia, her chin lowering obediently, "bring unto you . . . bring unto . . ."

The wrens flipped back and forth and back in their prison.

". . . this dire offering," hissed Joan, prompting.

"This dire offering."

"What is the offering?" Kim asked in his gravest voice, because it was ritual, and because he'd been practicing that voice for some while.

Lia lifted her hand to the cage. The birds pressed back against the far side.

"Heart and feathers," she said, but turned her head again—and then broke the circle by climbing to her feet.

"*Li-a*," said Audrey, exasperated.

"Doesn't anyone hear that?"

"No," answered Rhys. "And neither do you. Sit down, so we can finish this. It took me a bloody fortnight to catch those wrens."

"Wait," she said. "Listen. It's a carriage."

"It's not—" Kim began, but then he stopped, because, actually, he heard it too. Not just a carriage, a post chaise, rattling down the graveled drive from the distant manor house. He sent his sister a new, keener glance. "You heard that from here? It's at least a mile away."

Audrey had come to her feet as well, brushing out her skirts. "Who's expected?"

"No one." Rhys shrugged. "Just Zane, and he's leaving."

All three sisters swiveled to face him, and in that instant they looked remarkably alike.

"What?" he said, scowling.

"Zane?" echoed Joan. "Zane's here?"

"Not any longer. Apparently."

"Why didn't you tell us?"

"I beg your pardon. I didn't realize I was employed as your majordomo."

Lia dropped her shawl. It slipped to the ground with hardly a whisper, a white curving ghost against the brown leaves and dirt.

"Hold up." Kim caught her arm before her third step. "You can't leave. We've only just begun."

She glanced up at him but it was darker now, so he couldn't quite read her face. But he was irritated to have come so far for naught; he tightened his grip and gave her a shake.

"Oh, let her be," said Joan. "She's too young for this anyway. We all knew it."

"I did it younger than she," Kim countered.

"Yes, and you had something to prove, didn't you?" This from Audrey, his twin. "Eldest son, future Alpha of the tribe. You wanted to impress us." She lifted a shoulder, nonchalant. "Don't pucker up. I would have done the same if I were you. It was clever to think up a ritual."

Rhys sighed. "Might as well let her go, Kimber. The moment's gone. They're right, you know, she's just too young. She's *always* too young. And she hasn't shown any of the Gifts, anyway."

Beneath his hand, Lia twitched. But Audrey had reminded him of who he was, and

who he was someday going to be, and so Kim said, "You know what this means, Amalia. You won't be one of us, truly one of us, until the ritual is complete. Your Gifts won't come. Or if they do, they won't be as good."

"Yes," she said flatly. "I know."

She shook free of his grip, turned to the birdcage, and snapped open the door. There came a flurry of peeps and rustling; when she straightened again, there was a dark lump in her fist.

"To the *drákon*," Amalia said, and broke the wren's neck.

Her fingers opened. The little bird landed beside her shawl, one wing arced in an angel fan across the tassels.

"You have to do both," managed Rhys, into the sudden hush.

Without a word, Lia stuck her hand into the cage and retrieved the other wren.

Another rush of invisible wind sliced over them, clattering the leaves. She flung the second bird up after it, where it flapped and fluttered and skimmed off in a drunken line, vanishing into the night.

Lia shot a look at Kimber, chin tilted. "I suppose I'll only ever be half as good as you, after all," his little sister said, and with her skirts in her hands she pelted down the path that led back to Chasen Manor.

Changeling, Kim thought, watching her go. *Definitely*.

Once, years ago, Lia had asked her mother if she heard the song.

"The supper chime?" Rue Langford had asked, tucking her daughter into bed.

"No, Mama. The other song. The quiet one."

"The quiet one. The music box from your father?"

"No. The *other* song."

And Mama had gazed down at her with her lovely brown eyes, her head tilted, a smile on her lips. She and Papa were hosting a *fête* that evening for the members of the council and their wives. Her skirts were ivory and cream; she smelled of flowers and soap and the silvery dust of hair powder. She wore pearls that thrummed with a low, gentle melody, simple, like a hymn. Lia reached out and ran her fingers over the bracelet.

"I'm afraid I don't know what song you mean, beloved."

"That one . . ."

Audrey was already out of the nursery, but Joan was in the bed against the other wall, sulking because she wasn't yet old enough to attend the *fête*.

"She says she hears a song all the time," said Joan in a very bored, grown-up voice.

Mama's look sharpened. "What sort of song?"

"A quiet one. You know . . . like the wind in a meadow. Like the ocean."

Rue's expression relaxed. "Oh. Yes, I hear that sometimes too."

"You do?"

"I do. Nature plays a wonderful symphony for us."

"No, not *nature*. It's a *song*."

Rue placed the back of her fingers upon her daughter's forehead. Her skin felt very cool. "Can you hum it?"

"No."

"Does it bother you? Does it hurt your head?"

"No . . ."

"It's not even real," said Joan loudly in her bored voice. "If it was real, we'd all hear it. We can hear *everything*."

"It is real to your sister," answered Mama, firm, and looked back at Lia. "You must tell me if it ever starts to fret you. Come to me, and I'll fix it."

Lia sat up in her bed, wide-eyed, interested. Rue was powerful, the most powerful female of the tribe, but Lia had no idea her mother's Gifts were that strong.

"How, Mama?"

"Why, I'll love it away, just like this," said Rue, laughing as she caught Lia by the shoulders and pressed rose-petal kisses all over her cheeks.

That was how Amalia knew that her mother didn't believe her either.

When the dreams began to surface a few years after that, Lia didn't bother to tell anyone. The song, for all its persistence, held a certain sadness and distance that made it seem almost innocent. But there was nothing of innocence in the blind dreams. In them she was another person . . . older. Enigmatic. She woke from them flushed and panting, guilty and excited and miserable at once. She wouldn't share those feelings with anyone, not even her mother.

At first they were fragments, just voices and sentences that seemed strung together without reason. She could hear herself speaking in them, but what she said made no sense. She could hear the man's voice, but it was as though he was far away from her, talking through a rainstorm. She caught only snatches of words.

Yet the dreams had grown clearer. And clearer. And with them, a rising sense of danger, a warning that pushed down on her chest and prickled the hair on her arms.

Nothing truly terrible ever happened in the blind dreams. At the same time, she knew that somehow they meant everything terrible. She spoke of stealing and killing and the loss of her parents as if reciting a list for the village market. It was not pretend. But in that humming, welcome dark, Lia felt nothing wrong at all.

A few months past, in the gray morning hours of her fourteenth birthday, the dream had revealed for the first time who the man was.

Zane. Zane the Other, Zane the criminal. Zane, former apprentice of the Smoke Thief herself, now the tribe's hired hands and eyes and ears in the real world, the world beyond Darkfrith.

And tonight, even though she had run as fast as she could in her hoops and heels, she had missed his carriage. By the time she'd made it past the forest break and onto the front lawn, she couldn't even see the smudgy glow of its rear lanterns. There was only the faint squeak of metal and wood and the *clip-clop* of hooves fading off into the hills.

That—and the song. Thin and eerie and sweet, it beckoned from the farthest thread of the eastern horizon. It always beckoned.

Deliberately, she turned her back to it. It haunted her days and nights; it haunted her soul; and the fact that no one heard it but her was something Amalia never liked to consider.

She found herself gazing at the warm, handsome windows of Chasen Manor, set back against the forest and lawn like a perfect painting of country peace. At the figures moving inside, supper being laid, beds turned down, evening fires stoked, everything as ordinary as could be.

Something new flashed in the sky above her head, twisting, bright as a scythe with the rising moon; it dropped swiftly into the woods.

With her arms hugged to her chest, Lia watched it fall.

She'd be called in soon. She needed a plan.

From the Hardcover edition.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

German Montoya:

Do you have favorite book? When you have, what is your favorite's book? Book is very important thing for us to find out everything in the world. Each reserve has different aim or maybe goal; it means that reserve has different type. Some people truly feel enjoy to spend their time to read a book. They may be reading whatever they take because their hobby is actually reading a book. Consider the person who don't like reading a book? Sometime, man feel need book after they found difficult problem or maybe exercise. Well, probably you should have this *The Dream Thief (The Drakon, Book 2)*.

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