

KATHRYN BUTLER

The DreamKeeper ~ SAGA ~



The LAST KEEPER

“Faith, purpose, friendship, and hope. These themes and more draw young readers into a world where dreams come to life. Butler brings creative imagination and spiritual depth together in a way that keeps children engaged and curious. The larger-than-life storyline of the Dream Keeper Saga is worth daydreaming about at your desk and discussing with your family around the table.”

Gloria Furman, author, *Labor with Hope* and *A Tale of Two Kings*

“Where have all the good books gone? The ones that celebrate the beauty of light, instead of romanticizing the darkness? The ones where words are strung together so beautifully that grown-ups and children alike are captivated by the story as it unfolds? The ones where heroes do what’s right and villains are put in their place? Far too few books like these take up space on my children’s bookshelves, but as a mom I refuse to believe that all the great children’s literature was written in days gone by. That’s why I adore the Dream Keeper Saga, written by the tremendously talented Kathryn Butler. My sons have devoured these books and learned important lessons as they read. These new classics remind us all that there are still great stories worth telling.”

Erin Davis, author; podcaster; mom of four

“Kathryn Butler’s writing effortlessly draws readers into an imaginative, action-packed world of fantasy that is marked with clear allegorical themes of the truest story ever told. You will laugh and cry with the characters, all while being beautifully pointed to the gospel.”

Korrie Johnson, children’s book reviewer; Founder, Good Book Mom

“I want to know Pax. With each book, he becomes more compelling, and with him, the whole saga. Some series begin with their best tale, then try to muster up sequels. The Dream Keeper Saga gets better with each book. Kathryn Butler wins our trust with her characters, engaging turns, and deeply Christian themes. I’m excited to add the Dream Keeper Saga to our family canon.”

David Mathis, Senior Teacher and Executive Editor, desiringGod.org;
Pastor, Cities Church, Saint Paul, Minnesota; author, *Habits of Grace*

“Two of my favorite things about the Dream Keeper Saga are the character Pax and the almost Mad-Libs-esque imaginative flow, appropriate (even necessary) to a world redeemed from humanity’s collective dreams.”

James D. Witmer, author, *A Year in the Big Old Garden*; *Beside the Pond*; and *The Strange New Dog*

The LAST KEEPER

The Dream Keeper Saga

The Dragon and the Stone

The Prince and the Blight

Lost in the Caverns

The Quest for the Guardians

The Last Keeper

The **DreamKeeper** ~SAGA~

The LAST KEEPER

Kathryn Butler

 **CROSSWAY®**
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

The Last Keeper

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To Jack, Christie, and dream keepers everywhere.

Know he is making all things new.

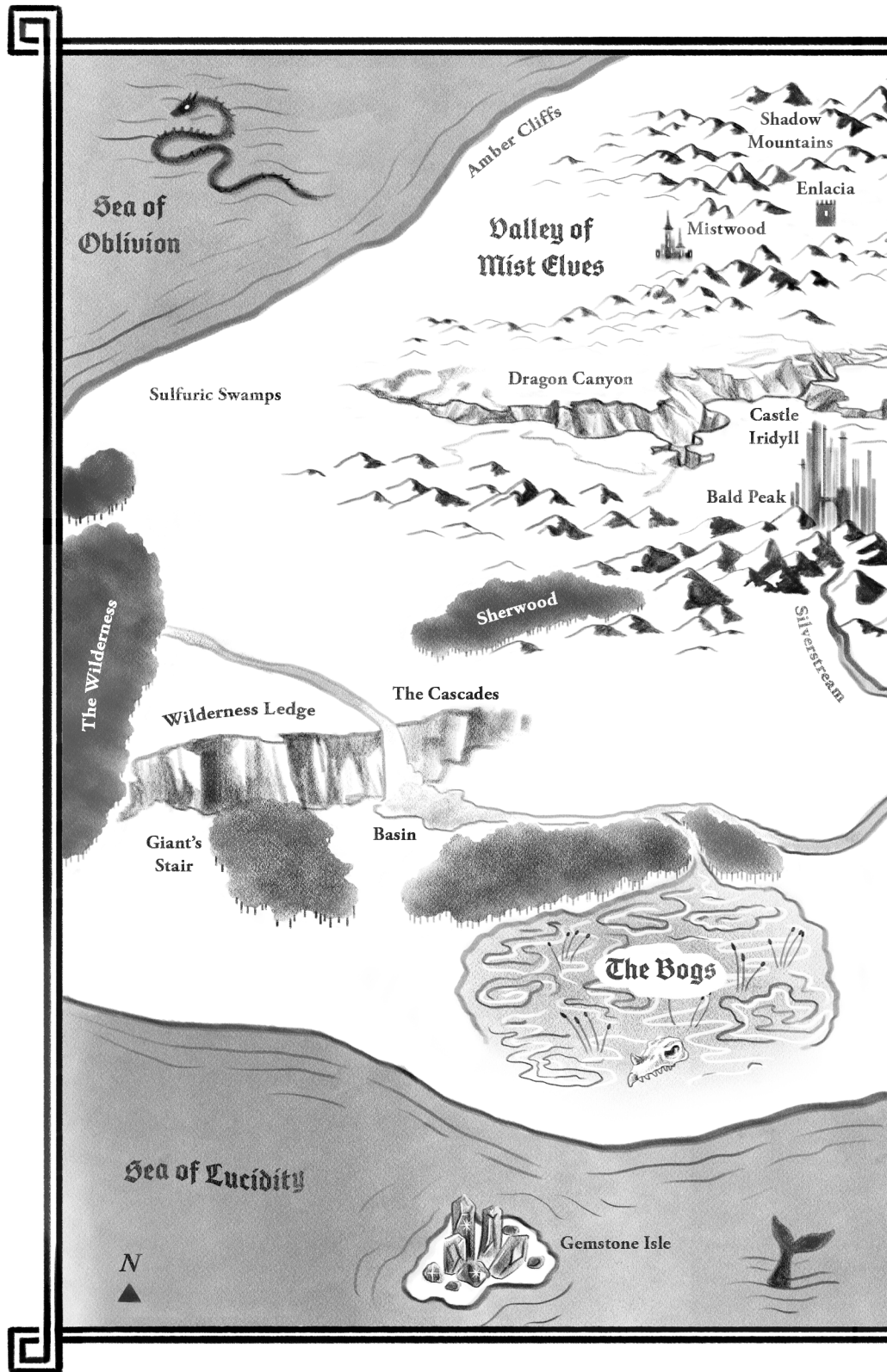
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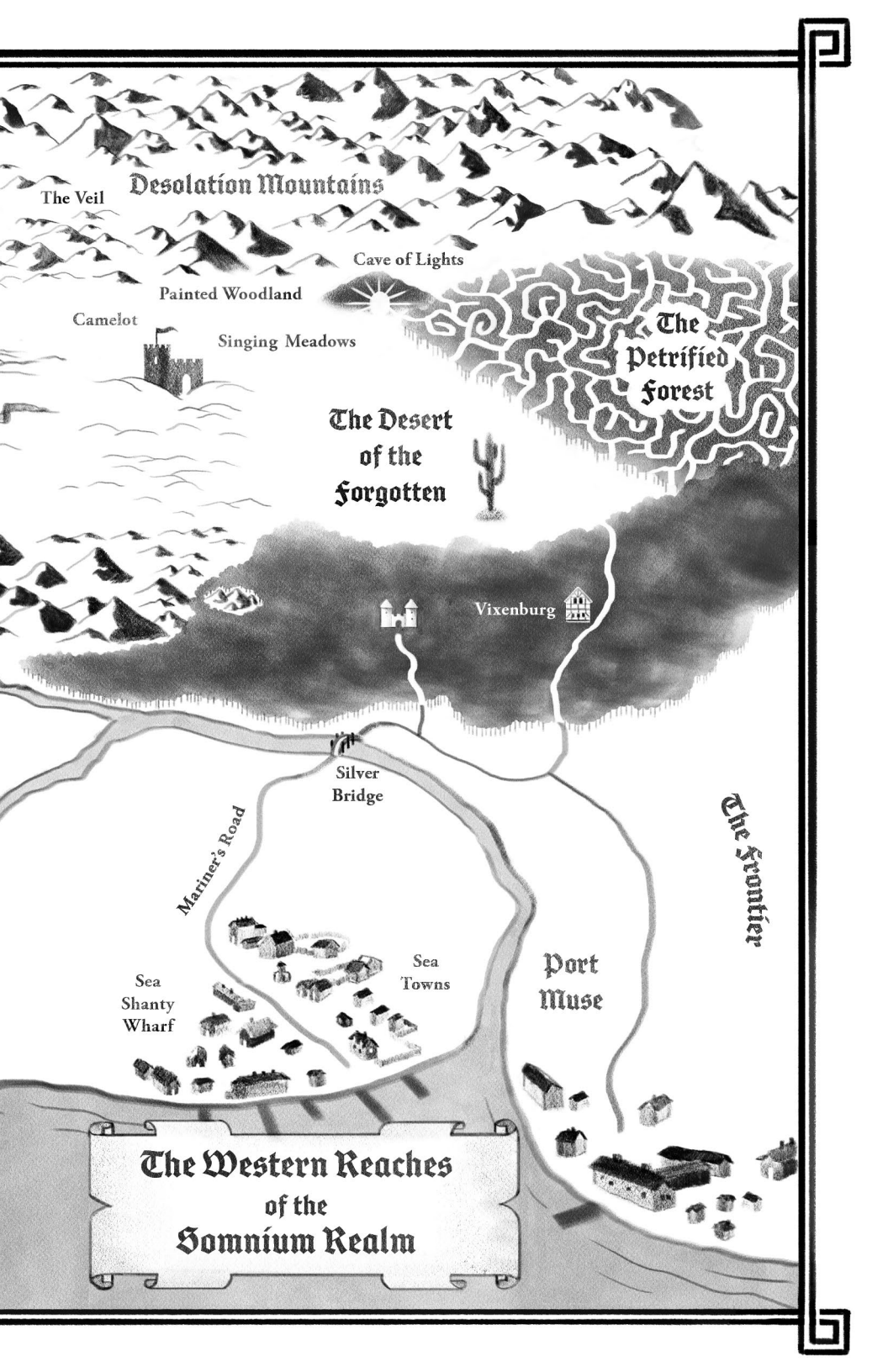
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Camelot

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Silver
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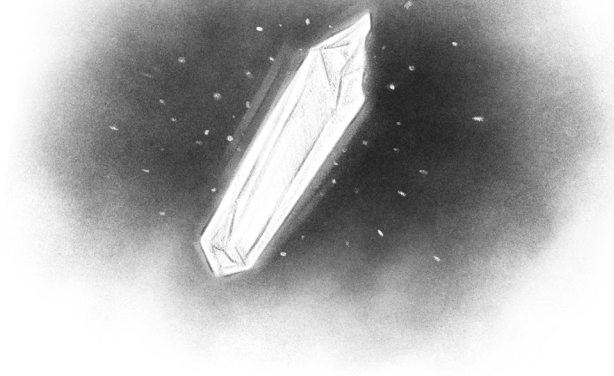
Sea
Shanty
Wharf

Sea
Towns

Port
Muse

The Frontier

The Western Reaches
of the
Somnium Realm



CHAPTER 1

Darkness Awakens

He awoke to darkness.

He lay on his back and stared into a void. Blinking several times cleared the grit from his eyes but didn't sharpen his vision. In the silence and the dark, he struggled to remember where he was, how he'd arrived there—even his own name.

Oddly, he wasn't afraid. The gloom felt like a worn, unwashed cloak dragging about his shoulders, its damp and musty scent repulsive, but the weave one he'd memorized. He knew the darkness even as he despised it.

His fingers searched the ground beneath him, and a carpet of dust gave way beneath his hands to reveal cold rock. As he

hoisted himself upright, his limbs seized up with pain and sparks of color swam before his otherwise sightless eyes. He opened his mouth to moan, but no sound issued from his gummy lips. His throat felt like crumbling paper, as parched as if he'd drunk his fill from desert sands.

Desert. Hatred surged up from within him like a geyser, and he gripped the jagged rock. "Curse them!" he shouted into the emptiness. His voice, forced through stiff vocal cords, came out as a rasp. The growl that should have rumbled low in his throat instead wheezed out like a last gasp for breath, and as it petered away, cold determination pulsed within him like a heartbeat. A single thought etched across his mind: *I will have vengeance.*

He crawled to his feet, ignoring a second wave of pain that locked his joints, and he searched the shadows for some inkling of form, some pale whisper of light to hint at his whereabouts. Instead, all was lightless and shapeless and stifling. The longer he strained his vision, the more his head throbbed and the hotter his anger burned. He didn't remember who had condemned him to this underworld, or why, but he knew he hated them.

He stretched one trembling arm in front of him, and his twitching fingers groped only empty air. He flailed to the side, and his palm knocked against damp rock. The wall of a cave? Or a tunnel? A tomb? Hatred for his nameless, faceless enemy propelled his legs forward, as a steam engine prods the sluggish gears of a locomotive. "I will find you," he hissed. With one hand

planted on the rock wall and the other extended with his fingers splayed wide, he plunged ahead into the darkness.

Minutes stretched into hours, hours stretched into days, and soon time itself seemed like a dream, a long-lost memory he couldn't grasp. The clammy rock anchored him in space for a while, but eventually his palm slipped and he stumbled through the abyss without mooring. As he trudged and the blackness gathered around him like muck from a bog, he cursed the day of his birth and wailed as one lost. Still, on he wandered, his pale green eyes glowing in the darkness like ghostly moons.

Images haunted him. He remembered white spires gleaming like icicles against a cragged mountain. A court of nobles in white robes and silver circlets. A young girl with smoke-dark eyes and hair like drifting snow. He saw green fire, heard the clink of amulets as he walked. Every so often he would hear the sound of his own name, but before he could latch onto the word, it would vanish like a wisp of smoke.

On and on he trudged. His fingers, icy from the long days in the deep dark, toyed with a broken chain at his neck and picked at a tattered cloak at his shoulders, both vestiges of who he once was. His crumbling leather boots had split at the seams, and as he tromped over rock and through sand, every so often he'd drop into the dust to rub the blisters welling on his soles. Over time his stomach twisted with emptiness, and in a fog of starvation he swooned and collapsed to his knees. When he could stand his hunger no longer, he scooped handfuls of dust from the ground

and feasted upon the earth, crunching sand grains between his teeth and filling his belly with dirt.

Still, his anger smoldered. "I will have vengeance. I *must* have vengeance!" he finally cried out, puffing out dust from his cracked lips. "Crush them. Ruin them. Curse them!"

As if in reply, a light flickered in the distance.

He squeezed his eyes shut, convinced they deceived him in the endless night. Yet when he opened them and peered into the darkness, the light still glowed. Faint. Icy blue. Wavering, like a candle flame clinging to life in a breeze.

At the sight of the glimmer, something turned over in his mind like an ancient, forgotten lock clicking open. He *knew* this light. And he knew that he desired it above all things—more than the sunlight, more than vengeance, even more than his own life.

He quickened his pace. *I must have it.*

His right boot tore away completely, and he hobbled across the rock floor. Still, he stumbled forward. The distant gleam burned in his pale eyes.

It's mine.

The light shined just feet ahead. Too frantic to waste a moment, he leapt through the air and landed chest-first onto a pile of rocks. The impact stole his breath, but still he scrambled, clawing at stones, his eyes wild. Finally, he snatched up the source of the light from among the rocks and lifted it between two pale, trembling fingers. His eyes, steeped in shadows for so long, watered from the glare.

It was a fragment of a turquoise crystal, a pale fire glowing at its core.

The stone tingled in his hands, and its surface emitted a cool, life-giving balm. He clasped the crystal to his heart, then rolled onto his back and filled the cavern with wild laughter. "I have it!" he cried. "I have it! All will be mine!"

As the echo of his words died away, a burst of hot wind suddenly rushed down the tunnel, blasting his face and pelting him with gravel. His fist instinctively closed around the crystal, and he bolted upright as another gust struck him, whipping his grimy hair away from his face. The wind smelled rank, like the breath of a foul beast just stirred from slumber. "Who's there?" he shouted.

The wind died down, as if his voice had frightened it away. He held his breath, listened, and waited.

Nothing.

He strained his eyes but saw no movement, light, or hint of life. Only the blue light of the stone shone through his closed fist, casting a haunting aura throughout the cavern like moonlight on black water. Its glow illuminated the sharp stalactites that hung from the cave ceiling like gleaming teeth. Otherwise, all was still and lonely and silent.

He snickered to himself, shrugged off his last shred of unease, and opened his palm to leer at his treasure.

The wind blasted again, this time with the howl of a banshee at its back. At the sound, ice coursed through his veins and he

backed away, his fist still closed around the stone and his eyes frantically searching the inky shadows. By the cold light of the crystal he glimpsed something dark and amorphous, like a living, writhing storm cloud billowing down the passage toward him.

He turned to run, but in his fright he careened straight into the rock wall. When he spun around, the specter was upon him, enveloping him in the scent of decay. Another howl filled his ears, and he realized that the sound now gurgled from his own throat, his voice anguished and sharp with a malice he didn't recognize.

He fell as if dead. Hours passed. Although his heartbeat still thudded and shallow breath occasionally seeped into his lungs, he neither stirred nor dreamed. Finally, he awoke, his chest burning and his fingers still closed around the crystal wedged in his palm. When he creaked to a stand, he opened eyes no longer pale green but red, as if plucked from the fiery depths of the earth.

We will make her pay, a raspy voice spoke into his mind. You will be her ruin. But first, you must serve me. You must open the way.

Suddenly, despite the darkness, he could see the cave floor strewn with sand and debris. The crystal shard's glow intensified like a fallen star ablaze in his hand. As his black heart raced with anticipation, a terrible pain seared within his mind and coursed down his arms. In the next instant, an aura of blue flame erupted from the stone, struck the cave wall in front of him, and rent the rock asunder. A tunnel yawned open, blue veins of lightning crackling across its entrance. Then, a thousand moans sounded

around him as shadows sped past, flew through the opening, and disappeared into the unknown.

He paid them no attention. His thoughts revolved around the one whom he sought, the one whose image he now remembered: the girl on the mesa, her hands uplifted, cords of light flying from her palms.

