

Curse of the Dragon Shadow

Book 1 of the Shadow Dragon Saga

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Complete summary including spoilers.



Riony Eyfarr (18) lives in the Undercity with her little sister, Lyrrin (8).

The underground, abandoned Alderkin ruins have been taken over by human refugees hiding from dangers in the world above, where dragonlords would enslave them or roaming undead raised by the shadow dragon threaten their lives.

Riony dreams of becoming a Delver, a respected and high-paying job, but Delvers come from prestigious families, and Riony struggles against the elitism that blocks her path.

One day, she finds Lyrrin in a fight with Benjin, the arrogant brother of two delvers, Aishena and Yoskar. They mock Lyrrin and throw Riony's treasured acorn pendant away, but she manages to recover it afterward.

Inside, hidden in the acorn, is a tiny bottle of unicorn blood—a rare, precious substance. The vial is scratched with decorative markings by Lyrrin.

Riony tells Lyrrin to avoid trouble and kid-snatchers as she leaves for a risky trip to gather herbs from the mountains above. Lyrrin, who enjoys keeping pets, has a young cave otter called Sir Butterfur Spelunkychunks to keep her company.

On her way out of the mountain tunnels, Riony discovers a magical Alderkin athame (crystal dagger) with a cutting rune but it's no longer working. She puts it in her backpack anyway.

In the mountains, Riony follows a secret path she's discovered behind a frozen waterfall, where warm rocks let herbs grow even above the snowline.

While gathering supplies, she glimpses a wolf and then a rare wild dragon. Chased by the dragon, she falls into a crevasse and breaks her arm. She considers using the unicorn blood for healing but resists, saving it for true emergencies.

Using her knowledge of herbs, she poisons herself to numb her body enough to escape the crevasse. Fighting through pain and delirium, she stumbles into an ice cave with dragon eggs before collapsing.

It seems as though the wolf helps her back into the mountain tunnels and speaks to her with a voice from her past, warning her away.

Delvers find Riony unconscious in the tunnels and bring her home. During her fevered recovery, she mentions the dragon eggs, and word spreads. Aishena and Yoskar are eager to destroy the eggs, worried a dragon nest might bring attention to them.

Riony, feeling protective of the eggs, particularly because Lyrrin is horrified at the idea of hurting baby creatures, decides to try to stop them.

Despite her injuries, she chases after the delvers but is too late. She finds the nest destroyed, except for one egg with an intact membrane and a faint heartbeat.

Unable to let the last dragon egg die, Riony uses the magical healing unicorn blood on it. The blood reacts, causing the dragon embryo to hatch into a strange hybrid of dragon and unicorn.

But the mother dragon returns, furious at the destruction of her nest, and rejects the altered newborn. She attacks Riony, mortally wounding her as the newborn creature hides from the dragon's rage.

Driven by the ambition to tame a dragon, Kessara Heithorn (17), on her riding wolf Griskin, has been staking out the cave of a mother dragon, waiting for the right moment to claim one of her eggs.

But everything changes when she hears the dragon's piercing screams and watches it fly off, far over the horizon. Alarmed, Kess rushes to the cave, where she finds the eggs smashed and Riony lying near death among the wreckage.

Kess and Riony have a history together, with Kess once being Riony's master, but haven't seen each other in years.

Furious, Kess assumes Riony has destroyed the eggs, ruining her long-awaited chance to tame a dragon. Resentful, Kess leaves Riony to die, regretting her earlier act of kindness in saving her life by carrying her back into the caves after finding her injured.

Left alone, Riony is on the brink of death as the last surviving hatchling approaches her for comfort. The hatchling's magical blood heals Riony's wounds, and in that moment, the two forge a bond that imprints the creature on Riony as its "mother."

Realizing the creature's incredible potential and the implications of unicorn blood, Riony resolves to care for it as she once did for Lyrrin, vowing to protect the newborn from those who would exploit it. It will be called Dracuni.

Returning to the underground, Riony hides the unidragon, and goes in search of Lyrrin, only to discover that she, the delver's brother Benjin, and a number of other orphaned children are missing.

She learns that slavers have taken the children, and, along with Aishena, Yoskar, and the orphanage worker Zade, she forms an uneasy alliance to rescue them.

Concealing Dracuni in her pack, Riony sets off with the group, taking Lyrrin's pet cave otter along to both keep the unidragon warm and for a potential decoy.

Leaving the relative safety of the underground, the group ventures into the harsh aboveground world. Their journey is haunted by burnt landscapes—evidence of dragonlords' battles against undead creatures, revenants.

Riony's return to the surface brings back memories of her childhood as a slave to the Heithorns and her family's harrowing escape. She is driven to follow a trail of subtle marks she believes Lyrrin left, despite the delvers' doubts.

As they track the slavers, tensions rise. Riony periodically stops to check on Dracuni, whose hunger and fear begin to seep into her mind.

These delays frustrate her companions, but just as Zade warns them to stay together, they stumble upon slavers being attacked by a revenant.

Aishena seems to defeat the revenant, but it doesn't stay dead after burning as it should and it injures her ankle.

They escape and find shelter in an abandoned Alderkin shrine that the chasing revenant seems magically prevented from entering.

Riony has seen shrines like it before, with standing stones around the shrine and a circular slice of large geode within it, in her time aboveground, but this one feels different, marked by a strange energy.

Though Riony briefly considers using Dracuni's blood to heal Aishena, she decides to keep the creature's abilities a secret for now.

Instead, they set up camp to let Aishena recover, sharing uneasy stories about their pasts in slavery, the dragonlords' power, and the oppressive weight of life underground.

That night, Riony remembers Lyrrin's birth. Riony (at age ten) was a midwife in training with her mother, and was present when a mysterious dragonlord woman known only as "the guest" gave birth. The baby was born with blue hair and strange hands.

Riony remembers the brutal order to kill the baby due to her differences. Riony defended the baby, killing the guard ordered to kill them, and stealing his sword and the baby before escaping slavery with her parents. Riony has felt responsible for Lyrrin ever since.

The next day they continue toward the slaver camp, spotting it from a look out then reaching a precarious rope bridge that spans a mountain pass. Suddenly, Kess appears, blocking their path.

Recognizing Riony, Kess demands to know how she survived after being left to die. Desperate for help, Riony offers Kess the truth in exchange for her assistance in rescuing the children, acknowledging that Kess's experience aboveground is invaluable.

Kess considers the offer, and for a moment, it seems she might agree to join them.

When Riony reveals her survival was due to a family heirloom containing unicorn blood, Kess seems skeptical. Disregarding her earlier agreement to help, Kess destroys the bridge, leaving them stranded.

Zade reveals he knows a secret trail down the cliffside that leads directly to the slaver camp. As they approach the camp, Riony sees Lyrrin using her sharp nails to cut her way out of her cage.

Kess is also in the camp talking to the slavers, and Riony worries she is warning them of their approach. They need to act fast.

But Zade suddenly whistles, signalling the slavers he had pre-warned of their arrival with a signal from the lookout, and they're ambushed.

To Riony's horror, Zade reveals his true allegiance: he's been trading children to slavers, believing he's saving them by bringing them to "safety" in the cities. He's also been planning to sell the delver siblings as his last, big score to secure a high position among dragonlords.

Aishena, Yoskar, and Benjin are revealed to be Hjelzahns, Dragon King heirs, runaway from home with a bounty on them from their mother.

Riony and the delver siblings are overwhelmed, bound, and stripped of their weapons. The slavers consider what to do with Riony since she's not part of the bounty, when they notice movement in her pack.

Dracuni stirs, and Kess, recognizing the creature's cry as a possible dragon, attempts to barter for Riony, offering a vial of unicorn blood. The slavers accept, but Kess's actions spark Riony's rage—Kess must have had the blood earlier and could have saved her.

Before Kess can leave with Riony, the slavers, greedy for more, suspect Kess has additional wealth to steal. In the ensuing struggle, they overpower her and her wolf, revealing that Kess cannot walk on her own.

Riony, chained to a cart nearby, feels a flash of anger at Kess's humiliation but remains focused on Dracuni, whose fear she senses. The slavers take Riony's backpack and are about to uncover Dracuni when an ominous shadow darkens the camp.

The feared Shadow Dragon arrives, calling to life revenants—undead human and animal corpses that rise to attack. The camp descends into chaos as Riony, still chained, fights off nearby revenants beside Aishena and Yoskar.

Riony is determined to escape, but she's torn between going to Dracuni or her sister. When her cart is overturned by a rampaging revenant, Aishena and Yoskar manage to escape their bonds with Riony's help, but abandon Riony, still chained, in favor of going to their brother's aid.

Riony manages to inch closer to Dracuni. She is briefly relieved when she sees Lyrrin, escaping her cage, is able to free other children, and Riony finally reaches her backpack with Dracuni.

Dragonriders arrive, swooping in to burn the undead, turning the battle in favor of the slavers but turning most of the camp into a burning mess. The slavers round up the children amidst the chaos, and Zade captures Lyrrin, calling her a "freak" and injuring her in the scuffle.

Riony is anguished over not reaching Lyrrin sooner, but is stuck protecting herself and Dracuni from revenants and dragonfire.

Almost at her end, Dracuni draws Riony's attention to the cutting athame in her pack, now mysteriously recharged, and Riony is able to cut herself free.

Reclaiming her pack with Dracuni, she watches as the Shadow Dragon calls to raise the dead again, bringing the burned undead back to life a second time with new, ash-like bodies, showing signs that the Shadow Dragon's curse is worsening.

Riony sees Kess crawling toward her trapped wolf and, driven by an instinct to help, frees the wolf before rushing to Lyrrin's cage, which a dragonrider lifts into the air.

Zade, clinging to the cage, fights Riony, but he falls to the ground, overtaken by undead. High above, Riony and Lyrrin have no choice but to jump, landing safely in a taut wall of a tent left by the slavers. Unsure if the rescue was Kess's doing, Riony grabs her sword and flees with Lyrrin.

After escaping, Riony and Lyrrin rest briefly and Riony reveals Dracuni to her sister, worried the unidragon still hasn't eaten. Lyrrin knows how to feed the creature, and Riony is relieved to have both her charges safe with her.

Soon after, Aishena and her siblings reappear, expressing relief at seeing them safe. Though Riony is upset they left her behind, she is grateful they were able to save many of the other children. With a new respect for each other, they begin the trek back to their underground city.

Meanwhile, Kess, watching from the shadows, has her suspicions confirmed that Riony has a live dragon hatchling with her, and bides her time, ready to make her move to take it.

Back home, Riony and Lyrrin keep Draconi in their small home under their protective watch. Riony has passed delver trials and has a better future to look forward to. Yet Riony is uneasy, knowing the unidragon's rapid growth poses both a new responsibility and a grave danger. Her goal to remain safe and hidden in the underground city feels more fragile than ever.



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