



**RUNES OF  
THE LAKE**

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## *Chapter 1*

# *Calming Waves*

The warm waves were softly brushing against my chin as I floated in the shallow water of the lake. The smooth stone I was resting my head on was nice and cool, and the feeling of my body sinking and floating in rhythm with my breathing was doing its best to lull me to sleep.

It was a nice sunny day with just the perfect amount of clouds that offered momentary breaks from the heat. Especially perfect for me who loves to just look at the clouds and their slow sailing across

the sky. Their shapes were so varied and I'd let my imagination run wild, forming stories around them. There was a wolf chasing a turtle while two bunnies danced around each other. Simple joys of life.

It had been a few weeks since the summer vacation began and I'm all for it. I was already slightly excited for the next fall however, as I'll be starting my first year in high school. I applied to a couple and got into my first choice which was the same one my big brother had been attending. I had no idea how he had managed to get high enough grades to get into the school as he never seemed to be reading or doing any school work.

I raised my head a little, turning my gaze to the opposite shore and the cabin that was resting there. I could see my aunt's red car in the yard. My mom didn't seem too happy about her being in the cabin this summer but I couldn't tell for sure. There had been an incident at the cabin last winter and my brother had gone missing.<sup>1</sup> My parents still got ex-

<sup>1</sup> *To find out more, read the story "Stars of the Lake".*

cited every time the phone rang, hopeful that someone would have found their son. I missed him but didn't want to think about it today.

With my blissful mood now ruined, I decided to get up from the water. My body felt heavy after so much floating and the little stones below water hurt my bare feet. There was a nice beach with soft sand not too far from here but I didn't feel like seeing other people today. Not to mention the sand gets in my hair and it's a pain to wash off. I tried to dry my hair with a towel with some success and by the time I was done with my hair, the warm summer wind and sun had already dried my body.

The back of my head was still feeling wet though. One of the many downsides of having such a long hair, I suppose. I never manage to dry it properly without a hairdryer. It didn't matter anyways since I'd be taking a shower soon enough anyways. I walked up the hill back to my house. My mother seemed to be tending her little garden behind the house. She seemed to spend a lot of time there these days. I waved my hand at her before going in but she

didn't notice, as she was too absorbed in watering some strange looking flower.

The house was nice and cool. Dad had finally given in last summer and bought us an air conditioner. I walked to the kitchen and looked out of the window, seeing only one car in the carage. While mom was spending all her time in the garden, dad was spending all his time at his work. I suppose everyone has different ways to cope.

I opened the fridge and poured myself a cup of iced tea, annoyed that we had no ready ice cubes in the freezer. Fridge temperature was going to be as cool as my drink would get. Searching the drawers for a long while, I finally managed to find a pack of straws. We had run out of the old plastic straws, the type that are no longer sold because they were bad for the environment. The paper ones weren't really any worse to use... unless you happened to be someone like me who forgets her drink on the table for hours. I took an extra straw I could use later if I were to do that again.

I walked up the stairs to my room, trying to be

careful not to spill any of my drink. I was successful at this and placed the glass on my table next to the pile of fliers advertising a swimming school. After my skating school had been such a big success, I had planned a swimming school as well. In the end it didn't happen after all as I felt I shouldn't bother my parents too much with it. Unlike my skating school, it would have required an adult for supervising, to make sure no kid would drown. Not worth the effort.

I picked up the "Do not disturb" sign and went to put it on my door before locking it. These days without it my parents would be knocking on my door relentlessly, not giving me a moment's peace. I wasn't sure if it was them being more needy now or if it was just me getting all of the attention that was previously divided between my brother and me.

I opened my laptop to browse through some reddit memes and sent some messages to my friends. They were planning a trip to the city in a few days, and my notifications were full of their spam messages asking whether I'd be joining them. Shopping seemed like fun as I did need a couple new clothes fit for the

hot summer weather so I agreed. The iced tea tasted heavenly. This was truly a good day.

My hair was still moist and it was starting to annoy me so I got up and picked up a hairdryer. I brushed my hair over one shoulder with my hand but as I did so, my hand touched something slimy. Before I had time to react to the gross feeling, I felt a sudden sharp pain in the back of my head and everything went black.



## *Chapter 2*

# *Above the Waters*

When I regained my consciousness, the sun was already near the horizon. What time was it? I tried to move my gaze towards the clock on my wall but nothing happened. I kept staring at my computer screen. There was a map of the nearby area open, and my eyes were fixed on the lake. Horror only started setting in when my eyes started scanning the waterways.

I couldn't move. I had had something similar before, mind waking up before my body did but this

was different. I wasn't able to even move my eyes but my eyes and body were still moving. Someone was moving them, just not me. My heart was starting to beat faster and faster and that's when my body suddenly moved its attention away from the map. I stared at my shaking hands. Something moved at the back of my neck, something slimy and gross. I hadn't noticed it earlier as my whole head seemed a bit numb, as if I had got some local anaesthesia or something. I could feel it digging into my flesh, crawling beneath my skin. I tried to scream but my body wasn't responding.

After what felt like an eternity, it finally stopped wriggling. My hands had stopped shaking and my heart was beating normally again. Yet I was still in panic, only now I didn't even have effect on my own heartbeat. I had to calm down and try to figure out something. Maybe mom and dad could help me, take me to hospital.

It made some sense at least. Whatever this thing was, it must have had attached itself to me when I was resting in the water. It sickened me that what

I had later mistaken for a patch of wet hair was in reality this... thing. Clinging to my back.

It suddenly made me get up. My hands were fumbling with the door for a little while, did it not know how to unlock it? Then how did it know how to use internet and my computer? It paused and I felt as if a needle had pierced my left eye, going all the way through my skull. It then took the key from my pocket and unlocked the door. So this is how it learned, somehow extracting what it needs from my brain.

It made me walk to the bathroom and I could see in mirror a huge smile appearing on my face as it saw the bathtub. Did it want a bath? My hands opened the faucet and got some water, dripping it on the thing on my neck. It wriggled a bit again, making me want to throw up. I couldn't see it from the mirror which I was glad for.

Next stop was the kitchen, although it did stop momentarily at the door that leads to my parents' room. I tried crying for help but it obviously didn't do a thing. If anything, the creature seemed amused by

my efforts, if it was even aware of them. Something felt weird in my ears and I could suddenly hear my own blood flowing. I could hear someone breathing in my parents' room. Only one of them was there. My mom, judging by the lack of snoring. My legs started moving again and my hearing returned to normal.

In the kitchen the creature made me pick up all kinds of objects, twisting and bending them. It seemed especially interested in knives and kept bending them until they broke. Finally it found something it seemed to like. A sharp and sturdy knife that didn't break even when my hands bent it so hard it hurt.

When my body started walking back towards the room where my mom was sleeping, I realized what the knife was for. I tried my best to stop it but despite my best efforts, it opened the door and walked to the bed. My mom seemed so peaceful, sleeping there. The usual worry that seemed to have her in its hold since the winter wasn't visible. My hand raised the knife. In my head I was crying and screaming. Suddenly, as if all my efforts were finally bearing fruit,

my hand stopped. The knife hovering just above her throat.

Despair grasped me as I realized it was not I who had stopped the knife. I could see a twisted smile on my face, reflected from the knife's blade. My hand put down the knife next to the bed and with a sudden movement my hands grabbed her by the throat. She woke up and tried to get me off her. I didn't know my body had this much strength. I could feel all of it, my own hands strangling her. The desperate kicking and hitting, the collapsing windpipe. I didn't want this, I wanted it to stop. And then it did. I looked into her eyes as the life disappeared from her and the fighting ceased.

I couldn't cry a single tear. There was only a big smile on my face as I grabbed the knife again. My hands carved off a piece of her flesh and the creature put it into my mouth. The taste of blood filled my mouth and I felt my teeth grind the raw flesh. The creature seemed satisfied with the taste and started carving deep cuts into my mother's flesh. There was another sting in my head, and the horrible feelings

left my mind, calming me. Unlike all the previous movements of this creature, these seemed very careful. This was clearly important enough for it to force me to calm down. The cuts formed strange symbols that didn't resemble any writing systems I knew of. It might have not even been writing for all I knew, but it seemed to have some meaning to it. I didn't feel anything looking at them, but my hairs still rose up. It was as if it wasn't my mind but my body that recognised them, remembering some horror from ages past, before humans even evolved to what we are today. I simply wanted to run.

Suddenly the room's door opened, my dad standing there, returned from late night at work. The suitcase he had been carrying began to fall as he saw what was in the room. I could imagine it. Me above the corpse of my mother with a knife in hand and blood on my madly grinning teeth. My body leapt towards him faster than I would have thought possible. In one clean swing the knife cut his throat. The suitcase hit the floor and my father's corpse soon followed. Both of my parents were now gone. By my

own hand.

After nearly two hours of careful carving of runes and swirls on the bodies of my parents, the creature was finally done. I was feeling numb. My hands hurt from all the effort and my mind was in pieces. I picked up my father's corpse and started dragging it towards the backdoor. No, not me. It. It picked up the corpse. This wasn't me. I didn't do this. Could I have prevented this if I had tried harder?

I had noticed earlier that the cuts on my father didn't bleed, unlike the cuts that had been made on my mother. Even the severed jugulars hadn't bled at all. Weird, but tells me nothing. Somehow I managed to drag him outside and as I was crouching over him, something suddenly hit me in the back and I fell over. My body turned with a quick motion and I saw the neighbour's goat. He was a regular visitor at our house, constantly escaping his enclosure. He really liked munching on the clothes we would put drying in the yard.

The creature didn't seem to like the goat at all, swinging the knife at him and hissing but the goat

didn't seem to back down, instead getting ready for another attack. Had the goat aimed for the creature? I then heard a strange gurgling sound from the water behind me, and that sent the goat running for its life.

When it was sure the threat was gone, the creature turned my body towards the water and I saw a large humanoid creature rising from it. Its limbs seemed to have too many joints and they bent in strange ways. Somehow, in a disturbing manner, its face resembled that of human's. It was green, the eyes were too far apart and bulging and its skin was dripping as if it was made of melting wax. From its throat emanated indescribable gurgling. For the first time since I had lost consciousness, I had some control over my body. A little twitch away from the large creature, a result of the strongest need to flee I've ever felt. Even whatever the slimy thing on my neck had done to me didn't completely numb that feeling.

The large creature picked up my father's corpse and carried it into the lake, vanishing beneath the surface. I walked after them, deeper and deeper into the water, until the I was completely submerged.



### *Chapter 3*

# *Within the Song*

We kept swimming for a while. Somehow even with my lungs filled with water I wasn't passing out. Did the creature somehow provide me with oxygen or what was going on? We came to a small crack at the bottom of the lake, barely visible and covered in some plants. Through it we swam a little while until we reached a cavern.

It was huge. A whole city, or at least ruins of one, right here beneath the lake. Despite the horrors I had gone through and the situation I was in, I couldn't

help but be in awe of the place. The buildings were made of some kind of stone, colour of which seemed to shift between green and blue. It made me strangely dizzy. I couldn't tell where one building began and another ended, and soon after I wasn't even sure which way was up and which was down.

As we were swimming towards the center of the city where I could see a circular clearing with no buildings on it apart from a single large obelisk in the middle, I noticed that the floor of the cavern was shaped like a sphere, with a flat ceiling cutting the sphere shape in half. The buildings were mostly following the shape of the cavern floor, reaching further up closer to the cavern's walls they got. I didn't see any lights but the stone the place was built of seemed to glow somehow. I could also see a lot of creatures swimming around in the city but they were too far away to make out any details. Something I was more than okay with.

We were getting close to the obelisk when I started hearing faint music or singing. It was nothing like anything I had ever heard before but somehow re-

mind me of when I used to go to church as a kid. It had the similar importance to it as church music, something above the normal everyday life. Something holy. It had no words or at least none I could recognise, but it brought to my mind images of times long gone and places far beyond human realm of understanding. The song was faintly coming from the obelisk, greatly strengthened while resonating throughout the city.

My admiration came to an end when we finally stopped. My father was placed on a stone slab that stood before the obelisk. It made me think of some cult scenes I had seen in some American TV shows. Suddenly there was pain in the back of my head again and I could feel the creature withdrawing. I fell to the floor as it left my skin and I was finally able to see it. It looked a bit like an octopus but clearly wasn't one. In its tentacles there seemed to be claws or spikes that grew and vanished and its shape changed and shifted as it swam. It had no eyes and no mouth, I suppose it simply borrowed those from others when needed. I wanted to kill it, make it pay for what it

did. But I was tired, so very tired. The city around me started fading and as the obelisk sang to me its beautiful song, the sweet oblivion of sleep took me.

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I dreamed of ancient civilizations ruled by gods, now long forgotten. Beneath the red skies and purple waters they lived, lost in endless bliss. They asked me to join their dance, to be one of them, one of their family. I dreamed of a great journey, an exodus, and many discoveries, of countless worlds and homes. I dreamed of my lost brother, whose teeth were now jewellery and whose bones held up the sky. I dreamed of my mother and father, who now were dead. I could still hear her song, reminding me of the aeons we spent together...

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As I woke up from my dream, the things I had seen quickly faded from my mind. I didn't have the luxury of thinking that the events of the day were all a dream, as the first thing I saw was the unnatural green stone floor. I was still in the city, but the creatures that had brought me here against my will were nowhere to be seen. I could escape.

I started swimming away as fast as I could, trying to remember the direction we had entered the city from. Events of the day were all a haze, as if I had been drugged. I suppose I probably was. I swam and swam, away from the obelisk and towards freedom. Until I was facing the obelisk.

When had I turned back? The song was all around me now, enfolding me in its symphony. I tried swimming away again but the song got stronger and I found myself once more facing the obelisk. The song was calling me. Is this why they had let me go free? Because they knew I couldn't escape the song?

I noticed myself getting closer and closer to the obelisk. No matter how many times I'd turn and try to get away, I'd find myself even closer to it than before.

Before I knew it, I was slowly walking towards it. I tried to turn back again but couldn't. My arms were reaching towards the obelisk and the song as if I was a baby again, trying to get my mom to pick me up. My mom. Dad. He was right next to me on the altar. I could see him in the corner of my eye. The song is beautiful. I wanted to go to him, to apologize for what I did. The song is calling me. Maybe he could still be alive! Why resist? After all there was no blood. Surrender to it. Maybe.

I stood before the obelisk. There were now creatures around me in the clearing. They were chanting but it didn't matter. My mother was calling me and it was time for me to go to her. I reached out and touched the obelisk. Cold and pain shot through my body and I came back to my senses. I had to get away. My hand was stuck against the obelisk, the pillar pulling me like a magnet. I tried using my leg to push against the stone to pull me free, but that only resulted in my feet now being stuck against it as well. The chanting got louder and with it the pull.

The song and chanting suddenly combined to one

voice and I was thrown against the pillar. My whole back was now against the obelisk, the cold from the stone creeping into my flesh. Finally the back of my head touched the obelisk and I could hear the words of the song. They made no sense but pierced through my mind, shattering and tearing my thoughts as they made their way into my head. The song is now everywhere, in and out. I can feel my memories being pulled through my skull into the cold stone, torn out by the song. Memories, thoughts, feelings, hopes and dreams, all of me, vanishing into the gaping mouth of Sasrutnotai. Erom on elo ne, dereul era tavi'ap nadnuknasimuhi aja eses'uon em!

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