



### *The Island of Fire*

can't believe we're going to get wet" said a voice "not tonight of all nights!" "I am sure we won't" said a second voice "those clouds are not here to stay, we'll be fine. Help me to build up the fire".

Iria quickly hid among the rocks and there she stayed watching the men stack the wood in a big pile, while more and more people came from all directions and took a seat around the wood and waited. Some had brought musical instruments and started to play tunes Iria had heard before. She felt content.

When the fire was lit and huge big flames licked the night sky the storyteller came and took his place. First he sat and talked and joked with the children, then he went silent and looked inside himself for a while, his eyes closed, waiting for the talk and the music to stop until all around was silence.

Silence.

Then he raised himself up and came to the centre nearer to the fire so that his tall frame was made taller and his long, black hair made longer by the shadows. In this way he looked more impressive, more powerful and handsome and, strangely, both young and old at the same time.

When the storyteller started to talk in his ancient language,  
Iria followed him into his world.





## *The Bestiary*

he woke because somebody was touching her skin and Iria knew she was back in the Jewel City, on the balcony and that the two women were looking at her.

Iria kept her eyes closed. Terrified at being discovered, she stayed still while the women were talking, scared and frustrated at not knowing what they were saying.

*Ha i piedi palmati!* “She has webbed feet!” the young woman was saying, *E scaglie sul corpo* “And scales on her body”.

*I capelli sono come alghe, sembra una creatura marina.* “Her hair is like seaweed, she’s like some sea-creature” said the other.

*Guardiamo nei libri, forse troviamo che specie é.* “Let’s consult the books, we might discover what species she is” said the young woman. The two women turned around and went inside, leaving the

balcony door open so that they could glance at her while going through the books, but Iria seized the moment, stood up, lifted herself over the balcony and jumped into the water below.

*Mamma é scappata!* “Mother, she’s got away!” shouted the younger of the two women, a disappointed look on her face. Then she closed the doors and went back inside where she started to leaf through an old book that was lying on a carved table.



Though she was searching for a specific image, the young woman couldn't help herself from taking time to look at the strange pictures in front of her. The book was full of drawings of the most amazing creatures - composite animals, half one type and half another, beasts of all shapes and sizes, monster-like, part human and part animal.

At last she came to the middle of the book where she started to look more carefully, page by page, image by image, through all the water creatures, the merpeople of ancient tales, until she found what she was looking for.