

# EKATA

FALL OF DARKNESS

DOMINIQUE LAW

## Prologue

Anger flared through me, its weight crippling. I quickly turned my head, looking far into the distance. Something was very wrong. I could smell traces of anger, pain, fear and sorrow on the wind. It left a bitter taste in my mouth. These feelings consumed me, until no other thought was possible. I sprinted towards the forest, hunting the evil hidden within. The trees were a blur. I'd never run so fast in my life, not even tiring as I closed the gap between me and the darkness ahead. When I'd first felt their minds, I thought I must be close. But their misery had travelled far to reach me. I passed through the dense forest without a trace. My feet left no mark upon the earth, and my body made no sound as I charged by. My sole focus was to destroy the cause of the anger reverberating through me.

## ASHER

---

Beneath a sheen of sweat, my body trembled. Whether from fear or cold I didn't know. In the darkness of my bedroom, shadows tormented me, pulling me back into my apocalyptic vision. Closing my eyes, I tried to clear my mind by focusing on my breath, but its hold on me was too strong. I was ensnared.

I was back there, amongst the confusion and panic engulfing my village. An ear-splittingly loud crack lit up the night sky with a burst of colour. It would have been beautiful had I not known it was pure destruction. I watched helplessly as the blinding light consumed all within its path. My home, everything and everyone I had ever known, obliterated.

Heart hammering, I lurched upright in my bed. Thank heavens it was over. I reached for my blankets, now a tangle on the ground,

and wrapped them around my chilled body. The visions were getting worse, affecting me physically as well as mentally now.

I was aware of Dad before he joined me in my room, his emotions a mix of worry and fear. I schooled my face into an expressionless mask, but Dad could see straight through to the haunting images I was trying to keep from him. He could read me far too well.

He perched on the edge of my bed and passed me a steaming cup of tea, his ever-watchful eyes studying me. "Son?"

I tried to reassure him. "I'm fine." It sounded false, even to my own ears.

Truth is, I couldn't shake this vision. It was the first time I had known the victims. Not that that should matter, but it did. It felt real, and as if witnessing hell wasn't enough, my memory forced me to see their faces. To hear their anguish. But that was nothing compared to the pain I was forced to endure.

Being an empath was a curse.

"Asher, talk to me. Please, Son."

I could feel his exhaustion, so I studied his face carefully, finding evidence of a painful, sleepless night. The last thing he needed on today of all days was to be burdened by my visions.

"Maybe later, I just need time." I could feel his guilt and pain. I knew how helpless he felt seeing me this way.

"You don't have to do this alone, Son."

"I know. Trust me, you're the only one keeping me sane."

He smiled. "Not Daivat, then?"

"Have you guys met?"

He chuckled.

I softened my voice. "Go back to bed, Dad, it's early yet."

He laid his hand on my shoulder, that one gesture speaking volumes, before standing and quietly leaving my room.

I exhaled in relief at his departure, wishing I could hide the extent of my visions from him. But sometimes the reality is too much for me to contain in my subconscious state.

I catch Dad watching me closely, when he thinks I don't notice. I think he's afraid of how much of Mum he sees in me. I don't have her blonde hair or frail frame, instead I take after him. But there's one part of me that's all from Mum – my eyes, which are grey, with a hint of the violet she was named for. I can always tell when Dad's missing her the most; he won't look into my eyes, and if he does, all I see is pain.

A flood of memories threatened to overwhelm me as I groped around in the pre-dawn light, searching for my clothes. I tried not to make a sound as I passed Dad's room on my way outside. I hoped he'd gone back to sleep, but chances were he'd been awake all night, tormented by the past and unlikely to drift peacefully to sleep. This time of year was always the hardest on him. Today marked my eighteenth year. I was born on the winter solstice, the darkest day, when dormant potential starts to stir. But it was something else keeping my father awake. Today was the anniversary of my mother's death, eight years ago. She was found in the river at the edge of the woods, floating face down. Most people think she took her own life, but I have never believed that. She loved my father and me.

Earlier that day, Mum and I had been exploring the surrounding valley and forest, searching for evergreen branches and the few remaining wild flowers to decorate the house for the solstice. This was her favourite time of year. I still remember how carefree she was as she danced around me, laughing and singing, her eyes

glowing a brighter shade of violet in the early morning sun. Every year she would celebrate me, saying that no matter how difficult life could be, there was a spark of light within me with the strength to brighten even the darkest of days, as if the solstice and I were one and the same.

The bonfire outside our house was renowned for being the largest in the village, and many people would join us as we brought a little extra light and life into the shortest day of the year.

I remember the last time I saw Mum. It was close to midday, and Dad and I had been busy building the fire, making sure this year's display would be even better than the last. She blew me a kiss, then smiled as she headed off towards the village. I will keep that image with me always.

It has become a ritual of mine to escape to the forest bordering our village at difficult times. My birthday is one such time. My favourite place is halfway up Mt Azura, named for the ever-present blue sky surrounding its peak – as you would discover if you dared to climb past the clouds and straight up towards the heavens. It is the tallest of all the mountains in our region, surrounded by sheer cliffs, impassable to those who don't know the way.

About five years ago, when my classmates excluded me yet again after school, I took out my frustration by running towards the forest leading up to the mountain. I wanted to burn off the feelings of hurt and anger flaring through my body. I ran as fast as I could through the trees, pushing myself to the limit, when a feeling of serenity came over me. Negative thoughts were driven from my mind with each step, until none remained. I was aware only of my feet pounding the forest floor, my breath, the burn in my muscles, and the immediate greenery surrounding me.

I kept going, the path becoming steeper, until I could hardly

stand without the support of the trees. Nevertheless I continued on, half climbing, half pulling myself up, until after what felt like an eternity I made it up onto a rock landing, jutting out from a small opening in the mountain.

From that day on, this rocky ledge became my sanctuary. When I took that first look back towards my home, and found myself high above the treetops of the ancient forest, I felt as if I was on top of the world, where my troubles couldn't reach me.

Today was an exception. As I sprinted towards my sanctuary, I was still haunted by my earlier vision and couldn't shake the thoughts and images whirling through my mind. Even the forest had an air of doom about it. When I finally reached my destination an hour later, I pulled myself up onto the ledge and closed my eyes, trying to still my mind as I turned to take in the view.

When I opened them, all I could see was darkness. I could smell the putrid stench of burnt flesh from up here, and sense death – an emptiness – below me.

I crumpled down onto all fours, puking the contents of last night's dinner over the edge. Trembling, I stood up, and stumbled to the back of the ledge, leaning weakly against the sheer rock face. Everything was once again alight with the sun's early morning rays. It was going to be a beautiful, clear winter's day. I slumped down to the ground with my head in my hands. I felt as if I was going mad. The visions were starting to take over my life. Where they used to be few and far between, now I was assaulted daily, and like this morning, I could barely differentiate between reality and dream.

My first vision came to me about a week after Mum died. It was so real. I was terrified. I could smell the stench of sweat and blood in the air as I watched a battle taking place all around me.

It was as if I was walking unseen through a nightmare of death and destruction. What was left of the village was in ruins, with fire hungrily devouring everything in its path. But that was nothing compared to the pain and despair. I vividly remember the boy standing next to me. He can't have been more than eighteen or nineteen years old – the same age as me. He was petrified, with sweat pouring down his freckled, ashen face. I watched, screaming, as an assailant defiled his innocent body with an effortless thrust of his sword.

That was to be the first of many brutal deaths I would see over the years. At first I thought they must have been visions from the Others, because violence of any sort was unheard of on Ekata. Our entire world was peaceful, because we had everything we could possibly want. Eventually I was able to take in the details. Yes, some of the weaponry was barbaric, as you would expect from their kind, but most of it was subtle; combatants locked in mind wars with each other. An assortment of objects, such as rocks or branches, were being hurled through the air by emerald-cloaked warriors towards an overwhelmed and untrained force. Until these visions, I would never have imagined the mental arts being used in this evil way.

I could have sat up there for hours, lost in thought. The sun was already high in the sky. I had lost track of time – it must have been late morning already. I quickly scrambled down off the ledge and, using the ropes I'd installed years ago, ran, jumped and slid my way down the treacherous path, letting the momentum carry me through the forest, not wanting to be late for the ceremony that would commence at midday.

As I crossed the meadow towards the village, I spied some white and yellow wild flowers. I could imagine Mum singing as she



picked them, weaving them into a wreath for us to wear during the solstice. I felt compelled to pick them, not for myself or Dad, but for the memory of my mother. I hastily wove the flowers into a small circle that I doubled up and wrapped around my wrist, then sent a silent prayer of love and gratitude up to Mum.

I was so engrossed in my task and my memories that I didn't notice anyone approaching.

"Well, don't you look fetching?" I heard the laughter in his voice as he wrestled me to the ground.

"Daivat, you oaf! Get off."

He chuckled. "If you'd just get out of your head and focus on the world around you, I wouldn't be able to best you so easily." Daivat climbed off, offering his hand to help me up. I accepted, a smile tugging at the corner of my mouth. He was always able to snap me back to reality. Although we are as opposite as two people can be, we have been friends our entire lives. "We'd better hurry, unless you were planning on being late to the ceremony?" He looked at me questioningly.

I rolled my eyes. "I'm here, aren't I? Come on, let's get going."

Somehow I always managed to be late. It wasn't intentional. The visions distracted me, eclipsing all else, and before I knew it, time had slipped away. The flipside was that I never had time to mingle with those who feared me, and what I represented.

"I can't believe we're finally graduating! Eighteen at last! Look out world, here we come!" He rubbed his hands together with a mischievous grin. I could only imagine what crazy plans he had for us.

Daivat had a way of giving off a light, joyful energy. It wasn't anything he did, it was just who he was. When he was around, you couldn't help but feel the cheerful effects. For a moment I felt

as carefree as my friend. I was grateful he hadn't mentioned my birthday. Since Mum's death, it has never felt right to celebrate this day.

"Jet's already given me the nod. My apprenticeship begins up in the crystal mines. I can't wait!" He could barely contain his pride. Standing with his hands behind his back, awkwardly bobbing on the balls of his feet in perfect imitation of his tutor, he cleared his throat and said in Jet's official tone, "You need to experience first-hand the source of the crystals, before you learn to master their energy."

We both grinned, and continued together along the path towards the village. Daivat's strength was sound vibrational construction. He was a gifted telekinetic, and could move objects of all shapes and sizes from more than half a mile away. The only drawback was that precision was not his strong suit.

I shoved my shoulder into his side and knocked him flat into the bushes, laughing. Although he's of a stronger build than me, we're around the same height, with Daivat just a smidge taller. Other than that, we're completely different. He is a blond-haired, blue-eyed, charismatic, loved-by-all type, and me ... well, I try to keep to myself. Everybody's happy that way.

"I was thinking about missing the graduation," I said. "It's just a formality. I think people would prefer my absence."

"Asher, don't be stupid, you're going. This is your day. The past is the past. Not that you had anything to do with what happened on *that* day. Just act like you belong and everyone will believe you do."

He made everything seem so simple and straightforward. That was his way, and I respected him for it. But some things are complicated, and a simple shrug wasn't going to fix the fact that the

entire village treated me like a pariah. The stigma of Mum's death would be with me always. Everyone blamed me for her demise, and said I had cursed her from the moment I was conceived.

I sighed. "I guess there's no use trying to avoid it. You'd just drag me along anyway."

"And don't you know it." A small, knowing smile appeared on Daivat's face. "Think of the girls, flowers through their hair, wanting to bring some fun and colour into this dreary winter."

"Ugh," I groaned. He was always on my case about women. "Even if I was interested in anyone from our little nook in the world, the chances of them feeling the same way are pretty slim."

Daivat rolled his eyes at me. "You need to lighten up, brother. There's a beautiful world waiting for us past the boundaries of our little village." He stretched his arms out dramatically as he spun around. "All you have to do is embrace it. Have you decided if you're going to leave when spring comes?"

"I want to, you know I do. It's all we've talked about for years. But I can't leave him alone up at the farm."

"Who, Gayan? Your dad knows you have to leave this prejudiced little community we call home if you're to have any life at all. And he's not alone. *He* still has support in the village. It's just you they're wary of."

He was right, but it didn't make the choice any easier. Or ease the guilt I felt at desperately wanting to leave this place far behind me.

As we walked into Vipul, I let the colour and vibrancy of the small village distract me from my thoughts. Every time I came here there was something new to discover. One house in particular had gone all out for the solstice, its energies adjusted to project images

of spring. I shook my head, bemused, as I walked past the extravagant floral display.

We joined the throngs gravitating towards the village square along a narrow mosaic pathway, their voices filled with laughter and excitement. The outer fires were already lit, and I was herded alongside Daivat towards our peers, who were clustered together at the steps of the grand hall. Too late now to disappear into the crowd.

There was a hush as the Council of Elders emerged in procession along the crystallised, amethyst terrace above us. There were five of them, all in their formal dress. First came Elford, the elected leader of our village, donning his pure white robe, decorated in silver with elaborate patterns of trees and animals, symbolising fertility and the many cycles of life. Second was Kesava, one of my teachers, looking equally impressive in his deep indigo robe, his contrasting pale blond hair falling straight down almost to his waist – impeccable as always. He turned his clear blue eyes on me, and I felt as if he was looking directly through to my soul. A cold shiver trickled down my spine, filling me with dread. I quickly broke the contact and focused on the third robed figure. This was Daya, my favourite teacher, wearing her formal pale blue robe, her curly brown hair falling haphazardly down to her shoulders.

There was a stark difference between Daya and Kesava. I wouldn't miss Kes's lessons. He taught channelling as well as remote viewing and divination. He also taught the younger kids how to read auras. He had a way of making me feel like a failure. I remember the first time I plucked up courage to seek advice from him about my visions. I was twelve years old. He sent me out of the class for being disruptive and making up stories. From that day on he was tough on me and always in my head, analysing

every vision. When I was doing a remote viewing exercise, he would try to manipulate me into revisiting my most recent nightmare, or would force me to relive horrors of the past, like my mother's death. He was always there, reminding me of the emptiness I was experiencing during sessions when I tried to contact higher beings. I could see and hear no one but him – I guess channelling wasn't one of my talents.

I don't know why he pushed me so hard. It was the norm for people to have abilities in certain mental arts, and none in others. It was very rare to possess *all* abilities. Those few people became high priests and priestesses. Unfortunately, Kesava was such an individual, and he used his abilities to brutal effect. It was supposed to be an honour to be tutored by a high priest, especially in a village of our size, but it felt like nothing of the sort.

I kept his tormenting to myself. Daivat wouldn't understand, and I didn't want to worry Dad unnecessarily.

It was always a relief when I had class with Daya, after one of Kes's gruelling one-on-one sessions. She had become like a mother to me. She is a high priestess, but completely down to earth. I would often find her sitting barefoot under the old cherry blossom tree, our village's symbol, where she preferred to teach. She would know what I was feeling before I arrived, because she is an empath, like me. Her strength is clairsentience. She can sense my thoughts before I articulate them, and her intuition is always dead on. She teaches this along with telepathy. In her advanced class we are only able to communicate with her through our minds, which is very difficult to do with an empath, as it's hard to keep private thoughts just that.

I snapped out of my reminiscing and looked up to see that Sophie, our healer, in her green robe, and Jet, in his red robe,

had joined them. They were sitting in their chairs while Elford addressed the crowd. I could tell Jet's mind was wandering, as a small crystal was floating above his lap, drawing patterns in the air. I smiled to myself. You'd have thought someone who always conducts himself as properly as Jet does would try harder to pretend to be interested in the ceremony. Jet is Daivat's favourite teacher, as telekinesis is his strongest ability, and he is fascinated by the mechanics of crystal and sound energy. Elford was harping on about the importance of community and peace, comparing our world to the Others.

I still remember the first time I learnt about the Others. I was seven years old and in my first spring period of school. Their world was so alien to me. How could people live that way, so disjointed from one another and the world around them? Our environments are similar, except ours is thriving from centuries of nurturing, and theirs is a poisoned, decaying world. Our civilization is far older, and its people more advanced. Mental abilities such as telepathy and telekinesis are nurtured and respected. Most of the population has at least one dominant gift. But the most important difference between our world and theirs is that we are peaceful.

*Or are we?* I thought, my most recent vision still plaguing my mind.

I looked towards the Elders to find Kesava staring intently at me once again. Remembering my lessons from Daya, I constructed an unbreakable wall within my mind, so that my thoughts were impenetrable. He looked away, slightly ruffled.

The Council of Elders stood, and attention turned to my group of eleven classmates. There was clapping all around us, and one by one we were called up to receive a token, symbolising our new

status in the village as adults. When it was Daivat's turn, Jet came forward, placed a cord with a fluorite crystal around his neck, and whispered something to him. Daivat smiled as he shook his hand.

After everyone else had been called, I started to worry that I'd be left out, but then both Kesava and Daya came forward and called my name. The crowd was silent. You could have heard a whisper. As I walked forward, I could feel the collective fear that my presence induced in the villagers. Keeping my head high, I made my way to stand before both of my teachers, and together they placed an amulet around my neck. The cord was interwoven with streaks of beautiful white, almost luminescent hair, and within the netted pouch was a clear quartz crystal. Daya smiled at me and gave me a hug, while Kesava awkwardly clasped my wrist, staring disapprovingly at me, as usual. I tilted my head in thanks, and walked quickly off to the side where Daivat was standing. No surprise, he was surrounded by giggling girls from the year below us, grinning from ear to ear as they lavishly placed flowers all over him. I shook my head and sighed at him, but his smile was contagious. We had finally done it. No longer would we simply be students; we would now be recognised as equals amongst the village's adults.

Elford walked forward a couple of steps with his arms raised, commanding the attention of his people. Immediately the chatter and laughter that had been slowly escalating died down. "Congratulations, graduates. Some of you may choose to leave the boundaries of our village as you make your own way in this world. But know this; Vipul will always be your home."

He made his way towards the centre bonfire, lighting his torch from one of the outer fires as he approached. The crowd parted, allowing him access to the ceremonial fire that would burn

brightly throughout the night. The entire village would be up celebrating until dawn, and there was an electric buzz in the air as all eyes turned to our leader.

“Happy solstice!” he cheered, as he lowered his torch and the bonfire blazed into life. A roar erupted through the crowd. The festival had begun.

Excerpt from *Ekata: Fall of Darkness* by Dominique Law (Book 1 of the *Ekata* Trilogy)

Available in ebook and paperback formats from Amazon and other good booksellers.

For more information, visit [dominiquelawauthor.com](http://dominiquelawauthor.com).