



Casts of Fire, Casts of Love

Quick Savant

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Table of Contents

Chapter One: Ash and Bone	
Chapter Two: Marked by Fire	
Chapter Three: Into the Crag	
Chapter Four: Trial by Fire	
Chapter Five: Wings of Flame	
Chapter Six: Hunt in the Ash	
Chapter Seven: Under the Commander's Eye	
Chapter Eight: Sparks and Steel	
Chapter Nine: Into the Embered Vale	
Chapter Ten: Embers in the Quiet	
Chapter Eleven: Shadows in the Crag	
Chapter Twelve: Secrets in the Stone	
Chapter Thirteen: Fire Magic	
Chapter Fourteen: Truths and Tensions	
Chapter Fifteen: Unraveled Secrets	
Chapter Sixteen: Into the Vale's Heart	
Chapter Seventeen: Fire in the Vale	
Chapter Eighteen: Maps and Motives	
Chapter Nineteen: Under Scrutiny	
Chapter Twenty: Forged in Ash	
Chapter Twenty-One: Rift of Shadows	
Chapter Twenty-Two: Shadows Laid Bare	
Chapter Twenty-Three: Flames of Retribution	
Chapter Twenty-Four: Striking the Shadows	
Chapter Twenty-Five: Breaking the Rift	
Chapter Twenty-Six: Chains of Loyalty	
Chapter Twenty-Seven: The Crimson Spire's Fall	
Chapter Twenty-Eight: Judgment's Blade	

Chapter Twenty-Nine: The Final Flame

Chapter Thirty: Verdict

Chapter Thirty-One: Flames of the Future

Chapter Thirty-Two: The Rift's End

Chapter Thirty-Three: Walls of Flame

Chapter Thirty-Four: Whispers of the Rift

THANK YOU FOR READING!

About Quick Savant

Chapter One: Ash and Bone

Ash fell like a traitor's promise, dusting Freya Veyne's cloak as she limped through the scorched wastes of Vyrn's Cinder Vale. Her left knee burned, a cruel pulse that flared with each uneven step, but she'd learned to outsmart the pain years ago. At nineteen, with a joint that locked or gave way like a fickle lover, she was still alive—more than most healers could say in this war-ravaged land. Her satchel, heavy with vials of salve and bandages, tugged at her shoulder. Ashwick's villagers needed her skills, and bread was worth the trek, invasion be damned.

The Vale sprawled ahead, a graveyard of cracked earth and skeletal trees, scarred by ancient volcanoes. Gray clouds churned above, spitting embers that pricked her cheeks. Freya's breath hitched as a low rumble shook the ground—not an eruption, but something alive. She squinted through the haze, spotting a shadow slicing the sky—a dragon, its iron-dark scales glinting, wings carving the smog. Her pulse skittered. Riders didn't linger in places like Ashwick unless trouble followed.

She ducked behind a charred boulder, her knee protesting with a sharp twinge. The dragon circled, its rider a lean silhouette, all sharp angles and coiled menace. Freya's fingers grazed the dagger at her hip, a reflex from years of dodging raiders. The beast's roar thrummed in her chest, stirring a reckless flicker of yearning she didn't dare name. Dragons chose warriors, not broken healers like her.

The dragon vanished toward the Black Crag, where the Dragonrider Academy loomed. Freya exhaled, forcing her legs to move. Ashwick was close, its huts faint in the haze. She'd deliver her goods, grab her pay, and slip away before the empire's blood mages swept through. Vyrn's war didn't care for stragglers.

A scream shattered the air. Freya froze, smoke curling from Ashwick's edge—too thick for the Vale's usual smolder. Raiders. Her stomach knotted. Blood mages had been gutting border towns, fueling their forbidden craft with stolen lives. The pain in her knee mocked her, but hiding might save her skin.

She veered toward a gully, but a sudden heat surged in her veins—not the Vale's scalding air, but something sharp, alive, clawing for release. She gasped, clutching her chest as fire sparked inside her, blinding and fierce. Her vision swam, and she saw it—a crimson sky, molten rivers, and a dragon's eye, unblinking, searing her soul.

"No," she rasped, shaking her head. The vision faded, but the heat coiled in her palms, restless. Her bad knee buckled, and she hit the ash-strewn ground, her satchel spilling vials. As she scrambled to gather them, a shadow loomed—not a dragon, but a man in

black leathers, his hood half-hiding a face too sharp to be kind. A rider, young, maybe twenty-one, with storm-gray eyes and cheekbones like blade edges. A dragon-scale patch marked his chest, and a sword hung at his side, casual but deadly.

“Stay down,” he said, voice low, rough as volcanic glass. His gaze raked over her, lingering on her trembling hands, her uneven stance. “You’re hurt.”



Freya's scraped palms weren't bleeding, but his stare pinned her, heavy with something she couldn't place—suspicion, or worse, interest. She forced herself upright, ignoring the stab in her knee. "I'm fine," she snapped, her voice sharper than she meant. "Just passing through."

His lips twitched, not quite a smirk but close enough to spark her temper. "Passing through a war zone, limping like that?" He stepped closer, his height forcing her to tilt her chin up. The air between them crackled, charged like the Vale's storms. "You're either brave or stupid, healer."

Freya's cheeks warmed, and she hated it. He was all lean muscle and arrogance, the kind of rider who'd never known a day of weakness. Yet his eyes, shadowed under dark brows, held a flicker of something raw—grief, maybe, or defiance. It made her pause, her dagger hand stilling.

"My name is Freya," she said, voice low. "And don't pretend you care." She gestured at his sword. "You're here to fight, not save strays."

He tilted his head, studying her like a puzzle he hadn't expected. "Maybe I like strays." His tone was teasing, but his gaze dropped to her hands, where a faint glow flickered, then vanished. His expression hardened. "What are you?"

Her heart slammed against her ribs. The heat in her veins pulsed again, and she realized he wasn't looking at her scraped skin—he was staring at her eyes. She touched her face, fingers brushing warm, flickering light, like embers leaking from her skin. Her breath caught. "I'm nobody," she said, forcing steel into her voice. "Leave me be."

"Nobody doesn't burn like that," he said, closing the distance until she could smell leather and smoke on him. His presence was overwhelming, like standing too close to a fire—dangerous, but tempting. "You're coming with me."

Freya's pulse raced, torn between shoving him away and the stupid, reckless urge to step closer. "I don't take orders from anybody," she said, her voice barely steady. "Especially from riders who think they own the sky." Her piercing, bright blue eyes widened.

His smirk finally broke through, sharp and infuriatingly charming. "Keep talking like that, and I might start liking you." But his hand hovered over his sword, a reminder he wasn't just flirting—he was dangerous.

A second scream tore from Ashwick, followed by flames licking the horizon. The rider—Dren, she'd later learn—cursed, his gaze flicking between her and the village.

“Stay here,” he ordered, but there was a plea in his voice, a crack in his armor. “I mean it.”

He sprinted toward the smoke, his form swallowed by the haze. Freya’s chest tightened, the heat in her veins humming like a warning. She didn’t know what this fire inside her was, or why this rider’s storm-gray eyes lingered in her mind, but Ashwick was burning, and she wasn’t the kind to hide.

Gripping her dagger, she limped toward the village, her knee screaming, her heart pounding with defiance—and, damn it, the faintest spark of something she’d never admit. Not yet.

Freya Veyne limped toward Ashwick, the screams and smoke clawing at her resolve. Her knee throbbed, a traitor's rhythm, but the heat in her veins burned hotter, urging her forward. The village's huts materialized through the haze, their thatched roofs alight, flames licking the sky like hungry tongues. Shadows darted between them—raiders, their cloaks marked with crimson sigils. Blood mages. Freya's grip tightened on her dagger, its worn hilt a small comfort. She was no fighter, but she'd stitched enough wounds to know what happened if you didn't run.

The ember-like glow in her palms had faded, but its memory lingered, a question she couldn't answer. That rider—his storm-gray eyes and infuriating smirk—had seen it too. What are you? he'd asked, as if she weren't just a healer scraping by in Vyrn's ashes. She shoved his face from her mind. He'd run toward this chaos, and she wasn't fool enough to chase a dragonrider's death wish.



A woman's wail cut through the crackle of fire, and Freya's heart lurched. She crouched behind a smoldering cart, peering into Ashwick's square. Villagers fled, some clutching children, others swinging pitchforks at cloaked figures. A blood mage, his hands wreathed in red mist, raised a staff, and a man collapsed, his scream fading as his eyes turned glassy. Freya's stomach churned. She'd heard stories—mages draining life to fuel their spells—but seeing it was a blade to the gut.



Her knee locked, forcing her to lean against the cart. She cursed under her breath, massaging the joint. Running was a fantasy, but she could slip through the alleys, find survivors, maybe get them to the gully. She started to move, but a roar split the air, shaking the ground. Her head snapped up. A dragon—his dragon—swooped low, its iron scales glinting as it unleashed a torrent of flame on a cluster of mages. The raiders scattered, some burning, others raising shields of blood-red light.



Freya's breath caught as the rider—Dren, she'd overheard a villager call him—leaped from the dragon's back, landing in a crouch. His sword flashed, cutting down a mage mid-spell. He moved like a storm, precise and relentless, his leathers streaked with ash. For a moment, she couldn't look away, her pulse traitorously quickening. He was arrogance in motion, but damn if he wasn't effective.

Then his eyes found hers across the square, narrowing with a mix of fury and recognition. "I told you to stay put," he shouted, dodging a mage's blast of red mist. His voice carried over the chaos, sharp enough to sting.

Freya bristled, stepping out from the cart despite her better judgment. "I don't take orders," she shot back, her voice steadier than her shaking hands. "You're not my keeper."

Dren's lips twitched, that infuriating almost-smirk, but a mage lunged at him, forcing him to parry. "Stubborn as a wyrm," he muttered, loud enough for her to hear. He dispatched the mage with a brutal efficiency that made her stomach flip—fear or admiration, she wasn't sure.

A child's cry snapped her focus. A girl, no older than ten, huddled behind a collapsed stall, her face streaked with soot. Freya glanced at Dren, still carving through raiders, then at the dragon circling above, its flames keeping more mages at bay. She had no sword, but she had her wits. Limping toward the girl, she kept low, her knee screaming with every step.

"Hey," she whispered, kneeling beside the child. "I'm Freya. We're getting out of here, all right?" The girl nodded, eyes wide, wiping away tears. Freya scanned for an escape—alleys to the east, but mages were closing in. Her palms tingled, that strange heat flaring again. She clenched her fists, willing it to stay dormant. Not now.

Footsteps crunched behind her, and she spun, dagger raised, only to meet Dren's storm-gray stare. Up close, he was even more overwhelming—sweat-slicked hair falling into his eyes, leather clinging to a muscular frame built for war. His scent hit her, smoke and iron, and her traitorous heart skipped.

"You're in the way," he said, but his tone was softer, almost concerned. He glanced at the girl, then back at Freya, his gaze lingering on her trembling dagger hand. "And you're going to get yourself killed."

"Then help me," Freya snapped, nodding at the girl. "Or are you too busy playing hero?"

Dren's jaw tightened, but he sheathed his sword and scooped the girl into his arms with surprising gentleness. "Stay close," he said, his voice low, meant for Freya alone. The words brushed against her like a spark, and she hated how they warmed her.

They moved toward the alleys, Dren shielding the girl while Freya limped behind, her dagger ready. A mage stepped into their path, red mist coiling around his staff. Freya's breath hitched, but before she could react, the heat in her veins erupted. Light—bright, searing—burst from her palms, slamming into the mage. He staggered, his spell fizzling, and Dren finished him with a thrown knife.

Freya stared at her hands, the glow fading but leaving her skin buzzing. Her knee buckled, and she stumbled, only for Dren's arm to catch her waist, steadying her. His touch was firm, too warm, and their eyes locked, inches apart. His breath was ragged, his gaze searching hers—not with suspicion now, but something deeper, hungrier.

"What are you?" he murmured, echoing his earlier question, but this time it felt like a challenge, a dare.

Freya's chest heaved, torn between shoving him away and leaning into the heat of his grip. "I don't know," she admitted, her voice raw. "But I'm not your problem."

His smirk returned, slow and dangerous. "We'll see about that."

A dragon's roar jolted them apart, and Dren released her, his expression shuttering. "Get her to safety," he said, nodding at the girl. "I'll clear the square." But as he turned, he glanced back, his eyes holding hers a beat too long. "Don't die, healer."

Freya's heart pounded as he charged back into the fray, the girl clinging to her side. The village burned, mages fell, and that fire in her veins whispered of truths she wasn't ready to face. But Dren's words—his damn smirk—lingered, a spark she couldn't snuff out.

About Quick Savant

Author of dozens of books, summary books, and audiobooks, Quick Savant earned a biology degree, Summa Cum Laude, a physiology degree, and a doctorate from prestigious universities.

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