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Opening extract from

Charmseekers: The Silver Pool

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The Thirteen Charms of Karisma

When Charm became queen of Karisma, the wise and beautiful Silversmith made her a precious gift. It was a bracelet. On it were fastened thirteen silver amulets, which the Silversmith called "charms", in honour of the new queen.

It was part of Karisma law. Whenever there was a new ruler the Silversmith made a special gift, to help them care for the world they had inherited. And this time it was a bracelet. She told Queen Charm it was magical because the charms held the power to control the forces of nature and keep everything in balance. She must take the greatest care of them. As long as she, and she alone, had possession of the charms all would be well.

And so it was, until the bracelet was stolen by the spider, and fell into the hands of Zorgan, the magician. Then there was chaos!

In the soft glow of candlelight the Silversmith sits and reflects. Her Charmseeker's quest has begun. Sesame has found the bracelet and heart charm, and has taken them to the Outworld for safekeeping.

One of the thirteen magic candles has gone out. Twelve lighted candles remain and each will burn until its charm has been found. Will Sesame find the courage to see her mission through?

"I have chosen well," says the Silversmith, confident she has made the right decision about Sesame Brown. "She will return to continue her quest, of that I have no doubt!"



One

Zorgan paced the floor, his thoughts swirling like a whirlpool, as he dwelt on some recent, unfortunate events. His plan to take possession of the bracelet had gone badly wrong – his old adversary the Silversmith had seen to that! At the very thought of her, fury welled up inside him. He was convinced she had put a spell on the bracelet to prevent him, or anyone but Queen Charm,



from wearing it – the black mark on his wrist was a constant and painful reminder that it had done its job.

The sorcerer recalled the fleeting sensation of joy he'd experienced when he'd put the bracelet on. Oh! The power that should have been his! But no, it was not to be. Angrily, Zorgan banged his fist on a table, cursing himself for scattering the charms. Now he must find and destroy them. The race was on to get them back!



The *bang* startled three companions who were with Zorgan in his study. The bandrall, Vanda, perched on a high-backed chair and the pixie puppets, Nix and Dina.

"Two new creations of my own," Zorgan had told Vanda, when introducing the pixies for the first time. To the casual observer Nix and Dina looked like normal pixie girls, with their flowing hair and impish faces. But closer inspection would reveal cold crystal eyes and steely wings, fine as cobweb; the pixies could fly like deadly arrows and were programmed to obey Zorgan without question.

The sudden noise unsettled Vanda.

"Rashee,rashee," * cooed Zorgan soothingly,

* *

* **Rashee** – hush; be still; a word of reassurance

stroking her neck. Ever since Vanda had come to roost on Zorgan's Tower, he'd taken an instant liking to her. The two had become inseparable. She flapped her wings to steady herself, before settling again on the chair.

Vanda watched as Zorgan turned to Nix and Dina. They stood alert, awaiting orders.

"The time has come to try you out," said Zorgan. "Set you tasks. Test your skills."

Nix and Dina's sharp eyes glinted in anticipation.

"You remember that, er, unfortunate incident with the charm bracelet?" he said, admiring a large gaudy ring on his finger.

Zorgan paused, waiting to see if Nix and Dina understood. They responded immediately.

"Yes, Master!" they chorused.

"When you put the bracelet on, it burned you," said Nix.

"So you threw it away!" added Dina enthusiastically.

"Spallah!"* exclaimed Zorgan, delighted with their response. "Well, I must get those charms back and destroy them. But there are those who wish to keep them. They must be stopped!"

"Who?" asked Dina.

"Morbrecia, for a start," he replied. "Queen Charm's sister. She's determined to find them, foolish girl,

* *

* Spallah – excellent!; a triumphant expression

though I doubt they'll do her any good. Besides, she's mad at me!"

Dina remembered Zorgan had tricked Morbrecia into stealing the bracelet from the queen. She'd been furious when Zorgan threw it away.

"Orders understood!" said Dina, with a malicious grin.

"Good," said Zorgan.

"Who else?" asked Nix, eager to prove herself too.

Zorgan hesitated. He wasn't sure, but he'd heard stories about an Outworlder. A girl called Sesame . . . Sesame . . . *Brown*! She'd been seen near Charm's palace.

"There's a girl . . ." he said, his voice cold as ice. "An interfering Outworlder. She'll be sorry she ever set foot in Karisma. I want to know all about Sesame Brown!"

The pixies shuddered at the venom in his voice.

"It shall be done, Master!" said Nix and Dina.

And in a whirr of wings they were off.



Zorgan's study was circular, as were all the others in the tower, tiered like the layers of a cake. It was lined from floor to ceiling with bookshelves, perfectly curved to fit the walls. The sorcerer's library contained hundreds of books on Astronomy, Astrology, Folklore, Myth and Magic.



After Nix and Dina had gone, he crossed the room to select some books from the shelves. Vanda followed, alighting on a chandelier, the better to observe Zorgan from her lofty perch. She watched him now scanning a row of leather-bound volumes.

First Zorgan took down *A Discourse with Dragons*

by Perdika Klum. The author, a famous dracomologist, had spent a lifetime studying dragons and had learned to speak their language – Dracodictum. There was a list of phrases in her book that he would find useful. Next he selected *A Pool of Silver* and, after a quick look along a row of encyclopedias, he found an old copy of *Rare Chants and Incantations*.

"Ah, yes," said Zorgan, blowing a layer of dust from the cover. "I'll need that too."

Clasping the weighty tomes to his chest, Zorgan staggered up the spiral staircase to his Star Room – exactly one hundred and ninety-five twisty steps to the top of the tower. Vanda flew ahead, screeching with delight, in her element to be flying higher and higher.

The Star Room was entirely encased in glass. Zorgan stood for a moment to catch his breath, and take in the view of the heavens. It was magnificent! The sheer vastness of the starry night sky never failed to enthral. Up here the sorcerer felt exhilarated. Here he could do magic!

Looking out across Karisma, Zorgan fixed his gaze on Mount Fortuna in the distance. In no time he had conjured a vision of the Silver Pool, and the Silversmith who had charge of it. He would soon have his revenge on her!

But to achieve that, he had work to do. Seating himself comfortably in an armchair, he opened *A Pool of Silver* and started to read . . .

A Pool of Silver by the Silversmith

PUBLISHED BY FORTUNA BOOKS, KARISMA

Introduction by the Silversmith

The liquid silver, found in a pool on Mount Fortuna, is unique to Karisma and quite unlike the precious metal of other worlds. The exact origin of the Silver Pool is unknown although one thing is certain; the pool has existed for as long as anyone can remember, because no matter how much silver is used the pool always refills itself – like magic!

Various stories have been told which attempt to explain how it may have come about but the most popular belief, held by Karismans today, is based on this intriguing legend.