

## **Character Descriptions:**

Noora:

Noora is my main character. She has spent most of her life moving from place to place with her mom, who never seems able to settle. Noora has a very strong connection with her mom, but she is also waiting for her life to start, a life that is separate from her mom's. She wants to go to university to discover things she's interested in and create a life for herself, but she can't afford it. However, Noora has no idea that the priory believes she is their savior, a kind of Messiah. The only trouble is that both sides seem to believe this, and one of the main questions throughout the story centers on whether Noora will choose to adhere to the old or embrace the new. When Noora gets pulled into this world of magic and mystery, she discovers things about herself and her strength that she had never imagined.

Avi:

Avi is my secondary character. His family is one of the oldest in Britain and extremely wealthy. He exists in a world of money, political alliances, social expectations, and partying. He has been an active participant for years, but he is nearing the end of his college career and realizing that he doesn't want to continue in this world. He has no clue what he wants specifically, but he knows he wants freedom and adventure. He certainly accomplishes this when he ends up at the priory with Noora, but he also finds that - as a man - he is not nearly as important as the women and he does not have the same power he had in the real world.

Noora's Aunt Mindy:

Noora's Aunt is exactly the kind of American who would move to Edinburgh. She is obsessed with cats, she owns multiple trench coats, her favorite season is autumn, and if she ever turned down a long chat in a coffee shop you would know something was seriously wrong. She is also weirdly ridiculously rich because she writes publishable porn. Mindy is also convinced that their grandmother (hers and Charlotte's) was a witch. Spoiler, she may be right.

Charlotte:

Noora's mother is an artist who is constantly moving, in search of new inspiration. She has made very little money, and relies on her sister, Mindy, when she runs out. Charlotte and Mindy are an eccentric pair, and Noora has grown up with both of them. Charlotte is obsessed with art and plants. Charlotte has also taught Noora many things and loves her very much in her own way.

Ita:

Ita is a nun at the convent who becomes close to Noora. She was the only child of a Scottish Parliament member before he died and left her a mansion in the Highlands. She knows Avi from sixth form, and they have been friends for years. However, she has also been involved in the priory since she was sixteen. Ita is also pregnant, meaning she has broken one of the sacred laws of the priory. She is the one who finds Noora and brings her to the priory because she believes Noora will change the priory for the better.

Bethoc: Abbess of the priory, she is the main antagonist of the story as she upholds many of antiquated values that have been in place for centuries. Descended from Viking raiders that occupied the West coast of Scotland - lots of legends and myths surrounding her ancestry.

Balu:

Balu is one of the most respected people at the convent. He is African, and he has been to magical sanctuaries all over Africa. The sanctuaries in Africa center on tactile and community-based learning, they are not overly focused on studying the written word. Knowledge is predominantly (though not completely) passed down through oral tradition in the form of stories, metaphors, and lessons. Balu has learned much from the African sanctuaries, but he has come to Scotland because there are whispers of a greater power that is approaching. No one knows exactly what it is, but when he gets to Scotland he feels it too. Like binary stars, spinning around each other in an eternal orbit, yearning to come together but forever apart. He senses it and he wants to witness it.

#### I. Background on Priory:

A. The priory has several characteristics of Benedictine monasteries of the Middle Ages. However, instead of venerating any specific God, the nuns worship magic.

1. The magic is an incredibly complex concept (that I have not fully developed), but the basic idea is that po primarily from emotion and different emotions produce different types of magic. For example, hate - violent, love - healing, jealousy - thieving, superiority - conquering, self-hate - weakening (of the self), etc. Magic, however, does not come

directly from a person in the form of flashing lights or dramatic scenes. Magic is channeled through inanimate objects (and sometimes animals, but this gets very complex). For example, if someone were to make an herbal tea without magic, it would just be an herbal tea, but made with magic, it can become incredibly potent. Depending on the emotions of the sorcerer and their level of ability, the tea can have all sorts of different powers (the primary use of something like this would be to make a healing tea for someone you love).

a) Understanding who is more powerful and why is a bit complex, but here are some examples of how someone might be considered a more powerful or proficient mage.

(1) Better at mixing potions: in this case, magic gains power with knowledge, the better you know the plants you're working with and how to combine in the most effective way, the more powerful you are.

(2) Better at controlling your emotions: this means your magic will be more effective because you are able to direct it better, it will do exactly what you want it to.

(3) Stronger emotions: this means that you are more powerful because your magic has a greater effect, it may not be controlled, but it is more potent.

(4) Better at reading the stars and celestial signs: this means you might understand others better, and you are better equipped to predict how they might act.

2. The nuns of the convent worship magic by reading and transcribing/translating ancient texts, writing and illuminating legends and histories, worshipping and pilgrimaging to ancient (pagan-inspired) sites, growing magically potent plants, creating recipes and potions for various uses, studying the movements of the stars and other celestial bodies, worshipping relics, worshipping goddesses etc.

B. However, for all its beauty and mystique, the priory still adheres to antiquated practices and beliefs.

1. Example: Ita reveals she is pregnant and that Bethoc knows. She plans to rid Ita of the baby when it is born by killing it and burying it in the garden.
  - a) This plotline sets in motion a kind of revolution against the upper-level nuns at the convent. The younger nuns are not happy with this treatment of Ita and the power relations at the convent. Noora is a big part of this. She is originally unwilling to take a larger role, but she turns out to be a powerful sorceress and eventually steps into her power by spearheading the insurrection.
2. Knowledge is highly guarded. The priory houses hundreds of books that very few people are actually allowed to read. Those that are available have been meticulously selected because they uphold the priory's bygone values.

3. The priory is a sister to the monastery in Africa, where Balu comes from, and which is the male equivalent of the priory. Both have power in their own right, and both are integrally connected, but they are also constantly fighting each other for power.
  - a) Men who are living at the priory are servants to the women and are treated cruelly.
  - b) Avi is given the role of a servant while they are at the priory, obviously hard on him for many reasons, especially since he's grown up so wealthy.
  - c) The monastery is not technically above the priory, but the abbot who runs it believes himself at least above the abbess of the priory, and she does not resist him.
4. Romantic and sexual relationships are strictly forbidden because they incite powerful emotions that are difficult to control, and, in the priory's eyes, are therefore dangerous.
  - a) However, the intensity of emotions associated with romance and intimacy hold a power all of their own that has yet to be fully explored as it is so strictly forbidden.
5. Female purity especially is highly prized. The women of the priory worship the Moon as a goddess with potent effects on female reproductive systems - signs from the Moon can determine a woman's purity. The menstrual cycle is representative of a woman's spiritual, physical, mental, and magical health.

- a) I want to explore the relationship between femininity, the menstrual cycle, and the moon.
- b) When Noora arrives at the priory, she is stripped of her clothes, washed, and dressed in new robes. She is questioned about her purity. She is forced through an initiation involving the Moon meant to determine her purity.
- c) The idea is that virginity must constantly be protected.
- d) Sexual desire is, on the surface, forbidden - but it is also subtly encouraged as a mode of increasing power, just as long as it is not released in the act of sex.

**Plot Draft:**

Major Questions/Themes:

- How do we understand our values and our path in life?
- Femininity and the female body.
- What is love? What is desire? What purpose do they serve?
- Gender and power relations.
- What is power? How does the individual covet power? Can power be used for good?

**BEGINNING**

- I. Avi and Noora meet by chance in a bar. Avi is there on a night out with friends, Noora was hired to play for the night as a backup guitarist. While they're playing Avi gets into a

fight with one of his friends and accidentally falls into Noora. The band breaks up and Noora leaves quickly. Avi follows her outside to apologize.

A. After this, Noora and Avi get to know each other in a few ways.

1. Noora is fascinated by Avi's life - the glamour and academic aesthetic are incredibly alluring to her. Noora also feels special, being invited into this incredibly exclusive friend group.
2. Avi is playing into the culture he has grown up in (in which attention and veneration are hard to come by and hard to let go of). In other words, he likes how interesting he is to Noora, it makes him feel important in a world where everyone's only goal is to be important.
3. Avi sees Noora as a kind of curiosity, he invites her out with his friends because it makes a nice change and he's interested in her, but he doesn't really see her as part of his world.
4. However, Noora and Ita hit it off (because Ita wants to get her back to the priory) and so Noora is kind of adopted into Avi's social circle.
  - a) Avi finds their friendship a bit unsettling, he didn't really expect Noora to be indoctrinated into their friend group.

B. Avi and Noora are invited to a birthday party by Ita, who owns a huge house in northern Scotland as a remnant of her family, who were very wealthy and are now almost all dead. Basically, they get invited to stay at this huge estate in the Scottish highlands and party for three days.

1. This is the kind of event that happens regularly in Avi's world, so he thinks nothing of it. But to Noora, it's scary and exciting.

II. Avi and Noora discover an island, and Noora goes back to it later. She is transported to the world of the priory, where she learns about the goal of the priory and her connection to it.

A. Noora is interested in the priory because it offers her a new and exciting opportunity, and it is a place where she is special.

B. Avi does not come to the priory until later, and his arrival is accidental. No one really wanted him there because he's a man, but he doesn't feel like he can leave Noora here in this mysterious place.

1. This is initially why he stays, but I need to uncover what makes him stay for the duration of the story, which I have yet to do.

C. Avi and Noora are both willing to leave their lives behind for different reasons.

1. Avi hates his life in the upper-class echelon of British society and he wants to escape it. He is sick of being told to participate, to sacrifice himself for his community, to become a part of the mass. All he wants to do is find a moment to take a breath and try and figure out who he is and what he wants after years of being told exactly what he wants. He wants a departure from this life because he doesn't feel like anyone relates to how he feels about it.

2. Noora wants an adventure, a departure from the banality of her life, and a chance to have a new experience. There is also a part of her that believes she is special, and that there is more to her life than what she has lived so far. When she gets to the priory, this is affirmed, and she likes to feel that way.

3. Importantly, Avi and Noora's roles are switched when they are at the priory. There, Noora is the important one and Avi is the one shoved to the sidelines like Noora was in his friend group. This will change how they interact and their relationship. However, this also means Avi has to have a really good reason for staying at the priory.

a) One idea I had was that he is trapped there, the nuns won't let him leave because he knows about them and if they let him go their secret could be compromised.

## MIDDLE

III. Avi and Noora spent a considerable amount of time at the priory and learned about it in great detail.

A. Noora spends almost all her time learning about the magical studies going on at the priory, learning them herself, and coming into her power.

B. However, she is also trying to help Ita 1) conceal her pregnancy for as long as possible and 2) figure out how to save her baby.

1. No one really knows how Ita got pregnant or who the father is, and she won't tell anyone. I want to explore the reasons for this later in the story.

C. Noora and Avi's relationship is becoming continually strained. Noora has become so important and Avi has been relegated to the lowest echelons of the priory's society. However, they still feel a sexual attraction toward each other, and Avi is especially confused by this since he feels it much more strongly than he did in the real world. Avi's feelings can partly be attributed to Noora's newfound power.

1. I need to answer the question of why Noora is attracted to Avi. But one idea is simply his status in the normal world.
2. Of course, these two also connect on a personality-based level, but with all these power hierarchies going on, it's hard not to factor that into romantic relationships.
3. Avi also usually gets what he wants, so part of the reason he is so attracted to Noora is because she is not an easy target.
4. Additionally, any male/female relationships are strictly forbidden, making their relationship all the more complicated.

D. Finally, the priory is facing some unknown danger that Noora can supposedly stop.

1. One idea:
  - a) The priory is under threat of Viking attack, however, Noora is connected to the specific clan of Vikings threatening the priory through her lineage. In other words, the grandmother who lived as a nun at the priory for several years was the daughter of the chief of this clan. This makes Noora a valuable bargaining piece for the priory.
  - b) Of course, Noora doesn't know any of this, but throughout the book, she becomes more and more determined to discover why she is so important to the priory.
  - c) Bethoc has told her it has to do with her magic, but this is only partly true.

IV. Climax: obviously, I don't know exactly how the climax will pan out yet, but I have outlined some ideas below.

A. What should happen:

1. Noora and Avi both must face the reality of leaving/separating from their families/friends/community in some capacity - they must make a choice that leads them in a different direction from the one they were originally on at the beginning of the book.
  - a) They both need to decide whether they are staying at the priory, whether they are continuing their romantic relationship, etc.

B. IDEAS

1. The convent forces one or both of them to commit to the magic practice - they must face an initiation of some kind.
2. Noora and Avi attempt to escape the convent.
3. Noora is forced to stay and Avi is excommunicated - possibly to the all-male priory in Northern Africa.
  - a) This begs the question: does Avi also have powers?
4. Avi is forced to return to the real world.
5. By this point in the book, Noora and Avi have developed a romantic relationship, including all the ups and downs that brings with it.
  - a) Their relationship faces a barrier at this point because Avi wants to leave the convent, he has had enough of all the politics and mystery (especially since none of it has to do with him). He wants Noora to come with him and return to the normal world.

b) Noora refuses, she finally feels like she has a place and purpose in life and the convent has become important to her.

c) They have a huge argument about this in which both are extremely passionate about their opinions but neither wants to be apart. This causes a kind of rift in the balance of power and, for a moment, lights up the monastery like a beacon, making it vulnerable.

(1) They have had arguments (and other passionate exchanges) before that have caused a similar effect, but not to this degree.

d) The convent is attacked in its moment of vulnerability and everything is thrown into chaos.

(1) I'm inspired by Viking attacks on religious houses in Scotland. I'm imagining that something similar happens and everyone has to protect the priory and the centuries of magical knowledge it protects.

6. Viking raid on the priory results in Noora's kidnap by the clan. A second book follows her life in captivity and Ita and Avi's attempts to save her.

V. Denouement - characters must come to terms with their decisions, even if there are still external tensions, characters must feel at peace with what they've decided.

VI. I imagine this book at the first in a series, so it should end on a cliffhanger.