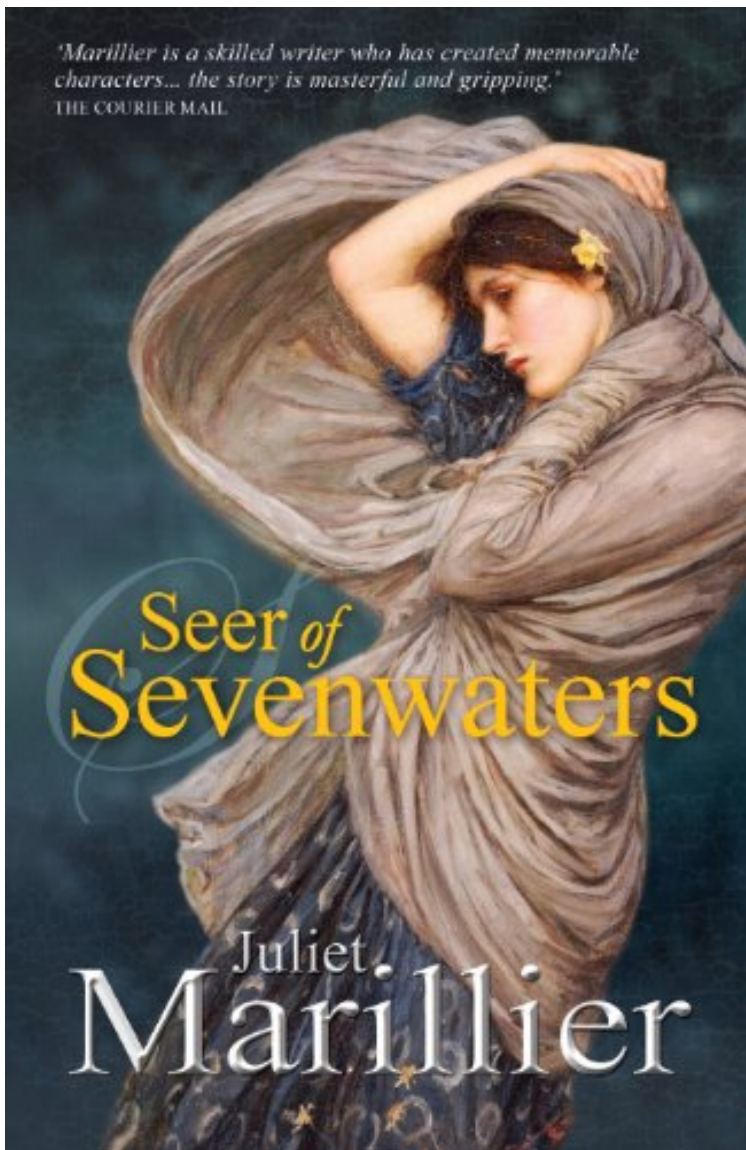


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Seer of Sevenwaters: A Sevenwaters Novel 5



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Description :

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is it that the gravely ill Ardal can't remember - or won't tell? When a visiting warrior is found dead at the bottom of a cliff, and an attempt is made on Ardal's life, Sibeal finds herself a pawn in a deadly game. The truth will be far more astonishing than she could ever have believed - and the consequences for Sibeal unimaginable. "There are some series so lyrical, so well-conceived, that every new book is a delight, and this describes Marillier's *Sevenwaters*." The Weekend West Winner of the Tin Duck Award for Best Long Written Work Fans of Marion Zimmer Bradley, Isobelle Carmody and Robin Hobb will love Juliet Marillier.

*Extrait~Sibeal~*I had been just one day on Inis Eala when a ship was wrecked on the reef north of the island. I was on the cliffs, heading out with a basket over my arm to gather seaweed, when I heard the men shouting down near the settlement. As I looked out over the sea the vessel struck the rocks. Manannn be merciful, I murmured, horror clenching my belly tight. The waves were monstrous around that reef. It was as if a malevolent hand stirred the water, reaching up to destroy any man so foolish as to come near. The day was windy I had kept a cautious distance from the cliffs edge, for it was a long way down but here on the island there was no storm. A freakish turn of weather stirred the seas in one particular place out there. Did that ship bear someone who had angered the gods? I stood frozen as the vessel smashed and twisted and broke up. Men were tossed into the water like dolls. Then, as the shouting from the settlement turned into an orderly series of commands, followed by a disciplined pattern of activity men running to the anchorage, a flotilla of small boats being launched and heading out to the rescue, women suddenly busy between infirmary and kitchen I was able to move again, and headed back down the hill. Inis Eala was full of capable folk, but at a time like this another pair of hands could always be put to good use. I reached the infirmary to find it full of quiet activity: women putting sheets on pallets, sweeping the stone floor, clearing space. My eldest sister Muirrin stood at the work bench preparing poultices while a young helper checked the supply of bandages. A pot steamed on the fire; a fragrant smell of healing herbs filled the air. What can I do? I asked. Nothing here until they start bringing in the survivors, said Muirrin. Her black hair was scraped back under a neat head-cloth; a capacious homespun apron protected her gown. She was a picture of orderly calm. Wheres Evan? I asked, not seeing the tall, dark-skinned figure of her husband among the helpers. He went out in one of the boats. It helps to have a skilled healer there as soon as they pick the survivors up. It had looked a substantial ship, with many oars. Norse, I guessed. Such a vessel would require a big crew. Each of the island boats had capacity for only a few passengers. The work of bringing back the survivors might take some time. I headed for the kitchen, where my sister Clodagh was helping Bidy, cook and matriarch of the island establishment, to prepare food. A great cauldron bubbled on an iron trivet. Bidy was kneading a large lump of dough, her hands pummeling and punching with a violence that suggested her attention, like mine, was on those poor souls out there in the water. Clodagh had been chopping vegetables, but she had laid down her knife and was staring out between open shutters. The breeze caught strands of her fiery hair, tossing them around her face. One hand rested on the swell of her belly. Her child, and Cathals, would be born within two turnings of the moon. Can I help? I asked Bidy. You could talk to your sister, Bidy said, glancing in Clodaghs direction. I walked over to the window. Clodagh? Are you all right? I followed her gaze. There was a view from here down the track to the anchorage. Across the water, the small boats were making a steady progress toward the reef. The stricken ship looked almost submerged. I thought I could make out dots in the water, men swimming or floating, but the wash of the waves around those rocks made it hard to be sure. My dreams had not shown me this. I had been weary from my long journey. Last night I had slept soundly. Now, I wished I had resisted sleep and made use of my scrying bowl. But then, if I had been granted a vision of the storm, the wreck, what could I have done to prevent it? A seer was not a god, only a hapless mortal with her eyes wider open than most. Too wide, sometimes. Even as I stood here beside my sister, there was a cacophony of voices in my mind, folk shouting, screaming, praying to the gods for salvation, crying out as lost children might. It happened sometimes, my seers gift spilling over into chaos as the thoughts and feelings of other folk rushed into my mind. It was one of the reasons my mentor, Ciarn, had sent me here to Inis Eala. Cathals down there on the jetty, Clodagh said. I know exactly what hes thinking. A freak storm, a boat wrecked so close to our shore . . . He believes its his father stirring things up, trying to make him leave the island. I could see the black-clad figure of Cathal, his cloak whipped by the wind, his eyes trained on the flotilla moving out across the bay. He could not go with them; everyone understood that. There was a powerful ward over Inis Eala, something ancient and good that held the whole island in its protective embrace. Here Cathal was safe from the clutches of his father, a devious prince of the Otherworld. What could he have done that Johnny and the others cant? I asked, ignoring the clamour of voices in my mind. He could have calmed the waters, Sibeal. Maybe. But he cant even try. If he performed a

feat like that beyond the confines of the island, his father would soon know about it. That man has spies everywhere. Its hard for Cathal, standing there watching men drown, knowing he could save people if it werent for the need to protect me and the child. Dont blame yourself, I said, putting an arm around my sisters shoulders. You and Cathal came here so you would be safe, and you are safe. Ask Cathal, and Im sure hell say that matters more to him than anything else. Besides, the storm seems to be overthe waters much calmer already. And look, theyre picking someone up. The sharp rocks jutted from the water like the toothed jaws of some ancient sea creature. Around them the waves had subsided and the ferocious gale had dwindled to a stiff breeze. Two men were leaning over the side of Johnnys boat to haul someone in. The other vessels had spread out to cover the area all around the reef. Thank the gods, Clodagh said quietly. She squared her shoulders and turned to walk briskly over to the cook fire. Biddy, Ill start another batch of bread. I wanted to help, but the voices were crowding my mind, and if I stayed here I was in danger of fainting on the floor and giving these already busy women still more work to do. I excused myself and headed out into the vegetable garden, which spread between kitchen and infirmary, protected from the prevailing winds by a dry-stone wall. I sat down with my back to the stones and bowed my head onto my knees. My body was tight with terror, the wrenching fear of men at the last extreme. I struggled to catch my breath. My vision blurred. My head was bursting. I whispered a prayer, fighting for control. Danu hold us in your hand. Manannn be merciful. I breathed slowly, repeating the words over and over to steady myself. The air was full of the sweet scents of thyme and calamint. The stones at my back held the suns warmth, anchoring me in the here and now. High overhead, gulls called. Closer to hand, the island dog, Fang, appeared from a corner where she had been digging and approached me, rolling onto her back to demand attention. I reached out my hand to stroke her, glad that she was in one of her good moods, for the diminutive creature had not earned her fearsome name for nothing. I waited, my fingers keeping up a slow pattern against the dogs warm belly, and the voices screamed on. Perhaps they would not hush until all were dead. It was some time before the cries died down sufficiently to let me move. I stretched and rose to my feet. The little dog scampered off to investigate something under a comfrey bush. Beyond the garden wall the settlement seemed near deserted, but I could hear voices from the communal dining hall that adjoined the kitchen. Nobody near the infirmary, though the door stood open. No movement near the practice yard where the main work of Inis Ealathe training of fighting men was carried out. Everyone must be busy indoors or out on the rescue boats. But surely the small craft should be back by now. In my mind one last voice called Mother, help me! and fell silent. Inis Ealas sheltered bay housed the long wooden jetty and an old cottage where a fisherman had once lived. I walked to the top of the steep path and looked down to see a good number of folk standing on the shore in silent clusters. Among them were Clodagh and Cathal, his arm around her shoulders, hers around his waist. I did not go down, but settled to wait on a flat rock beside the path. Johnnys boat had turned for home. The others passed and passed again around the rocks. A few timbers floated on the swell, but the ship was gone. Danu hold you in her hand and bring you safe to shore, I murmured. And if it is your time to go, Morrigan guide you through the gateway. May light shine on your path; may you walk on without fear. After a while Fang crept up beside me and settled, nose on paws, keeping her own vigil. Dogs were not allowed on Inis Eala. For this unlikely creature an exception had been made. The story went that she had been brought back from a mission by the intimidating Snake, a man whom one would expect to see accompanied by a fearsome wolfhound or barrel-chested fighting dog, not a tiny, temperamental ball of white fluff. I hoped I would hear the full tale of how it had happened before my visit here was over. Youre a lucky girl, Fang, I murmured, scratching her behind the ears. A subterranean growl rumbled through her small form and I drew my fingers away. Fangs moods were legendary, as changeable as spring weather. You fell on your feet, from the sound of it. Snake was away, along with a party of fifteen men, undertaking a mission for a chieftain in the south. They had taken the largest of the Inis Eala boats, which made todays rescue effort slower than it might have been. Johnnys boat was halfway back now. Four men were rowing, my cousin among them, while Evan was in the stern, his arm around a man swathed in a big cloak. Only one. And now another of the island boats had turned for home. The crew had raised a rudimentary sail. I could not see whether this vessel carried survivors. The others maintained their pattern, searching. I slowed my breathing, calming my wayward thoughts. I tried to set aside those anguished voices. I told myself that the rescue effort had got under way quickly, that the crew of such a ship would be fit, capable men, that many would be saved. More folk were heading down to the shore now, carrying stretchers, blankets. Johnnys boat came in to the jetty. Johnny threw a rope to Cathal, who secured the craft. The man in the cloak was helped onto the jetty. He refused a stretcher and began to climb the path with Evan on one side and Cathal on the other. The survivor

was a strong-looking person of middle height, squarely built, with hair that would be fair when dry. His skin was ashen, and despite the courage that saw him attempt the path on foot, he was plainly exhausted. They were almost at the top of the pathway when the second boat came in. The fair-haired man turned his head to look, started violently and began shouting. He seemed intent on hurling himself headlong down the path, but the combined strength of Evan and Cathal held him back. There was a survivor on this boat, too, and it was a woman. She appeared deeply shocked, her eyes huge, her face grey-blue with cold and exhaustion. When she was helped from the boat to the jetty her knees buckled and she collapsed onto the boards. A woman on a Norse ship. So perhaps this had not been a voyage to raid and plunder, but one of trading or searching for a place to settle. Had there been other women out there in the cold sea? Little children drowning? This woman looked as if she had gazed on hell. Clodagh helped her up. The survivor was much taller than my sister; equal in height to most of the men down there. A blanket concealed much of her form. For a moment she looked straight up the hill toward my perch among the rocks, and a sudden sharp pain went through me, like a knife in the heart. Even as I gasped with the shock of it, the woman dropped her gaze and the pain was gone. The fair-haired man would not go a step further until they brought the woman to the top of the path. When she reached him, he took her hands in his and kissed her on either cheek. She stood stiffly, staring through him. I thought she hardly knew where she was. The two of them were escorted away, but I did not move. The piercing pain had unnerved me, and it was some time before my heart slowed to its usual pace. Even then, I stayed where I was. It seemed important to keep watch until the last of the little boats came home. Fang crouched by my feet, reassuring in her small warmth. I prayed. Danu cradle you gently in her arms . . . Morrigan lead you through the gateway . . . Sleep, dear ones, sleep softly . . . I hoped I was wrong about the children. What had that woman seen, to turn her face to stone? When the last boat was tying up at the jetty, Johnny came to find me. The search was over. The stretchers had been used to bear seven dead men up the path to level ground. Two more limp forms lay in this final vessel. Sibeal, my cousin said, seating himself on the rocks beside me. Still keeping vigil? At his voice, Fang rolled instantly onto her back. Johnny rubbed her belly absently. His tattooed features were grim. Only eleven, counting the woman, I said. It must have needed far more to man a ship that size. So many lost . . . Will the currents bring them back to this shore, Johnny? Or will they drift with the weed and the fish until there is nothing left of them? The waves may wash some in here. Well keep a watch in the likeliest places. Sibeal, we must conduct some kind of funeral rite. The two we rescued are too distressed to say much as yet, though I'm hoping the man's names Knut may be ready to talk to us later today. Some of us have enough Norse to conduct a conversation, and this fellow knows a word or two of Irish. What about the woman? Her name's Svala. Knut's wife, if I understood him right. She's deeply shocked. I haven't heard her say a word so far. It seems the gods were watching over the two of them. I'd imagine a vessel of that size needs a crew of forty or more. They were gone so quickly. Clodagh suspected Mac Daras hand in it. Perhaps. Johnny was noncommittal. A Norse warrior is buried in a boat. Or a grave in the shape of a boat. I can conduct a ritual for them, something simple. Knut and Svala might add prayers of their own. When do you want to do it? Johnny was a leader of men. Though still young, he headed the community of Inis Eala and its school of warcraft. He was skilled at reading people. Somethings troubling you, Sibeal, he said now. Something beyond being witness to what's unfolded here today. I'm all right. I would not confess to him that a very small part of me was still disturbed that Ciarn had insisted I come here to spend the summer with my sisters before I made my final pledge as a druid. That I could hold on to such a personal concern in the face of today's tragedy was selfish. I'll be ready to help as soon as you've decided where and when to conduct the ritual. I did not expect to be performing a druid's duties here so quickly. Are they all men, the drowned ones you brought in? Johnny nodded. As one would expect on such a vessel. It seems quite odd that Svala was among them. If this was a voyage of settlement there should have been more women, surely. They may have been first to drown. Well find out in due course. I won't tax the survivors with questions yet. Come. He rose and held out his hand. You need food, warmth and company. I'm under orders to see you're well looked after during your stay with us. I took his arm and we walked toward the dining hall. Whose orders? I asked. Ciarn's. Didn't you wonder what was in that message he gave you to bring me? I grimaced. I'd assumed it was something complicated and strategic, not an order to make sure I ate properly and got plenty of sleep. My cousin smiled. There was some of both in it, to tell the truth. I understand he's coming here in person to collect you at the end of summer. A whole summer. Why had Ciarn thought it necessary to send me away for so long? I was ready to make my promise now; I had been ready for some time. True, sometimes the thoughts and feelings of others did crowd into my mind, as if I were a receptacle for anything too powerful for their own selves to encompass. But in the nemetons, as a druid, I could work

on controlling that. I could learn to make it a gift, not a burden. Here on Inis Eala all I would be doing over the summer was wait. Wait until it was time to go back to Sevenwaters; wait until it was time to fulfil my vocation at last. I had known since I was six years old that the life of the spirit was my destiny. I had known since the first time the Lady of the Forest had appeared to me, a majestic, blue-cloaked figure manifesting before me unsought by a still pool under the oaks. She had recognised me as a seer; she had offered me her grave counsel. What did Ciarn think I would do here at Inis Eala? Fall in love with some strapping young warrior and allow my life to veer off its long-intended course? I would never let that happen. Sibeal? I snapped out of my reverie. Yes, Ciarn is planning to come here and escort me home. He wants to talk to Cathal. Mm-hm. I'm glad you're here, at any rate. Not only because this far-flung part of the family likes to see you, but also because the island lacks a druid or wise woman. I'm sorry I have to ask you to conduct a ritual so soon after your arrival, but folk will be pleased to see it done with the authority a druid can provide. Those poor fellows died a hard death. We must lay them to rest as well as we can. I'm not quite a druid yet, I said. But I'll do my best. Presentation de l'diteur The fifth book in the epic and compulsively readable Sevenwaters series "masterful and gripping" The Courier Mail Sibeal has always known that she is destined for a spiritual life, and is committed to it with all her heart. The only thing left for her to do before she enters the nemetons is to spend the summer visiting her sisters, Muirrin and Clodagh, on the northern island of Inis Eala. But Sibeal has barely set foot on the island before a freak storm out at sea sinks a ship before her eyes. In spite of frantic efforts, only three survivors are fished alive from the water, and one of them, a man Sibeal names Ardal, clings to life by the merest thread. Sibeal befriends Ardal as he begins to regain his health. But it becomes clear there is something unusual about the three shipwrecked strangers. Why won't the beautiful Svala speak? And what is it that the gravely ill Ardal can't remember - or won't tell? When a visiting warrior is found dead at the bottom of a cliff, and an attempt is made on Ardal's life, Sibeal finds herself a pawn in a deadly game. The truth will be far more astonishing than she could ever have believed - and the consequences for Sibeal unimaginable. "There are some series so lyrical, so well-conceived, that every new book is a delight, and this describes Marillier's Sevenwaters." The Weekend West Winner of the Tin Duck Award for Best Long Written Work Fans of Marion Zimmer Bradley, Isobelle Carmody and Robin Hobb will love Juliet Marillier.