

# ~ Moon, Sun and Stars ~

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Description: Being gifted with magic is a blessing and a curse for Talia. She has lived her life running from the scorn that people show her but now she works for a formidable organisation. Blaming herself for past mistakes, fate binds tightly around her to become something that she had lost long before she could even remember.

Content Warning: This story contains violence

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## Chapter 1

Yearning for night to come, grey eyes stared far off into the distance. The sun was slowly setting, sending trees and shrubs into shadow. On the vast grass covered hill, she stood with long lean legs covered in tight leather pants and soft leather boots. Her calloused, slim fingers caressed the hilt of a broad sword that hung from her waist.

"Almost time..." she whispered softly into the wind. Her voice was a soft hum. She continued to talk to the wind. "Will you help me with my quest, oh great one?"

The wind picked up around the young woman as grey eyes surveyed the castle that was far below where she was standing. It swirled around her slim body and gently caressed every piece of skin that was not covered. Slowly red angry marks began to stain her pale skin.

Far below in the valley, the castle stood at its mightiest. Tall, stone towers were erected at each corner with sharp archers keeping watch. Along the high castle walls were warriors familiar with both sword and crossbows. No wall was unattended; not even the gates. Everyone who entered was searched thoroughly and questioned.

"How will you enter?" howled the wind.

"As a travelling merchant, I have some wares stored nearby that I need to get rid of anyway. My stay will be as long as I have stock and I will be staying at a lodge. No one will stop me at the gate for more information than that" replied the grey eyed figure.

"I bid you safe passage since I cannot follow. I will see you after you complete your mission. Remember to conceal what I have given. They don't believe in my kind."

Slowly the grey eyed figure headed towards the castle. Thick cloak with hood covered her as she slowly guided the donkey with her wares. Winding down the road to get into the castle, she was stopped by a guard. Her legs were slightly bent; ready to take action if she was attacked. Her donkey stood still as the guard approached her.

The old weary guard cautiously addressed her. "Greetings boy... I need you to take off your hood" said the old guard gruffly. He had assumed that she was a boy because of her small size and the fact that she was obviously travelling alone with wares to sell. He also felt that she had a hidden weapon under the thick cloak but first he needed to identify her.

Grey eyes watched the old guard carefully. He seemed like a decent enough man but was obviously not fond of youngsters. Her eyes had scoured each of the guard's faces and filed them into her memory. Slowly she obliged to the old guard's gruff request. She lowered her hood to reveal long silky blonde hair which fell to her shoulder blades. Grey eyes were amused at the stunned look on all of the guard's faces.

"I am sorry young lady. I did not realise with your hood on. Please state your name, your business, and how long and where you will be staying. This information is mainly for your protection" said the old guard politely. His entire body had straightened up further and he tried to make a good impression for his earlier mistake.

"Elizabeth Dray-more, I am here until I have sold all my wares. As you can see I am a merchant. I am not sure which lodging but hopefully I find one" said the grey eyed figure sweetly in a soft feminine tone. Her back was ramrod straight and she did not act like a merchant. Everything about her was graceful; even the way she guided her donkey through the gates when the old guard had accepted her answer.

She walked in slowly and the scene in front of her shocked her to her core. Just inside the gates were many people who were dirty, smelly and obviously poor. Only a few stores were set up in the middle of the merchant area and none of the merchants looked at her kindly. Grey eyes could see their stares of dislike as she guided her donkey towards them. Her cloak barely grazed the ground as she walked.

Grey eyes looked around and could see that the castle was in poor condition. She could now see why the castle was heavily guarded. There were only few people in the court and it looked as though they were all heading home or finding dinner. She slowly stopped her donkey in front of one of the merchants who was an older man than herself and smiled. "Greetings fellow merchant" said the grey eyed figure. "I was wondering if you would like to buy some of my wares."

The older merchant looked at her a little confused. He slowly came closer to her to see what wares she might have. "You're new around here" stated the merchant in a gruff voice. "Merchants don't sell to merchants. Merchants are meant to sell to the citizens and then the

merchants are taxed for using the King's space. So if you are going to sell to a merchant like you are now, you won't get a good bargain and you will have to pay a merchant tax."

"What if I was to give you my wares? You can pay me seventy-five percent of the value you sell it at. Then I won't get taxed and you will have more wares to sell" suggested the grey eyed figure. She held onto the reigns of her donkey and held it up to the merchant who thought about her proposal. She could see in her peripherals that the other merchants were eyeing her wares.

"I will give you fifty percent of the value I sell it at since I am doing you a favour" replied the older merchant. He then turned around to get a piece of paper to write down the deal that he was going to make however she stopped him with her next words.

"There is also another condition if you are only going to give me fifty percent. I would like for you to care for my donkey as well. He is very good and will cause little fuss. He only needs shelter, some water and food. Will that be alright with you?" asked the grey eyed figure.

He turned around with the piece of paper and smiled. "Since you accept the fifty percent, I can do that for you but how long will that be for?" asked the older merchant nicely with his gruff voice. He slowly wrote out the deal with a feather and ink before handing it over to her so that she could agree with what was written.

"Only for tonight, I will find a place to shelter him for tomorrow night. I will have someone come pick up my money when all my wares are sold. Now to seal the deal" said the grey eyed figure sweetly. She read the deal carefully and signed it. He then signed it himself before handing the deal back over to her.

"Give the deal to whoever you are going to get to pick up the money so that I know that you sent them. Good doing business with you" replied the man before she handed the donkey's reigns over. He gently shook her hand as if it were a delicate piece of crystal and watched her walk away.

Grey eyes swept in the features of the court before distantly inspecting the castle defence. It was strange that the majority of the warriors on duty were young and she wondered what the King was like. She still needed to find lodging so that the gate guards would not see her as suspicious. She quickly found a tavern with a spare room and was not surprised that the entire place was pretty bare. Her room was simple and the window viewed the court. However there was no need for a bed since she wouldn't be sleeping tonight.

Slowly she pulled off her thick cloak and threw it onto the bed. Her arms still held the fiery red marks and she wondered when she would have to use them. She could still feel the wind within her that had granted her with its wisdom and help. Grey eyes hastily went over her person to make sure that she had everything that she needed. Tossing her hair up into a ponytail, she crept to the window and opened it. Her face, hair and body were anticipating a nice breeze but none came. So it was true that the wind could not follow her here.

Carefully she climbed out of the window and balanced herself on a wooden beam just outside of the window but away from view. She was cautiously looking around before she pushed off slowly with her legs and leapt onto the roof of the lodging. Her brown leathers easily allowing her to blend into the straw roof, however she did not stick around for too long. Fast strong legs carried her body to the nearest wall of the actual castle and once more she was blended into her surroundings. She was not surprised that no one had seen her since the castle eyes were more focused on intruders rather than those that were inside.

Grey eyes looked up at the battlements and smiled at the lack of eyes within the walls. She still had to be careful but was sure that if she was seen that no one would assume it was anything but a cat. Her mind focused on the mission that she needed to carry out before the innkeeper knocked on her door. She had ordered a midnight meal that would allow the innkeeper to verify her whereabouts if anyone asked.

Soft booted feet raced across the tops of the patchy roofs. There was nothing that stopped her from losing her concentration; even though noises erupted from the open court which sounded like drunken people noisily making their way out of the inn. Shouts could be heard from the local warriors that were trying to sort out the situation. Few eyes turned in to see the commotion but none had spotted the grey eyed figure.

Hands on the hilt of her sword kept it from clattering against the light chain mail that she wore for protection. Even though it wasn't necessary for her, it was protocol for the organisation she belonged to. She passed most of the houses and was almost nearing the main part of the castle that was like a great stone house where the King was located. Her target was within those walls but she still had to sneak in unnoticed.

Increasing her speed, she passed five houses in a blur and leapt over the road that separated the citizens from the King's home. She was still airborne as her immediate target was in sight. It was an open window that the maids were scheduled to close in half a candle mark. Her body flipped in the air and her feet softly touched the ground of the balcony. She swiftly slid inside so that no one would notice her. She could feel that she was completely relaxed even though she was in her target's home. It was rumoured to be the most difficult place to sneak into and no one had been able to sneak in as far as she had. Her reputation for the organisation was on the line. She needed to get to the King before she was found out or the mission would be a bust.

Grey eyes carefully looked up and down the hallway where the window had let her in. She had to go to the King's quarters and lucky for her, it was down the hallway to the left and then first door on the right. Her timing had been perfect. The guards were due for a shift change and she only needed a few moments to slip in unnoticed. Her soft boots had led her to the corner to see the guards standing outside. She watched as they nodded to each other and headed off down the hall in the opposite direction to where she was hiding.

With the guard's backs turned, she swiftly and quietly made her way to the door. Slightly turning the handle, she was pleased that it didn't make a noise. She then quickly let herself in before the replacement guards arrived. However she stopped just inside the door and moved over to one side so that she was covered in shadow. Grey eyes were pleased that the King had not arrived yet

but she needed to be ready. She looked at the raw marks left on her skin and called them forth. She needed the wind's help now and knew she was the only one from the organisation who was qualified enough to do it. The raw marks began to glow red and her skin tone began to change. She watched her arms as the red marks faded from view but she knew that they were still there until the wind had taken it back.

Feeling her face to make sure that all of her facial features were intact, she quickly rechecked her weapons and made sure they were ready. She could feel that she would require them soon even though her mission was almost over. Still in shadow by the door, she waited since she knew that the King would arrive soon. She had already heard the replacement guards come up and felt a little trapped. Grey eyes could not look further into the room to ascertain possible escape routes since the King was due to arrive. She would have to wait and see.

As if upon cue to her thoughts, the door creaked open and blocked the grey eyed woman from view. She waited and tried to distinguish how many people were entering. Her ears were sharp and she could tell that only two people had entered. She could tell that one set of footsteps was heavy and evenly paced while the other was soft with more strides compared to the first. So she was able to tell that a male and female had entered the room. Little guess work was involved to identify who had entered since this was the King's private quarters and she had already done her research on him.

The King slowly walked into his quarters and leisurely moved over to his table with all of his scrolls. He was about to sit down and relax but looked up as something caught his attention. Brown eyes were staring at a tanned young woman with a long sword at her waist and wearing chain mail. He watched carefully as his daughter had instinctively moved to his side for protection.

Grey eyes had moved silently as soon as the doors had closed and stood in full view. She watched amusedly as the King was about to get comfortable. However he had stopped and in turn this had alarmed his daughter who had now registered that she was present. The grey eyed figure slowly moved forward without making any sudden movements. She didn't want him to alert the guards yet and knew that it was forthcoming if she didn't tell him her reasons for intruding.

"Greetings King Ruric and Princess Rebecca, I am here on a mission to hand you an important message. Since it was of vital importance, I had to deliver this in utmost secrecy. Also this message is verbal. Nothing of this warning is written and so you must remember" said the grey eyed woman clearly without sounding too condescending. Her voice was high and musical unlike before when she called forth the wind marks.

"Who are you?" demanded King Ruric. He looked quite alarmed by her presence but not enough to call the guards yet. Brown eyes kept a keen eye on her as he slowly moved his hand to his sword hilt. "Where are you from?"

"I have no reason to identify myself to you. Now please listen carefully to the important message. The north border is under attack by Altruem Kingdom led by Commander Lucas. The

south border is safe and Matri Kingdom is sending an envoy to propose to you a deal so that you can receive their help. However you must decline their help and try to lure the Altruem warriors to Isolde Mountain. After you have accomplished both tasks your Kingdom will be spared."

"Are you suggesting that both Kingdoms are threatening me? How will luring Altruem warriors to Isolde Mountain stop them from attacking? Also what will stop Matri from attacking as well?" asked King Ruric as he finally sat down and thought about the message thoroughly.

Grey eyes stared at brown and could easily see the confusion in his eyes. However it was not her duty to explain anything except to deliver the message and leave. She bowed curtly at him and was about to turn around but Ruric was fast. The blade of his sword rested on her shoulder with the intention of severing her head if he wished to. She could see that he was very determined to get more information from her.

"Tell me everything that you know" demanded Ruric as he threatened her with his sword. He looked deep into her eyes and could see that fear was not in them. He was amazed at her resolve and knew that this confrontation was pointless but he had to try. Slowly he felt his sword move erratically away from her shoulder. He watched in awe as she smiled at him and lunged through the open doors of the balcony.

Ruric stood where he was, staring out of that door and wondered what really was going on. He was not as blind as other ruler's thought he was. He knew that the young woman was a skilled fighter and he had no chance of defending himself against her if she chose to attack. Everything around him continued in a blur of motion as his personal guards entered the room and were trying to pursue the invader.

After the guards had left, Princess Rebecca spoke, "Father, are you alright?" She was clearly concerned since it was rare for her father to be so dazed. She even had to speak for him since the guards tried to ask what had happened. Slowly he turned towards her but she was sure that he was still a little stunned by the invasion. "We will surely never let this happen again. She could have killed you but I'm sure the guards will be able to apprehend her before long."

Ruric smiled at his daughter's naivety. She was young and careful. She knew how to deal with politics but sometimes outside affairs concerning their kingdom still baffled her. "There will be no need for the guards to apprehend her. If she wanted me dead, I would already be on the floor motionless."

"Father..." wailed Rebecca disapprovingly. "Why do you say that?"

"She is from the Blaster organisation..." said Ruric in a shuddering whisper which shocked Rebecca enough to root her to the spot. He could now see realisation dawn on her face as he once more stared out of the window. "We will have to take her message and obey it for the safety of our kingdom."

Grey eyed figure was once more running along the rooftops without a backwards glance. She could hear the alarm being raised but she was already almost back at her room. She swiftly

entered through the open window and cast her grey eyes around the room. Satisfied that everything had been left where it was supposed to be, she quickly donned her cloak on once more.

Grey eyes looked at her arms which had been tanned but were now pale. White teeth could be seen as she smiled at her timing and abilities. She was glad that she did not have to forcibly escape and was even relieved that the King had not been able to see her sword which she had used to remove the threat that he had imposed. She walked slowly over to the table and was glad to now be able to relax. She sat down and only had to wait for a few moments before there was a gentle knock on the door.

"Come in" she voiced as she stared out of the window at the night sky.

The door to her room creaked open and the innkeeper with his bushy moustache poked his head in. He looked around and smiled as he spotted his beautiful customer. Confidently, he walked in with a tray full of delicious smells and aromas that wafted over to her. He casually placed it onto the table before curtly bowing. "Is there anything else that you need for tonight?" he asked politely.

"No thank you. I will be leaving early tomorrow morning. Can you please have someone bring me breakfast at dawn?" She waited for his head to nod hastily and he smiled at her. "I will leave this outside of the door when I am done. Please make sure that no one disturbs me until dawn" she said sweetly. Grey eyes could see him melting into the palm of her hand.

"I will see to your breakfast personally. Please have a good night" he said before bowing once more. He quickly checked the room with his eyes full of curiosity but knew that he had to leave before she judged him to be rude. He quickly turned on his heel and walked swiftly to the door, shutting it on his way out with a big smile directed at her as he left.

Grey eyes slowly tracked back to the table and looked at the covered dishes. She wanted to see what was under all of the dishes since the smell was so appealing but held back. She was waiting. There was enough food for four people and she still remembered the innkeeper's face of confusion as he looked her up and down. It was obvious that he couldn't believe she could eat so much and still look slim. However he had smiled brightly at her when she had handed over a small bag of gold coins that was quite generous and made sure that she had excellent service.

"Hungry, are you?" A girly, cheerful, high pitched voice came from the window. Suddenly a brunette with hazel eyes in her late teens poked her head down from the top of the overhang. She smiled at the amused look that was plastered onto the grey eyed figure's face. Swiftly but carefully, she manoeuvred her body down over the overhang and swung gently into the window. "So what's for dinner?"

"Well take a seat and let's find out" said grey eyes before she gestured to the empty seat that was across from her. She watched amusedly as the youngster casually took off her cloak. Grey eyes smiled at the long broad sword that was strapped to her back and her sense of fashion with the standard issue chain mail. "Nice shorts and vest, Misty"

"Are you pulling my leg again, Talia?" responded Misty with a smile as she lifted the heavy broad sword off her back and casually placed it leaning on her chair with her cloak. Her hazel eyes looked at the table and started to lift the covers of the various plates while taking in the aromas. Her stomach growled loudly and she laughed as she dug into the food with glee.

Talia slowly delved into the various plates and was surprised that the dishes were actually nice and filling. Well she had paid handsomely and expected the dishes to be only half as good as they were. She was going to suggest this inn to the other members if they ever come to this kingdom. She ate only a third of what was on the table while Misty was already onto her third serving. "Misty, how long have you been here?" asked Talia.

"Well," said Misty as she looked up from her plate, "I was only sent out only a... um... I think it was quarter moon ago. They wanted me to get you all the information that you needed to get in here without causing so much of a fuss. I guess you had the easy way in while I was buried in a bundle of hay. Luckily for me, they didn't check the wagon otherwise I would have been skewered. Have you seen those pikes they have?"

Talia smiled. It had been quite easy for her to actually get in. She was just like any other traveller and no one had an excuse to search her either. So it was a good thing that she had the appropriate information for staying out of trouble. "I have a feeling that they will try to search each house and inn for the culprit. Where are you meant to be staying anyway?"

Misty continued to munch away and talked with her mouth full. "I'm not recorded as a visitor or anything. So if they do see me, I am pretty much busted. But it's the reason why Laney gave me this neat sack. I can fit right in and be part of your luggage." She hastily pulled out a plain grey sack from her coat and flapped it out for Talia to see. It was quite small however considering Misty's size; she could fit in without any worries and still look like a normal sack.

"Well you better hurry up and eat before they come. I've got to put the tray outside and also look like I am fast asleep for when they come in" said Talia as she pushed her chair back and quickly stowed her sword and Misty's broad sword under the blankets. "They should be fine there."

"Do we get breakfast as well?" asked Misty between mouthfuls of food.

"Dawn" replied Talia as she smiled at her friend's appetite.

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## **Chapter 2**

Bang, bang, bang.

Talia lifted her head and turned it towards the door as it was opened. She blinked rapidly trying to remove the sleep from her eyes even though there wasn't any. Her grey eyes stared at the three warriors who stormed into the room and were all turned, looking at her. She pulled the sheets up



as she sat up and made sure that she was fully covered. "What's wrong?" she asked in her sweet voice.

The three guards looked around the room to spot any other occupants but did not enter further into the room. The middle guard who looked the oldest with his greying beard and moustache spoke sincerely. "I am sorry, Lady but we were ordered to check all the rooms. Sorry to disturb you." He quickly ushered out with his two comrades and the door was swiftly closed.

Talia threw the sheets from her body and slowly got up to light the candle that she had hastily extinguished when she had heard them approaching. The tray of now empty plates had been put outside just before she heard the innkeeper sounding quite furious down below. She looked around the room and spotted Misty stumbling out of her sack.

"That was close" commented Misty as she stretched out her body from being cramped in a tight spot. "I could have sworn that the door almost hit me. Luckily you moved me over before they came. I wonder what trouble we'd be in if Laney knew what had happened."

Talia once again took a seat at the table and stared at the lone candle. She could still see Misty in her peripherals but didn't pay much attention to her. Her mind was still grinding away with many ideas and memories, circling around in there. She could still clearly remember her brief meeting with Ruric and Rebecca but something about it made her feel uneasy. She unconsciously began to drum her fingers on top of the table as she tried to figure out what the unsettling feeling was.

"So are we going to commence the second mission?" asked Misty as she retrieved her broad sword and strapped it onto her back. Her slender arms were very deceptive considering the sword was heavy but she was so small. Hazel eyes slowly looked up and stared at Talia for a response.

"I wonder what Mila is doing back at base?" commented Talia as she strapped her sword to her belt and threw on her cloak. The cloak covered her entire body and she was grateful considering the raw marks that stained her skin. The other members knew of her ability to change her appearance but never question how she was able to achieve it. It wasn't as if she wasn't telling them what she was capable of but it did mean that no one else knew how to do it. So she was the busiest member besides Misty and another member. "Do you think she is cooking up some more missions for us?"

"I'm pretty sure that she received a whole bunch of mail the day I left. So I'm pretty sure that there are a few missions for us after we finish up here. Luckily we don't have to camp up out and wait for those Altreum warriors to get their arses to Isolde Mountain" replied Misty with a grin knowing that Nester was currently camped out there.

"Well at least she will get to have fun once she is there" retorted Talia. She walked towards the window and was about to jump out but something caught her eye. There were a group of warriors standing just outside of the inn. She could tell that they were on duty considering none of them were tired and they seemed anxious.

"She's good at it and she ain't the talking type so it's a perfect mission for her to rough up those Altreum warriors" stated Misty as she headed towards the window as well. She stopped next to Talia and looked at what she was staring at. "Are they searching the buildings?"

Grey eyes took in their armour and weapons. It certainly did look like they were on duty but something was off kilter. The warriors were just standing out there and were not engaging in camaraderie talk. It was as if they were standing in front of their commander and waiting for instructions but Talia didn't see a commander in sight. Her grey eyes searched the ground and now she was sure that there was something wrong. Quickly withdrawing from the window, Talia approached the table and blew out the candle that lit the room.

"What's wrong?" asked Misty a little baffled.

"If we want to accomplish the second mission, we have to hurry. I have a feeling that there is something up and I am not going to stick around to find out. Our chance to complete the mission might slip out of the window. I'll go first and you follow" said Talia as she swung her body out the window and onto the top of the roof in a fluent motion.

Misty followed closely behind and looked around to see if there was a chance that they might get spotted. "I don't like this feeling" squeaked Misty as she followed Talia at her heels. She continued to look around and was quite attentive of where all of the warriors were looking at.

Before long they were both out of view and safely inside the King's home. They were actually in the Princess's quarters, waiting for her to arrive. Obviously they were did not position themselves where they could be easily seen so that the Princess didn't alarm the guards. Also it wasn't long before the door creaked open.

Princess Rebecca swept into the room without glancing around. The door was immediately closed by the servants who were waiting outside for her beck and call. She shredded her gracefulness to bits as she leapt forward onto her queen sized bed. Diving under the covers she slowly sighed as her body began to relax. Her mind had been reeling before and now all she wanted to do was rest until her father requested her presence.

Lifting an arm to rest over her eyes, she felt sleep creeping up on her. Her body slowly relaxed bit by bit until only her mind was still awake. She did not need to look around her room to know that the servants had entered once more to extinguish the lights. Only the small fireplace was still slightly ablaze. It made her room nice and cosy.

Grey eyes looked around at the dimly lit room. The bed was opposite the main door and only a couple of tables and chairs filled the room. It was quite small and she had the feeling that it would be quite cool in the summer. The balcony door that they had entered through was closed by a servant who dared not to look around. Talia could see that Princess Rebecca was getting closer to falling asleep and they would need her to be asleep for them to accomplish their mission.

Slowly Talia crept from her hiding spot and quietly approached the bed. Misty was slowly making her way over from the other side and was also being very quiet as well. They didn't want to alarm the Princess and they also didn't want to fail this mission. Talia slowly withdrew a small pouch from her belt and picked out a small vile of liquid. She crept closer and closer towards the bed.

Misty watched patiently as Talia emptied the contents of the vile into a small cloth. Hazel eyes looked intently at Princess Rebecca so that she could be sure that Rebecca was sleeping soundly. She could see her even breathing and her relaxed face. Slowly she glanced up at Talia who looked ready to pounce.

Talia quickly placed the damp cloth over Princess Rebecca's mouth and momentarily saw her eyes open in surprise before they slowly drifted shut. The effect of the liquid in the vile was instantaneous. It was no wonder that they were given explicit instructions from Laney not to smell the contents.

Misty and Talia had been tempted several times to see what the vile actually contained but held back since they had a mission. Otherwise, if they were back on base, they would goad each other into testing it out. Misty would be the first to try it since she was really incompetent at scissors/paper/rock.

Talia smiled as she carefully placed the cloth in an airtight bag. She would have to use it again if Princess Rebecca were to wake up. She quickly threw the covers off and carefully lifted Princess Rebecca off the bed with Misty's help. Since Princess Rebecca was in her early twenties and they were only teenagers at best, it was quite extraordinary that only Talia was carrying Princess Rebecca over her shoulder.

Misty quickly restored the room so that their presence was erased. She even fixed up the bed so that it looked like Princess Rebecca was still in it. She then finally made her way over to the window to follow Talia and shut it on her way out.

Talia carefully climbed onto the railing of the balcony and waited for Misty to finish up. Grey eyes surveyed the surrounding area and noted that it was only a few candle marks from midnight since they had to make sure that Princess Rebecca was sleeping before they proceeded. She carefully noted that the warrior's shifts were due to change over which meant that they were running out of time.

Misty quickly tapped Talia on the shoulder to let her know that she was done. Another tap made Talia stop in her tracks. It meant that it was not safe to be carrying Princess Rebecca around like they were going to. Misty quickly looked up at the bright sky with the moon and many sparkling stars. She swiftly withdrew her sword and carefully held it with two hands before starting to chant under her breath.

Talia looked around and waited for Misty's signal to go. She knew what was going to happen and could start to see a well of vapour beginning to become visual around them. Soon enough, a light mist had covered the whole castle and then it became a thick fog that completely obscured their

vision. Grey eyes tried to pierce the density of the fog but to no avail. She could only see what was right in front of her.

"Alright, I think that should do it" said Misty as she quickly sheathed her sword and looked around at her handiwork. She slowly waved her hand through the air and felt the mist against her fingers. It was perfectly created and her hazel eyes had analysed that the mist would remain for quite some time until the sun came up or some wind blew it away. She knew that it would probably be the former considering the location of the castle which was situated in a deep valley.

"I'm ready when you are" replied Talia as she shifted Princess Rebecca more securely onto her shoulder. Grey eyes looked straight ahead and felt Misty's hand grab her by the upper arm. As soon as Misty moved the slightest bit, Talia was able to replicate her movement so that she could be guided safely without falling to her death or injuring herself. Her steps were even as light as Misty's and she could slowly feel that Misty was relaxing against her side since she had been worried about this section of their mission.

"How are we going to get her out of here?" asked Misty since it was safe to talk considering no one would be able to see them. Hazel eyes scanned the surrounding area and noted that the guards were trying to be vigil but they were looking quite clumsy in the effort. She even noticed that one warrior was actually facing a wall that was two metres away from him. "No one told me the rest of the mission since I'm just a tag-a-long after this point."

"I will tell you once we reach our destination. Stay alert... I don't know if our luck will hold out. There may be someone within these walls who might be able to use magic and see us running along the roof. I don't want Mila on our case for being slightly careless" said Talia as she continued to mimic each of Misty's movements.

Soon enough they were back inside the room that Talia was lodging at. Princess Rebecca was comfortably in bed, still knocked out by the vile of liquid that she had breathed in. Grey eyes turned towards Misty who had been quietly sharpening her broad sword for the past three candle marks since they were waiting for dawn which was slowly approaching.

Talia gradually rose to her feet and glided over to the mostly sleeping Princess Rebecca. Grey eyes could see her beautiful face relaxed in sleep and knew that any amount of noise would not wake her from her slumber. It was a good thing however there was a slight risk that she could wake up during their small trip out of the castle. There was no way that she was going to administer another dose of the vile in case it was lethal. She had to follow Laney's instructions carefully or else risking more than just the mission. They would have three kingdoms united under one cause and would be after the members of the Blaster organisation.

Talia's tired mind could see how this mission could be beneficial to all three kingdoms. Her brief briefing with Mila had broadened her view about the whole situation considering that Mila had cleverly been able to combine the wishes of six anonymous letters into one complicated mission. She could see how only three members of the small organisation would be able to accomplish such a complicated task in less than one full moon.

A hesitant knock at the door stilled everyone in the room where they were. Slowly Talia raised her voice in a gentle lady-like voice. "Who...Who is there?" asked Talia. She glided swiftly to the door with her blade nearby and pressed her ear slightly against the doorframe. Her sensitive ears could only pick up one set of lungs that were strong and quite large which meant that whoever it was could only be a man who was quite healthy.

A male voice whispered back through the door. "Excuse me miss, I have come to give you a message. May I please come in to deliver it?" asked the man. It sounded like he was only a servant by the way he talked but Talia could hear that he had not told the whole truth. Also she couldn't really let him come in since Princess Rebecca was on the bed and anybody would be able to recognise her.

"Please hold on one moment" replied Talia, sounding like she was on the opposite side of the room. She quickly moved to the bed and had Misty jump in with her sword and all. In quick, precise movements, Talia was able to arrange Misty and Princess Rebecca to look like they were one person. She hastily gave her blade to Misty for safe keeping and then glided to the door before slowly letting the door creak open.

Grey eyes widened in surprise to see that the man that she had been talking to was actually a commander of the warriors. His dark eyes directed at her looked as though they were trying to measure her from head to foot. She could feel a slight sense of unease but that did not faze her. Her whole body had almost reacted at the sight of him and she could have sworn that she had wanted to step back and hide somewhere. However she had a mission to do and this was no time or place to fall apart simply because a commander was standing at the door with magical power brimming underneath the surface of his skin.

"Thank you for letting me in," he politely said as he entered the room swiftly. His dark eyes immediately flew to the bed which he noticed that there was somebody in it. He turned and faced Talia with a questioning look but had to wait as she closed the door.

Talia swiftly turned on her heel and looked at the commander. He seemed quite handsome and strong but she knew that there was something about him that made her want to remember every little detail about him. He gave her a questioning glance and knew that he was enquiring about the other occupant in the room.

"Please excuse my business partner, but she is very tired after arriving here very late last night" said Talia reasonably. It was a very good lie and one which the commander had no need in following up considering that there were plenty of people arriving and leaving the castle at bizarre times of the night. She continued to try and recognise every line on his face as she spoke next. "So, please deliver the message that you have for me."

"King Ruric would like an audience with you tomorrow evening. You are to attend the party that will be held for Princess Rebecca's birthday. There, King Ruric would like to have a word with you. Also several members of the royal court would also like an audience with you. That is all" said the commander before bowing to her and then was about to leave.

"Please, wait one moment" said Talia elegantly but a little urgently. The commander halted and turned around to face her. "I know that this may sound a little odd but why would the King and members of the royal court want me to attend the party when I do not know any of them?"

"I am sorry, my lady. It would seem to me as though the King and the members of his court had witnessed you at the merchants stand. Seeing how lovely you are and the beautiful ring that adorns your finger, he explicitly requested me, his loyal servant, to approach you and request an audience which he assumes you will not turn down" said the commander before he turned and left with Talia standing there in shock.

As soon as the door had closed and the footsteps of the commander had faded away, Misty hastily sat up and had thrown the covers off the bed. She was struggling to get out of bed and Talia could now see why. Princess Rebecca had unknowingly draped her arm tightly around Misty and was hugging her quite tightly. "A little help please" pleaded Misty as she struggled to loosen Princess Rebecca's grip.

Talia swiftly helped Misty out of the bed and watched amusingly as Princess Rebecca grabbed the pillow instead and was smiling brightly into it. Grey eyes looked up at Talia and she almost started to laugh at how red Misty had gone from embarrassment. "I think she likes you" teased Talia and was hit by a spare pillow that Misty had thrown.

"Anyways," said Misty as she found her sword and sat down at the table to resume her sword maintenance, "what are you going to do now?" Her hazel eyes looked up at Talia and could see the laughter slowly die away as if it had never been there. She glanced at the ring that Talia was wearing. It looked pretty ordinary with its silver band and blue rose diamond. She slowly started to sharpen her sword while keeping an eye on Talia.

Grey eyes stared at the ring on her forefinger. It had always been there ever since she could not remember. She had worn it everywhere and now this was the first time in which she was addressed about it. Questions sprang forth into her head that she had not considered before. *Where did I get this ring from?*

"Are you going to go to the party?" asked Misty after a few moments.

"Well since the party is for Princess Rebecca and we have her, I don't think there will be a party until she returns. Since we won't be returning her until midnight, I doubt they will have a party at that time. I would actually think that they will be too busy trying to find her and then maybe still have the party after she is found" explained Talia as she continued to stare at her old ring. There was something about it that she couldn't really put her finger on. She could feel as though her mind was blocking the information that she was seeking. Her head began to ache and so she stopped staring at the ring. "We will continue with the mission. If the mission is complete before the scheduled time of the party, then I will attend with Princess Rebecca."

"I suppose so since we will have to eventually tell her why we are taking her for a ride. I just hope that we can sneak out of the city without being hindered. I doubt we will be able to get out

without being stopped first" replied Misty as she packed away her sword maintenance tools and started to get ready for the long day.

Talia went about her business as she usually did in the early candle marks before dawn since she was waiting for breakfast to arrive and sleep was the last thing that was on her mind. She carefully cleaned her sword and made sure that it was sharp as can be before getting involved in some exercises with Misty that involved sparring but with little or no noise. It was a good exercise that would increase their stealth skills while having the advantage of surprise if they had to face a large group in the dark.

Misty had already worked up a sweat considering that she mostly just used her stealth to hide or run away. She wasn't the confrontational type like Nester. However Nester only confronted people if she had a plan which she always did. It was quite surprising that she could see how well Talia had improved over the years. Since the Blaster organisation was only ten years old and its members had only joined no less than five years ago, it was a given that their skills had improved immensely since joining. Misty was already at her limit before Talia decided to stop. She wondered if the girl had a better sparring partner like Nester that she could go on for hours.

Talia cleaned up and breakfast finally arrived at the door where she personally got up to get considering that there shouldn't be anybody else in the room besides her. She quickly closed the door on the man before he could even utter a greeting. Her nose could smell the delicious aroma of honey on bread and some stew. She could already hear Misty's stomach protesting quite loudly to be fed.

Slowly Talia made her way over to the bed where Princess Rebecca was starting to show signs of waking up. Grey eyes quickly jerked towards Misty, to hide her while Talia was going to be in for a nasty situation. She hastily deposited the tray of food onto the table before carefully approaching the bed.

Princess Rebecca fluttered her brown eyes open. She looked puzzled at the unfamiliar ceiling in which she was staring at. She hastily sat up in shock feeling as though there was something wrong. Her brown eyes looked around frightened. She was in an unfamiliar room and it looked quite shabby compared to her own room. She wondered what she had done last night to end up in this place. However before her thoughts could go reeling off, brown eyes met grey.

Talia bowed deeply to the princess before addressing her formally. "Good morning, Princess Rebecca" said Talia before she stood erect. Her hand had covered her heart during the bow but it was respectful enough to not alarm the princess too much. Grey eyes could see that she was calculating in her mind and that she was trying to figure out what had happened to her last night. "Please do not be alarmed, I am here for your safety."

"Excuse me, young lady but I... I wish... I wish to go to see my father immediately. Can you please excuse me?" asked Princess Rebecca in a polite manner that befitted her royal heritage. She slowly tried to stand up and make her way to the door but Talia impeded her progress just when she was about to cross the floor. "Excuse me but did you not hear what I have just said?"

"I am deeply sorry Princess Rebecca but you are not permitted to leave this room to seek your father. As I said before, I am here to protect you and keep you safe. Please take a seat so that I can explain everything to you" explained Talia before the princess tried to force her way to the door. Talia sighed deeply. *Why do I have to always make the explanations?*

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### Chapter 3

Talia, only fourteen years of age, stood by the door of a large factory which was actually a large village comprising of many smaller houses. She was waiting for the boss to come and greet her since she had always been there by happenstance for a nice chat before she needed to leave for work. Her strong arms and legs were only ideal for field work but she was talented in other areas of the large factory. She could mend clothing as well as cook and it was by no means a hard place to work. The factory in question was owned by an elderly woman who was actually running a corn business.

Talia stood outside of the biggest building and waited patiently for the boss. She could slowly hear the sounds of singing which she knew immediately belonged to that of the elderly woman. Her rough but inviting voice filled the air with happiness. Talia had always felt happy coming to this place ever since she could not remember.

"Hey Talia, come over here for a bit" called the elderly woman as she saw the former just standing there. The elderly woman who still had every bit of her grace intact, flowed around the kitchen as if she were gliding across ice. She looked so happy even though she had wrinkles and grey hair. She wasn't like those other old people which Talia had seen before, always bickering to each other about youngsters. "I want you to try something for me" said the elderly woman kindly before placing a bowl and spoon into her hands.

Talia looked into the bowl and could see that there was yellowish paste in her bowl. Grey eyes looked at the bowl with some curiosity and slowly dipped the spoon in to discover everything about it. She could see that it would slop over the spoon like any other stew however the bowl was not hot. She could see that there was only corn in the bowl and a milky sauce was surrounding the small pieces.

"Go on and have a taste" said the elderly woman encouragingly.

Talia slowly raised the spoonful of whatever it was to her mouth and only placed a small amount in. Her tongue collected the flavour and started to savour it. The corn stew or whatever was sweet, creamy and made her whole body cool down as if she had just eaten a cold block of ice. She looked up at the elderly woman who was holding her breath in apprehension before letting out a sigh once Talia had placed several quick spoonfuls into her mouth and had nearly finished the bowl.

"I will take it that you like it?" asked the elderly woman who smiled sweetly at Talia. She slowly turned around as if she had wings and began to prance around the kitchen even before receiving



a nod of approval from Talia. "I will leave a bit aside for you later. You should be off. I think the other workers are getting ready to plant more corn for me."

Talia, not even upset by the mention of work, courteously placed the bowl onto the clattered table and turned on her heel for the door. She nodded her head in appreciation at the elderly woman before disappearing from sight to fulfil her duties as one of the workers. She liked the elderly woman very much but seldom talked to her. It was always the other way around and had been since she arrived at this large village. She had spoken to no one and no one knew that she could speak. They had all assumed that she couldn't since all she did for communication was nod or shake her pretty head.

Grey eyes looked across the field of corn and smiled. She had a hectare all to herself where she had to pick all of the corn. It was the same amount that everyone else had to pick and it always amazed everyone else that Talia was able to finish before they did. Her smile would light up everyone's moods and no one ever had anything bad to say about her. She carefully strapped the big basket to her back and walked into the field of corn. Grey eyes looked at the very pretty bugs that were flying about and how cool it was within the field. She slowly started to pick the corn and managed to fill only about a quarter before she put it aside and went to grab all of the other baskets that she needed without the other workers knowing.

Talia looked at the fifteen baskets that she had to fill to the brim with corn. She placed them in a row and made sure that they were stable. Her grey eyes looked around carefully so that she couldn't be seen and slowly she extended her hands out in front of her. Closing her eyes gently, she called forth the strings of power that swirled inside of her body. She could sense where every single corn in her hectare was and slowly let magical power slither out of her hands. The power flowed out among the corn stalks and hastily encouraged the corn to depart from their resting place. The corn then danced their way back to the baskets and started to fill them up to the brim. While she was letting her power loose, she was dancing around, weaving an intricate pattern in the air which was how she was able to encourage the corn to leave their resting place. The last part of the dance was to withdraw all of her magical power as well as collecting the corn.

Talia's hands swayed around and around as she twirled in a tight circle. Her mind was free to wander the winds that were blowing in the air. Her dance had become more graceful than anything she could do consciously. Her grey eyes glowed brightly as she watched the corn flow into the baskets. It was all a simple magical trick that she had masterfully created on her own so that she could keep up with the others. Otherwise she would not be done until it was late into the night. Slowly her magical power withdrew into her body once more and she stopped dancing. Her eyes stopped glowing and she could see that the baskets were full of corn.

Talia smiled to herself. She had completed the work in less time than she had done so before which was quite a deal considering the first attempt actually took until dusk. Now she was done in less than two candle marks. She walked to each basket and carefully inspected them to make sure that they wouldn't fall out when she carried them out. Her body relaxed as she looked around at the stalks and slowly closed her eyes to breathe in the nice fresh air of the day.

Talia slowly spread her arms out and smiled majestically to the corn stalks before taking in a long breath of fresh, cool air. Grey eyes fluttered open and gazed at the bright blue sky that was so inviting she could have floated up there to swim among the wind currents. Her eyes could see such things and her body could feel every tug that invited her to just leave the ground far behind and make her feel free from the world. However her gaze returned to the baskets full of corn. It was time to return one of the baskets so that it looked like she was doing the work that she had been assigned to do. She sighed deeply and went to work.

Later on in the day, Talia cocked her ear up and wondered who was coming to visit the large village. She could hear wheels on a cart turning as if there was a family with their luggage onboard. Quickly snatching up the last basket of corn, she ran out of the field of corn and rushed towards the main house where she had greeted the elderly lady earlier in the morning. Grey eyes were stunned to see that her hearing had been right.

A covered wagon being wheeled by two horses, rolled slowly to a stop just in front of the main house. A man slowly hopped off from the driver's seat and made his way to the back of the wagon. He lifted up the back covering and smiled at the many people who were seated in there. He then said a few words which Talia could not catch and walked onto the porch before knocking loudly.

Talia rushed towards the back of the main house. She could see that the man was actually handsome even though he was so old with his growing beard and moustache. Her face looked a little concerned since the man was holding a small bag which only reminded her of a coin bag. She wondered what such a man was going to do once he met with the elderly woman. However she didn't have any more time to speculate since she ran around to the back door and let herself in.

The elderly woman turned towards the back door and smiled. "It's nice of you to visit me after you have finished collecting all of that juicy corn. I think there is someone at the front door, can you please let them in?" asked the elderly woman before she turned her attention back onto the stove. "I have to keep an eye on this otherwise it may burn."

Talia nodded at the elderly woman and walked casually towards the front door while dusting herself off. She had always met each visitor and would always try to see if anyone recognised her or not. However lately, she had only been meeting with every visitor since she had become used to it and the elderly woman did not mind. Her manners were always impeccable and she never spoke a word to any of the visitors. Her mind had given up any hope that someone would know her and tell her where she should be.

Talia slowly approached the door and swiftly opened it before the man could knock a second time. Grey eyes looked up at him questioningly but before he could say a word, she gestured with a wide sweep of her arm to let him in. She closed the door smoothly before escorting him towards the kitchen since the elderly woman was cooking. The man had tried to talk to her a few times while following but the questions only needed a nod or shake of the head to answer them. She could see that he was starting to get puzzled by the fact that she had not said a word to him and the fact that she never elaborated any of his questions.

Talia watched and waited carefully by the back door while the elderly woman and the man started to converse. Her ears were eager to eavesdrop in on their conversation. It was not like she was nosey or anything but her hearing had become so sharp that she could hear every little thing that was happening inside the kitchen as well as what was happening outside in the corn fields. Sometimes she wished she could just turn it off since her ears would accidentally pick up some indecent noises or snippets of conversation.

"What business do you have here with me?" asked the elderly woman as she stirred the pot of baby corn around. Her blue eyes never left the pot but she could tell that the man was interested in what she was doing. "I don't have all day and I am sure that you want something from me before I take my leave."

The man cleared his voice throatily before answering. "I am sorry to have to disturb you while you are busy however I would like to conduct some business. I hear that you own a quite bit of land and you have only made use of about half of it. I have come to give you a generous offer to purchase a tenth of the land that you are not using. Are you interested by my proposition?" asked the man carefully while lightly flicking his brown fringe from his sweaty forehead.

"I'm listening" replied the elderly woman as she continued to stir the contents of the pot. Her arms were outstretched to collect herbs or spice to add to the contents of the pot before she stirred it again and had a whiff of the delicious aroma to see if there was something missing. She could feel that the man was a little put off by her actions and demeanour however she couldn't help it if he had caught her at a bad time. "What are you offering me for a tenth of the unused plot of land? Also what are you using it for?"

"I am offering you ten thousand gold pieces for a tenth of the unused plot of land. I will use the land to build my own business and to raise my family. The business which I will build will be a smith for weapons and armour. It is the only thing that I am good at and I'm sure that there are no other smiths around these parts" replied the man.

"Ten thousand gold pieces for that small plot of land but where will you be getting your metal from? There are no mines around here. Also it almost is a not needed business around these parts at this point in time. I don't see a war starting up in these parts for a long time or until I see the changes. People around here are happy with their lives and neighbours. Tempting people with the idea that your weapons and armour are only for protection will ultimately make some people lose some of their light. If you build such a business, you won't be able to live here for very long" muttered the elderly woman as she continued to stir the contents of the pot. It was still quite amazing that she had said all of that seriously without losing her concentration on the soup that she was preparing. "I suggest that you make something else with the metal if you find a way to get it. You may have the plot of land on one other condition."

"Yes?" queried the man.

"You will take the girl who showed you in with you. She will help you on your endeavour and I am sure that she will be reporting back to me if there is any mishap. She is strong and fit but she

doesn't talk. I think giving her the chance to spend some time with people her age will do her some good. You do have daughters about her age don't you?" asked the elderly woman.

"Yes, of course I do. My youngest daughter is fifteen years old and she will befriend her in no time. I am also sure that any of my sons will try to talk to her also and maybe they will also become her friend. So, why doesn't she talk?" asked the man curiously.

"She wandered to my door when she was only six years old with a ring on a necklace around her neck. She only wore a simple dress. I tried to ask her things so that I could figure out who she belonged to but she didn't know. Also it didn't help that the more she stayed here, the less she would interact with the other workers but it was quite understandable with the age difference and all. She will still work my fields but I have a feeling that she will be able to help you when she is done" replied the elderly woman with a small chuckle.

"If she is to attend the fields, I doubt she will have the time to spare to help me let alone become friends with my sons and daughters. How will she be able to work your fields and help me?"

"I know she finishes her work in less than two candle marks in the field. She will have plenty of time after that to lend a hand as well as spend time with your sons and daughters. However I will give you one warning, if something happens to her, I will hold you responsible" said the elderly woman threateningly which made the kitchen feel heavy with all of the pent up tension.

"You have my word that nothing will happen. Here is your ten thousand gold pieces and I will see you in three days if I need anything else. Please have a good day" said the man before he turned on his heel without the bag of coins in his hands and left.

"You can come out now child" cackled the elderly woman who knew that Talia was still there. She stirred the pot of soup once more before turning off the heating source and removing the pot to the bench to sit. "Did you hear what we were discussing?" she asked.

Talia slowly stepped back into the kitchen and nodded her head reluctantly. She had been caught out once again that she had been eavesdropping. Slowly she began to speak in a soft voice so that no one could hear her except the elderly woman. "How did you know that I can finish the field work in two candle marks?" asked Talia.

"Unlike some other people around here, I am gifted just like you are. On the very first day that you came to me, I could tell that you could control only a small fraction of what you can do now. I was a little surprised that you didn't know who you were but I could tell by the ring on that necklace that you wear means that you are an important person. So I have left you be until now" said the elderly woman gently.

"What do you mean?" asked Talia.

"You need to broaden your horizons and gain more knowledge about the outside world. I don't want you stuck here all your life if you have the potential to be something greater. So please just listen to an old woman like me and go and work for that man. You can come back anytime that

you want to and if you don't feel like working the fields then you don't have to. However you have to promise me that you will talk to his children. You have to talk" warned the elderly woman. She gently placed her hand onto Talia's shoulder and gave her a big toothy smile.

"If you can see that I have a gift or not, how come I can't tell?"

"You are still growing child. In a few years, you will be able to tell if somebody has our gift or not. However you will also become more affiliated with your own gift and there will lie the danger. If someone feels that you may be a threat to them, they will try to eliminate you. So I suggest that you not only help the man out but to also get him to teach you how to defend yourself" suggested the elderly woman as she pulled Talia into a tight hug.

Talia returned the hug and could feel that there was something not right. She could sense that there was something that the elderly woman was not telling her. Grey eyes looked deep into blue and could almost stare at her soul but she stopped her gaze from prying any further. She didn't want to intrude into someone's soul unless she had their permission and she also respected the elderly woman as well. She did not dare to break the trust that the elderly woman had for her.

The elderly woman slowly released Talia and smiled once more at her. Blue eyes stared at Talia for a moment before she stood up straight again. This was the most she had gotten out of Talia since she came here. "Now off with you. I know you have finished your field work and you have free time, so go and introduce yourself to the man and his children. I'm sure that they have not reached the field yet. I guess you will be able to catch up to them before they get to the unused field. Get them to use the side closest to here" said the elderly woman before she smiled and hugged Talia one more time.

Talia stood there for a moment. This was the first time in which the elderly woman had actually hugged her and it was just a shock. It was almost as if the elderly woman was saying goodbye but Talia doubted that she would not come and visit. Her grey eyes stayed on the elderly woman for a second longer before she smiled and made her way to the front door.

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Talia dashed across the field with Marina trailing behind. It had been a week since she had last gone back to the elderly woman since Marina's father, David, had wanted more of her help to set up his home and business. Marina was a nice girl who would quickly do her chores before spending the afternoon just having fun. Marina would always cheer her up and lighten her day with the jokes that she constantly issued. Talia was hard pressed to try and not laugh while she was having a drink. She had almost died the first time that Marina said a joke while Talia was having a drink.

"Where are we going?" asked Marina with a big grin across her face. Her small fragile body seemed to bounce across the field since she was so light. She was strong enough to wrestle with her brothers but always tried to act a lady whenever her father was around. She only followed Talia since Talia had seemed so excited.

"It has been a week since I saw the elder. She will be happy that I have finally gotten some free time to actually see her and talk to her. She will be surprised when she hears everything that I've done while I've been away" replied Talia as she ran faster. Her small frame seemed to glide across the ground as if she were walking gracefully. Marina had been very surprised to see her run for the first time and felt embarrassed about complimenting her on it. "I'm sure that she should be in the main house."

Marina only sighed but kept running. She could only follow Talia so far before she called out to Talia for her to slow the pace down. She could see the excitement that was bubbling up inside the girl that she had only known for a week. It seemed quite unbelievable that her father had told her that Talia didn't talk. She could see that Talia was quite hesitant in talking to her father and brothers but to the female side of the family, it was like she could let her guard down somewhat. "Wait up" called Marina before she almost lost sight of her new friend.

Talia and Marina arrived at the house in a short amount of time. They slowly walked to the back door so that Marina could catch her breath before meeting with the elderly woman for the first time. It seemed like such a long walk but Talia didn't mind since there was still plenty of time before they had to head back to help out again.

Talia slowly stepped onto the back porch and gently knocked the door before walking in. She didn't even wait for anybody to answer her since she had never done so before. Marina had wanted to stop Talia from entering but it was too late. Talia was already inside and she didn't want to be left outside all alone. Talia quietly stepped through the house and walked into the kitchen, where she assumed that the elderly woman would be. However, to her surprise, the elderly woman was not there.

"Maybe she is taking a nap" suggested Marina.

Talia doubted that very much considering that the elderly woman would always be busy cooking during midday. She slowly stepped through the house and walked into the living room which was cold and quiet. No one was in there either. Slowly grey eyes turned to the stairway that led up to the second floor. She had only been up there a couple of times since she had come there but now it looked ominous. She slowly made her way up with Marina following closely behind.

Grey eyes looked up and down the hallway but no one was in sight. So she headed towards the elderly woman's bedroom which was the last door down the hallway. She stepped lightly and made sure that she didn't make too much noise in case what Marina had said was actually true. Her fingers reached for the door handle and began to turn it slowly after she had gently knocked on the door which gave her no reply. Her heart pounded heavily in her ears as she gradually opened the door.

Grey eyes looked into the room and were shocked to see the elderly woman lying on the bed. However her shock didn't just die there. Talia ran into the room and approached the elderly woman who seemed to be wheezing while she was sleeping. Grey eyes could see that there was something wrong immediately. Her eyes which had grown very sensitive to the currents of life could see that the elderly woman was slowly fading away from existence.

Marina stayed at the door. She was unsure whether to step into the room or not since she hadn't been invited in and she was a guest inside the elderly woman's house. Her manners were intact and she didn't want to barge in on the elderly woman. Her brown eyes could see that Talia was very worried but she couldn't see why. The elderly woman looked like she was sleeping just like any of her family members would.

Talia gently placed her hand on top of the elderly woman's forehead but retracted her hand instantly at feeling how hot she was. Grey eyes slowly raked her body to see the cause of the high temperature. She could see that something was disturbing the elderly woman's life force. Her mind tried to identify what it was and time was running short. Her hand gently hovered over the woman's body to scan it and then she gasped in surprise. Tears slowly started to trek down her cheeks.

"What's the matter?" asked Marina concernedly.

Talia stared at the elderly woman in shock. Her grey eyes teary at the revelation that the elderly woman was on the brink of death and there was nothing that she would be able to do to help her. She could feel the life force in the elderly woman dim to that of a flickering candle. Her heart ached terribly at the hopelessness that she felt.

Slowly blue eyes fluttered open weakly. "Don't cry Talia. This has been a long time coming. I'm sorry that I didn't tell you. You can't help me with your gift for what is happening to me" said the elderly woman slowly. Her breaths came in short stabs. Her face was as white as a blank sheet of paper and she was sweating profusely.

"How did it happen?" asked Talia while trying to hold back a sob.

"Three months ago while you were out working in the fields, I felt somebody gifted coming. It was a man who I knew harboured great hate towards those that he felt threatened by. He saw you as a threat and so I stepped in. I approached him before he could get to the corn fields. We had a duel in which he perished and I sustained this injury. It can't be healed" replied the elderly woman weakly.

"Why did you do that?" asked Talia while trying her hardest to rein the tears in.

"You are important..." whispered the elderly woman on her last breath before she closed her eyes and began to sleep for all eternity. Talia just stood there, seeing that the flickering candle had been snuffed out. There was nothing that she could do and Marina was still at the door in shock. She could only stand there and watch the elderly woman who had done so much for her in secret.

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## **Chapter 4**

Talia rode on a horse with Misty riding her own. They were both heading back to base, the long way around since it was the only way to get there unless they wanted to cross the large lake.

They had completed their last mission without a hitch and Talia didn't have to attend the party since Nester had taken more time than usual to deal with those Altruem warriors since Matri had decided to go to Isolde Mountains and strike against them as well.

"Do you think Nester will make it back to base before we do?" asked Misty.

"She is travelling on foot with only her gear. I think she will cross the lake and get back to base before us. Also she did send us that letter saying that she was done and we had yet to leave King Ruric's castle. Also Princess Rebecca had to clear everything up for us so that her father wouldn't come and try to attack us. So I am pretty sure that Nester would be back at base before us" replied Talia as she looked around to see if there was any danger lurking about. Grey eyes swept the land which was a field of grass and sighed. She could still remember the sweet smelling fields of corn that she had worked at during her childhood. However she never voiced her feelings or any events that had occurred in her past. It was a rule that the members had created so that they could work professionally together and if need be, would be able to sacrifice each other's lives for the greater cause.

"I can see your logic working there" replied Misty before she sighed breathily. The trip back to base was uneventful and seemed to be less fun then when they had to sneak Princess Rebecca out. It was only for her safety that they had to take her to somewhere safe until the threat was over. Misty could see that Matri and Altruem were at each other's throats and would not hesitate to involve another kingdom so that they could have a war with one another. Princess Rebecca had been the key to the whole situation. "What do you think our next mission will be?" asked Misty.

"I wouldn't know" replied Talia distractedly. Her grey eyes had caught something in the distance but she couldn't see what it was. The small object that she could see was still quite far away and it was slowly growing bigger and more distinctive as it got closer. "I think we have incoming."

"What...?" asked Misty. She looked around to see what Talia was talking about. However her hazel eyes were not as sensitive or strong as Talia's. So she just withdrew her broad sword from her back and stood ready for whatever was coming. Her eyes were sweeping the area in which Talia was staring at while her right arm twitched in anticipation.

"Oh" exclaimed Talia before she sent her horse into a gallop in which Misty hastily followed her. She could see the figure in the sky coming closer and knew that there was trouble coming. The figure was a large balloon with unknown contents inside and it was slowly falling back down to earth at a speedy rate. "Are there any villages or towns near here?" asked Talia.

"There are about three towns nearby and a village. Why?" asked Misty.

"Up there" pointed Talia who could now see the balloon clearly with a small compartment at the bottom with people onboard looking frightened. The balloon was descending rapidly and it was bound to crash to the ground unless she intervened. Her horse galloped faster seeing its rider fearful of the impending accident. "We need to get to where they are going to touch the ground before they actually get there. Otherwise they will all perish."



Misty quickly hastened her horse to run faster. There was not much that she could do about the impending crash however she knew that she could lend a hand if Talia needed it. She quickly slapped the flat side of her sword on her horse's bottom and encouraged it to run faster. Her horse was only more pleased to assist and comply.

Talia arrived at the sight first and quickly jumped off her horse before shooing it away to safety. Misty was right behind her and sent her horse away as well. Talia quickly gazed up at the balloon which was heading straight for them. She extended her arms in front of her and seized the wind to blow a cushion of air towards the falling balloon. Misty saw what she was trying to do and quickly created a mist to help Talia in cushioning the balloon to safety. Talia could see that her magic was slowly working but knew that it would not be enough to stop the balloon even if Misty was helping.

"Misty, leave here now" yelled Talia as she turned her gaze to her comrade.

"Why, are you crazy?" replied Misty as she tried to form a thick cloud of mist to try and cushion the falling balloon. Her hazel eyes could see that Talia was thinking of something while she was deploying all of her strength to try and stop the impending crash. "I'm not leaving here without a good reason. We can stop this."

"It won't be enough unless I use all of my strength and that may be dangerous for you. Please leave and wait with the horses. I will be alright" explained Talia in a loud voice as she increased the amount of air trying to cushion the balloon. She smiled at Misty as soon as she complied and left to stand with the horses. Grey eyes stared at the huge balloon that was descending rapidly towards her. She dropped both of her arms to her sides and ceased her magical output. "I hope this works" she muttered before she closed her eyes.

Talia stood there for a while as she extended her hearing far and wide, only to engulf the falling balloon. She could now tell how big the balloon was and how heavy it would be. She could even tell how fast the balloon was descending to the ground. Grey eyes fluttered back open and she knew that she only had one shot at stopping that balloon from crashing into her. She lifted her arms in front of her and saw the red wind marks that were still engraved onto her skin.

"Oh great one, god of air and wind, please grant me enough strength to allow me to safely help these people to the ground. Will you help me?" she asked in a mighty voice that melded into the wind. It was as if she were talking in the language that the wind was howling in.

"You will always have my help, little one" howled the wind before it whistled roughly against Talia's cheek. It was almost as if the wind had caressed her cheek with its invisible hand in an affectionate way. Talia had smiled at the touch. "I will do as you bid. Wield me like you have done so before and I will grant you with all of my power."

Talia closed her eyes once more and nodded before she felt the wind around her. It started to cloak onto her skin and she could almost feel like there was a warm coating around her. Her mind was ablaze with raw power that the wind had freely given her. She would now be able to carry out what she wished to do. She lifted her hands higher into the sky and quickly invoked

every single bit of magic that was in her body to throw a surge of wind that would gently let the balloon land onto the ground.

Misty watched closely. She was amazed at Talia's strength and magical prowess. Hazel eyes watched in awe as Talia simply let the balloon flow down slowly and land a few feet away from her. It was almost as if the huge balloon was a feather that she had guided down slowly. The roar of the wind was still in her ears as she slowly approached Talia. "Are you alright?" asked Misty.

Talia slowly turned around and gazed at Misty blankly. She could only see the concerned look in Misty's eyes before she felt the rush of air flow out of her and she saw the ground coming quickly towards her. She didn't even feel the ground once she had fallen.

Misty hastily ran towards Talia but halted in her tracks. Her hazel eyes widened in disbelief because she instantly saw a man appear out of thin air. He was dressed in a dark blue suit with a black torn cape. His face was unshaven and his black straight shoulder length hair flowed with the wind. He had instantly grabbed Talia before she could hit the ground and all Misty could see was how worried he looked for Talia's sake. Misty's eyes began to bulge even further when a woman appeared out of thin air. It almost looked like she was made out of wind, the way her flowing dress was almost see through and her white long silky hair gracefully fell down her back.

Misty slowly approached the two who were quietly whispering to one another. She could see that both people were worried about Talia and that they were carefully examining her body. Gradually she felt her body respond and her mind focused. "Excuse me, but who are you?" she asked both people.

The woman turned first with the grace of a thousand queens and looked as though she was made purely from wind or mist. Her face was pale white and her white eyes seemed to look quite amused at her. "I am Willow of the wind and this is Shawn of the sword. We are the only great ones who have had the pleasure of being spoken to by her. There are more of us but we are waiting for her to be ready. Please rest assured that Talia is fine. She was just a little overwhelmed by my magical prowess. You should go and see to the people that she has managed to save" howled the woman as if her voice were the wind.

Misty didn't even think twice, she quickly ran towards the compartment where people were slowly flowing out. She could see that there were at least twenty people and all of them seemed shaken from the incident. Hazel eyes always kept an eye on her comrade while she went to lend assistance to the traumatised people.

"How is she faring?" howled Willow.

"She is exhausted but other than that she is fine. I'm sure only a little rest is all that she needs. Are you alright?" asked Shawn as he checked Talia once more before gazing at Willow with his black eyes. His strong build easily allowed him to lift Talia up as if she were a feather. "You used an awful amount of magic there."

"I am fine. There is nothing that you need to worry about. I have a feeling that if I didn't hold back at least one tenth of my prowess, she would have used it all and then I would have been in trouble. I'm sure that she could have used more than just how much I have. She is almost like a vast container" replied Willow as she slowly followed Shawn to the horses that were standing nearby.

The horses didn't even stir as Willow and Shawn approached them. They were very calm even though they were eyeing the two people cautiously. However they continued to crop the lush green grass and watched as Shawn slowly lifted Talia onto her mount. The horses stamped their feet for a bit to adjust to the new weight that was added to their load before they continued to crop at the grass.

"Her potential is limitless. I wonder what she will do when their paths cross" said Shawn as he made sure that Talia stayed on her horse. He glanced behind him, sensing that Willow had taken too long to answer him. "Did I say something wrong?" asked Shawn seeing the look that was on Willow's face.

Willow shook her head and gave the man a frown. She swept the area surrounding them with her eyes before resting them on Talia. "She will have to face a few more challenges before she is ready to cross paths. However, Arlem has assured me that every thing will work out just right. I will just have to trust his words" replied Willow in a huff of breath.

"Arlem of the fates, he will not be able to see their futures yet. His words are as hollow as ever. You must know deep within yourself that Talia will greet with great dangers that can stop her fate at any time. There is no point in talking to Arlem if her future is as clouded as ever. Only one person will know her fate and none of us are allowed to speak to her" explained Shawn in a casual tone that almost sounded on the verge of exasperation. He slowly guided the two horses toward the huge balloon contraption and slowly smiled as Talia was finally regaining consciousness. "I will see you in a little while Willow. It would be best if she doesn't see you yet."

Willow smiled and slowly started to disappear with the wisp of the wind. Shawn followed suit shortly after but only faded away from bottom to top as if he were being sheathed by a scabbard. Talia was left alone, a little confused and wondering why Misty was helping these people before she recalled what she had done.

Misty slowly approached Talia once more and smiled at her. "You really are an interesting person, Tal. If I hadn't known any better, I would have classified you as being haunted but you're not. Anyways the people are safe. They are apparently from one of the local towns, who were experiencing the idea of flying in this contraption. Obviously they had some problems while airborne. Funny how life works, trying to defy gravity and end up almost dying" muttered Misty before she mounted her own horse. Hazel eyes stared at Talia one more time before she tugged on the reins and signalled for her horse to head off. They were going to be much later in getting back at this rate. However she picked up the pace and knew that Talia would follow immediately seeing how the people were staring oddly at her.

Steven stood next to his brother Joshua and watched the two young ladies gallop off on their horses. His blue eyes had seen how the blonde had sat upon her horse and just watched them while the other had queried to see if everyone was alright. He thought it strange for the girl to not help out and wondered who she was since she looked like a warrior but had the grace of a queen.

"Hey Steven, did you see the blonde with the ring on her finger?" asked Joshua excitedly. His blue eyes were the same as his brother's but he knew that he could not see as clearly as him. His slender body was nothing like a warrior but he knew how to defend himself with a blade if ever he needed to which would most likely be not. He was after all the younger brother and could pull pranks and get out of trouble quite easily. "Did you see it?" he asked again.

Steven looked at his brother and furrowed his eyebrows. He had not been looking at the blonde's hands. He was only staring at her face and body. His observation skills were not as thorough as his younger brother's and so he had no doubt that the blonde had actually worn a ring. "What about the ring? I did not see it clearly" replied Steven in a deep masculine voice that could have commanded a thousand warriors in a fierce battle to lay their weapons down with ease.

Joshua glanced at his brother after losing sight of the blonde and her brunette companion. He could see that his brother was thinking deeply about something but if his brother didn't see the ring then it was going to shock him. "The ring that was on her hand had a silver band with a blue rose diamond" exclaimed Joshua excitedly. He beamed at his brother and was shocked to see his brow scrunched up in confusion. "What's the matter?"

Steven slowly turned on his heel and walked towards the contraption that they had been riding in. His blue eyes looked up at the huge balloon and sighed. It had been a good lift off and there had been no problems. However, midway through the flight, the captain of the crew began to bark a set of instructions to quickly land safely. Halfway back down to the ground, a set of ropes had snapped and the balloon looked as though it were deflating. The passengers had panicked and Steven and his brother were told to be seated and not to worry. They were after all nobles who were invited to attend the revealing of the invention that the captain had created.

Steven glanced back over his shoulder to where the two young women had ridden away on their mounts. He sighed for a second trying to figure out if he should pursue them or not. The ring had been a disturbing piece of news considering that there was only a handful in existence. He scratched his head in thought. *They were both warriors...* His mind tried to figure out how to interpret the information. *Only a special group of royals are given that kind of ring...* Blue eyes could see that his brother was looking at him concernedly. "I don't recognise her or remember seeing someone her age listed as being apart of them" commented Steven after a while.

Joshua nodded in understanding. He didn't recognise her either and it troubled him too considering that they were very familiar with one of the owners of such a ring who happened to be their uncle. Joshua started to frown since there was only one plausible explanation that popped up into his head. "She must have stolen it" suggested Joshua as he stared at his older brother.

"I don't think Uncle or any of the others would have let such a thing happen unless it was over their dead body. So if she has that ring then it could only mean that she killed one of them and took the ring as a prize. It is after all a valuable item that would fetch for a lot on the market" explained Steven as Joshua nodded his head in understanding. Steven then stepped towards the Captain who was slowly approaching after checking that the other passengers and his crew were alright. "Good work Captain."

"I think it was more luck than skill, I'm afraid. We were actually descending a bit too quickly and it almost seemed like a miracle that we managed to land so softly. There was an unexpected draft of wind that helped a lot as well. I was actually surprised that there were travellers who witnessed the whole thing and made sure that we were alright" explained the Captain in a nervous gesture.

"Seeing that everyone is alright and the invention is going to be grounded for quite some time, would it be alright if my brother and I make our own way back to town?" asked Steven in a polite manner.

"I don't see a problem with that. I'm sure you can explain to your father and the other town's people that we are all safe and sound. If you would like to wait a bit, I'm sure that one of my crew members will be able to round up a couple of horses for you" suggested the Captain. His light brown eyes were twitching in nervousness and it didn't help the fact that he knew that if it wasn't for the miracle landing, they would all be dead or he in deep trouble.

"That would be appreciated" said Steven politely before the Captain walked off to find a crew member to collect some horses. He could see that the Captain would come through to his word considering that there was a village nearby. He also wondered if the Captain would also ask for a wagon to bring back the other passengers while he tried to figure out how to transport his invention back to his workshop. Steven turned abruptly towards his brother. "We will pursue them after we get the horses. I guess a message will be delivered back to father so that he won't get worried. I'm sure that he will understand our concern over the matter."

"So we are going to stop by the village to collect some supplies and send off the note while we are at it?" asked Joshua who was trying to keep up with Steven's train of thought. He knew that he lacked the brain power to actually scheme so he sometimes found it hard for him to keep track of what his older brother wanted to do. A swift nod of the head was all the confirmation that he received from his brother. "Well then I should go and gather our things so that we can trail the two young women without losing track of them."

"I'm sure I'll be up to tracking them if we do lose sight of them" muttered Steven as he watched his brother walk off to find their belongings. He didn't know how long it would take to get the horses but he was sure that he could catch up to them and trail them to their home. It would be a huge advantage over the two women if he needed it since he was not too fond of seeing women warriors.

A couple of candle marks later, Steven and Joshua were mounted and following the trail that the two young women had left. They had indeed left a note for their father and had received

provisions from the village for their journey. Their tracking was quite straight forward since that assumed the two female warriors were unaware. Steven had also picked up the pace since he wanted to be within sight of his prey in case the weather turned against them.

"Are you sure that these tracks are theirs?" asked Joshua as he halted his horse next to his brother's. It had been a long day and night was almost approaching. It was almost time for them to make camp or find a place for the night. He could see that his brother was concentrating very hard in trying to determine which way the horse prints were heading in. Blue eyes looked around warily. He was determined like his brother to find out the real story behind the ring but he wondered if this was a bit much. Slowly he checked his sword and gear before gazing at his brother once more. "Are you sure that these tracks are theirs?" he repeated in a louder voice.

"Little brother, I am the most skilled scout in our father's army. I am positive that these horse prints belong to them. Since you have exceptional observation skills you would notice that the prints are not as deep as ours which indicates that the rider is light. Also each horse print is different for each horse. The horse that we are tracking has a unique indentation in it that allows for the horse shoe to be able to travel quickly" explained Steven in a huff. He quickly reined in his anger since he knew that Joshua had exceptional observation skills but would be so bored that he usually skimmed over details unless he found something interesting.

"Sorry" apologised Joshua before rechecking his sword and gear. His blue eyes only glanced back at his brother a few times to see if he was actually having trouble or not. So far they had been travelling on the path but now it looked as though the two female warriors had left it and forged a new one that went to the left side of the road. He could see that it was actually a hidden path that not many riders would use and wondered why. "So are we going to follow?"

"If we want to make sure that we don't lose them then we should. However I have a feeling that this road will connect with this path after the village to the north. I don't know if we should try and get ahead of them or not" replied Steven cautiously.

"There is no guarantee that they will come back to the main road. We should just follow since it doesn't look like they have detected us yet. Also we might end up losing track of them if we don't follow. It would be a huge gamble and we have spent all day trying to track them" explained Joshua as he urged his horse onto the hidden path.

Steven followed, agreeing to Joshua's logic. He felt happy that his brother was so smart and always sorted out situations by thinking unlike some of the warriors in their father's army. His blue eyes raked over his own sword and gear to make sure that they were secure as he followed his brother for a while before taking the lead. He had to make sure that they didn't lose the trail or their journey would be for naught.

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## **Chapter 5**

At fifteen years old, Talia had become a very competent smith's assistant. Although they mainly made farm tools, there were other metallic items that they would forge for travellers and other customers. She had almost been capable of taking over the business but because no one knew her, David had to mainly deal with the customers. Her bright grey eyes would look towards each day as a new challenge since she still had to run back over to the other field and complete the farm work which she had been assigned.

Talia carefully lifted the hot metal out of the fire and quickly placed it inside of the large barrel of water. The metal hissed violently before she looked at her handiwork. A smile crept across her face as she felt satisfaction course through her body. The metallic item that she had been forging was a shovel which a close neighbour had requested. She quickly placed the item back and wiped the sweat from her forehead. The workshop was very hot and David had already left to work on what was left of the house to finish.

Carefully dowsing the flames, Talia closed up the workshop and headed towards the house to inform the family that she was finished. Grey eyes looked around and were surprised to see Marina waiting just outside. With a determined air about her, she strode confidently towards her friend.

Marina's light brown eyes lit up at seeing Talia. She had been waiting for a while since her chores were completed and her father was trying to fix up a part of the kitchen. She doubted that he would be finished by dinner time though and so had prepared it earlier that morning. She had been rushing around trying to make sure that her afternoon would be free so that she could accompany Talia. She gently twirled her long brown hair between her fingers while she waited for the distance between them to close.

"Hey, what are you doing out here?" asked Talia as she stood beside Marina and leaned back against the wall with her legs crossed. She folded her arms and gazed at the sky. It would be just fine weather to go on a short walk to visit an old friend. She then glanced back over at Marina who looked as though she wanted to say something but was hesitant to do so.

"Um... Father is fixing up the kitchen wall. I finished cooking for dinner and all the other things. So I have the afternoon free to do whatever I like" replied Marina as she continued to swirl her hair nervously with her fingers. She glanced over at Talia and could see that her mood was not dark like that day that they found the elder woman near her deathbed. Her body slowly shook at the mere memory.

"Are you cold?" asked Talia, seeing Marina shake. "We can go inside. I don't mind." Talia stood up straight and looked at Marina with a little concern. However her worries were erased after Marina shook her head and beamed a smile in her direction. Grey eyes looked deep into light brown eyes for confirmation which was there. She then eased herself back against the wall.

"Do you mind if I accompany you to visit?" asked Marina slowly.

"I don't mind" replied Talia as she continued to stare at the sky and was lost with her memories. She could still remember that day clearly as if a year had not passed. Her mind strove to recall

every moment that had passed at that point in time. Remembering every little detail no matter how minor it was.

Talia had stood next to the bed where the elderly woman had died. Grey eyes were red with tears. Her cheeks were soaked and the pain in her heart had increased tenfold at what the elderly woman had revealed to her. Her mind was spinning out of control at the hopelessness that she felt. Slowly she sank to her knees and held onto the elderly woman's hands gently. She had never known how frail the elderly woman was until now.

Marina had been standing at the door. She was shocked and didn't know whether she should come in or not. Her body wanted to enter but her mind refused to listen. She wanted to comfort her new friend. She wanted to stop those tears from flowing but she didn't know how. Her light brown eyes which were watery watched as Talia seemed to sink deep within herself. It was like she became a shell and nothing could pull her out.

Talia sat there. Tears continuously streamed down her cheeks. Her mind was too shocked to even think about what to do now. Yet there was only one thing that she knew for sure. The elderly woman who had been her only friend was dead from a wound caused by another gifted person who was after her own life. Talia felt her restraints on her body slip away. There was nothing that she could do.

Suddenly a gust of wind originating from Talia's body erupted out of her and flung Marina completely out of the doorway. The elderly woman's body was thrown like a sack of potatoes against the wall. Talia remained kneeling on the floor as a surge of magical energy swept through her body like mixing water and ice. Her own flesh began to tear away as her grey eyes shining like silver emeralds were bulging out of their sockets. Her skin, torn, released a gentle flow of blood out of her body as pain overwhelmed all of her senses. She wasn't even aware that she had her mouth open wide and was screaming so violently that Marina had to shield her ears or have them bleed.

Fear was plastered onto Marina's face as she watched her friend turn into a completely different being. Her light brown eyes stared in shock as Talia's skin was being torn off. Her clothes were drenched in blood. Her eyes were shining stars that could illuminate the whole night sky if she so wished for it. Marina continued to shield her ears as she felt the onslaught of the pressure against her body that rendered it immobile against the hallway wall. Her eyes were glued to Talia as Talia's flesh was seen, bloody and red as if she were just a lump of pulsating meat attached to bone.

Talia felt her clothes were drenched with her own blood. Her hands were slippery with the elixir of her life covering them. Slowly she stood up and let her arms stretch out at her sides as she screamed for the pain to cease. Her mind was almost at breaking point as her whole body was on fire. She could slowly feel that her bones were breaking beneath her tender tissue. They were gradually surfacing to replace what was once her skin. She felt the wrenching pain as all of her bones shattered into a million pieces and slowly surfaced to the fore. The bones then fused together to form a hard exterior that protected her tender muscles and organs.



The pain slowly receded and Talia slowly fell to her knees. Her shining grey eyes looked at what had become of her body. She was shocked and amazed to see that her skin was replaced by a hard white shell. Even her face had been covered by the hard bone tissue. She slowly tried to stand up but her body protested violently against the stress that her body had just gone through. "What is happening to me?" whispered Talia through bloody lips.

Talia slowly looked up and could see that the elderly woman's body had been flung across the room. Grey eyes began to water as salty tears trailed down the outside of her white hard mask where her cheeks used to be. Slowly anger began to build up within her at herself. She had unknowingly caused more damage to the elderly woman than when she was on her deathbed with just one simple wound. Tears streaked down her face as she slowly managed to stand up even though her body protested the movement.

Talia could still feel the air currents that were now swirling around the room. She had not noticed them before and a glance behind her had shown her why. The entire wall had been blown out from the torrential force of her magical outburst. She could see that not much of the wall had survived the fall considering that they were on the second floor. She knew for sure that people who were field workers were starting to gather. She even knew that some of them were making their way through the house and were already at the bottom of the stairs.

Her anger directed at herself was starting to boil over. She could feel the slim strings that she kept during the transformation slowly slip from her grasp. The shining grey of her eyes were slowly blazing silver as she gradually took a step towards the door. All thoughts escaped her mind as she approached the door and sent a wave of pure magical energy outward from her body. She could see the pressure that would force anyone near her to be pressed violently to the ground.

Suddenly, her eyes fell to the open doorway where a body was lying there. Brown hair obscured the girl's face but Talia knew who it was. Guilt struck her like a sword through her heart and she instantly drew back in all of the magical energy that she had left unrestrained. Her body sucked in every little drop of magical energy that she had just released in that wave and slowly felt her mind ease at seeing that Marina was only slightly bruised. Gradually kneeling down next to her friend, blazing silver eyes dulled to a shining grey. Her eyes roamed her friend's body to ascertain if there were any injuries that needed tending to. Surprise struck her as Marina gently lifted her head and smiled at her. "Are you alright?" asked Talia, a little shakily.

Marina slowly raised her hand to stroke the awkward exterior of Talia's cheek. Her watery brown eyes gazed deep into shining grey. Her hand was as calm and smooth as she felt the surprisingly smooth exterior. She wasn't looking at what Talia had become. She was seeing past all of the flesh and was looking at Talia's soul which was still gentle, untouched by the harshness of the world. No words were needed as she stayed in that position for a few moments.

Talia gracefully raised her hand which slowly reverted back to normal and slowly grasped Marina's hand as if it would break at any moment. Her grey eyes slowly returned back to normal as well as the rest of her body. She was still covered in blood but now all of her magical energy was under her tight control. She could feel her body calm down like the surface of a pond.

becoming calm after it had been disturbed by a stone. Grey eyes watched as Marina slowly lowered her head and her body gave in to the stress.

A group of field workers rushed up the stairs. When they arrived at the second floor landing, they were shocked to see Talia covered from head to foot in blood. They stood at the top of the stairs staring as Talia finally slumped forward over Marina. Quickly overcoming their shock, they raced towards the two girls and were relieved that both were fine. Even more surprisingly, Talia had woken up on their approach and gotten up against their wishes. She had walked away to disappear into the bathroom and instantly cleaned herself up before coming back out to help Marina out of the house. No one had questioned her about the elderly woman. No one stopped her either.

Talia quickly snapped out of her daydreaming and looked at David blankly. *When did he get here?* She quickly turned her full attention on him and suddenly realised that he had been standing there for a while just watching her. She quickly glanced at her side and noticed for the first time that Marina was standing there in her going out wear. It looked as though she had been zoning out for a while. "I'm sorry" said Talia.

"No need to Talia, I know what day it is and I'm sure they are all waiting for you. I will see both of you for dinner later. Now be careful on your way over" said David with a caring smile before he gently gave Talia a little push down the stairs.

Talia almost stumbled but she caught her balance in time. She gave a half hearted smile back before she started across the field with Marina in tow. Her stride became more confident with each step. It was surprising that she felt this way even though they were making their way to a small gathering for the elderly woman's anniversary. She wasn't sure what to expect but several field workers had approached her and asked for her attendance. She didn't have a reason to decline and it almost seemed like they were eager for her to go.

Half a candle mark later, Talia and Marina arrived at the corn business. They both headed straight for the main house that was rebuilt after the extensive damage that had been made. Talia still remembered carrying Marina out with the help of a fellow field worker and setting her down at the foot of a nearby tree. The fellow worker at the time had then hastily ran back inside and left Talia sitting next to Marina. Talia could see the tree now which was still standing tall and casting a huge shaded area just below. Within that shade laid a tombstone that had the elderly woman's name on it and some kind words about her. Talia and Marina had not come to the burial since the physician had explicitly told David to keep both of them at home to rest for three days. The elderly woman had been buried on the second day of rest. A field worker had been kind enough to come over and inform them.

Around the big old tree were now all the field workers. They all looked up and smiled at Talia and Marina before the two of them joined the gathering. Talia had come here many times before she started work in the fields and after she was done. She felt it normal to converse with the elderly woman even though now it was the reverse of how they conversed before. This time Talia would talk and she believed that the elderly woman was listening to her every word.

The ceremony had been short. Some of the workers said a few words so that the new workers knew who this elderly woman was. No one spoke when Talia approached the tombstone and gently laid her hand on the surface. Their eyes had saddened at the small gesture knowing that the elderly woman had a special spot in Talia's heart. They were even kind enough to inform Talia that they knew about her injury and did not place any blame on her. That piece of information had been a heavy blow since she still blamed herself.

Talia slowly made her way back to the smith business. She had been staying there ever since they had to fix the elderly woman's house. However she didn't feel right in moving back in. Her legs slowly took one step at a time as Marina followed silently. She had not said a word ever since they had arrived at the gathering. Grey eyes could see that there was something on her mind but she didn't feel like pursuing it now. All she wanted to do was climb into her bed and fall asleep even though she was slightly hungry. She just wasn't in the mood for eating and a chat with Marina's other siblings.

Upon reaching her room, Talia slumped onto the bed after closing the door and not intending to catch the last bit of David's concern over her. It was true that she was happy doing business and spending time with the family however her façade was seen through. Everyone knew that she wasn't truly happy. She slowly gazed at the open window and slowly let slip a tiny amount of her magical energy to open the window slightly.

Talia was amazed by her magical ability. She had noticed that it was getting stronger each day after that incident. Her field work only took a quarter of a candle mark and she was never tired by the end of it like she usually was. She had even been able to use it in the smith whenever she was alone. She could do almost anything except protecting herself. Her body could generate a lot of magic but it hadn't been attacked before and so she knew that she couldn't instantly react if the time came. She had also noticed that if she were to completely release her control over her magic that it would mutate her body so that she was covered in a white shell that was made of her bones. She had tried it on one finger and never did it again because of the excruciating pain.

However her mind had noticed something very disturbing. It seemed as though they knew all along that she had the gift. They weren't even surprised anymore that she was able to complete her work so quickly. No one had even questioned her about the incident, even Marina was not asked by anyone. Talia assumed that the elderly woman must have warned them beforehand. It was the only explanation but that brought up more questions. *Why did she feel the need to not tell me that she was dying? Why did she only inform the workers? Why wasn't I allowed to attend the burial when I was perfectly fine?* Talia could feel her head start to ache at the stress that she was putting it under. "Why didn't they blame me?" whispered Talia into the soft covers of her blanket.

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Talia walked closely against the walls down a dark corridor. The black walls were solid and smooth as she trailed her fingers along them. The floor and ceiling were pure white but she had the feeling that they would be rough and jagged as her feet felt the uneven surface. Her grey eyes tried to look far ahead but she could only see a few steps in front of her feet.

Talia looked back at the way that she had come but it was the same view of where she was heading in. Slowly it seemed as though the walls were getting smaller but her logic told her it was quite impossible since the height of the ceiling had not changed. Her mind finally realised that the white that had only covered the floor and ceiling were spreading towards the walls. After a short while, even the walls were pure white as she continued down the long dark corridor.

Grey eyes continued to try and pierce the darkness. Her face was as blank as a piece of paper. She had to remain calm if she was going to figure out why she was walking down such a corridor in the first place. Her free hand wiped her forehead which had begun to perspire in her gnawing worry. Unwanted thoughts began to swim in her head as she tried to swat them away.

"Where am I? Is there no end to this?" she whispered but her ears heard the echo which sounded like she had yelled the words. Slowly the worry became worse and so she started to pick up the pace. She had already begun to jog as she tried to race to the end, believing that there was an end.

Suddenly Talia saw a dot of light. She increased her pace and was running towards what she believed to be the end of the corridor. Her hand was still trailing the smooth wall to keep her balance since the uneven surface of the floor had caused her to almost trip several times. She ran towards the light but then faltered a few steps from it. Her grey eyes finally could distinguish what the light source was. She stood rigid as the light was actually a pair of blazing silver eyes that belonged to a person standing in front of her.

Talia swallowed audibly as fear slowly started to creep up within her. She could see that the person was covered from head to foot in white, smooth armour which she knew could only be one type of material. It was made of bone and the person seemed strong and tall even though they were only a head taller.

Slowly the person in the white bone armour knelt down in front of Talia and presented a sword which was glistening silver. In a feminine detached voice the person spoke "I give you this. Take it to defend yourself. It is made from no known metal ore in the world for it comes from a different place. I'm sure our paths will cross again. Farewell." The person had placed the sword gently into Talia's hand and disappeared in a wink of an eye.

Talia stood dumbfounded as she stared at the beautiful sword that was in her hands. Grey eyes were riveted on the intricate carvings that were on the actual blade. It was a vine with many roses on it. She slowly looked back up at the corridor which had now disappeared. She was once more standing in her room. She hastily looked around and could see that everything was untouched. Only the bed was slightly ruffled as if someone had been lying there. A glance at the window indicated that it was almost dinner time.

Talia drew her eyes back onto the sword which lay in her hands. It was great marksmanship and the hilt was like the claymores that David usually made for the lords who passed by. Slowly she grabbed the hilt and held it in one hand. It was surprisingly light and nimble. A few quick swipes told her that it would be easy for her to wield. Her fingers accidentally let slip a small amount of magical energy into the sword and her eyes widened as the sword began to glow a little silver.

*Where did it come from? It can't have been a dream if I have this in my hands.* Carefully she placed the sword on top of her bed. She was shocked when the sword sunk very deep and almost broke the bed. In her haste she quickly grabbed the sword which was as light as a feather in her hands and looked at it peculiarly. She slowly and carefully decided to place it flat on the floor since it was much sturdier than the bed. She was glad that nothing drastic happened this time.

She turned on her heel swiftly to go downstairs to dinner but stopped dead in her tracks before she could take a step towards the door. Her eyes were plastered on a man with black eyes. He had straight shoulder length black hair that looked silky and smooth as if dust and dirt were allergic to it. His face looked unshaven which gave him a rough look that had added few years to his face. He wore a blue plain outfit which was crisp and smooth as if creases and wrinkles didn't know how to attack his outfit. Only his long black cape looked different to his outfit as if it didn't belong there with its torn and weathered look.

The man stared at her with a blank face. It looked as though he was waiting for something but she continued to just stare at him. Her eyes were almost glued to his as she tried to figure out how he managed to sneak up on her and how he had come into the room without using the door. Her mind was swimming with ideas but nothing seemed logical. She would have heard him even though she had been engrossed with the sword. It was almost as if he had suddenly appeared out of thin air after she had turned around.

"Good evening..." he said. Although his lips were still moving after those two words, she did not hear the rest of what he had said. "My name is..." She lost what he said next again. She looked at him with a confused expression. His voice was deep and kind as he spoke. "I hope you will call on me later after you eat" he said before he gradually disappeared as if someone was erasing him from bottom to top.

"TALIA DINNER TIME" yelled Marina.

Talia was left speechless. She didn't know what to make of the man who had stood in front of her. She didn't even hear what he had said or what his name was. She knew that her ears were fine the way that she heard Marina calling for her but she wondered if it was because she didn't want to hear. Slowly Talia stepped towards the door. There was plenty of time for her to figure it out after she had finished dinner.

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## **Chapter 6**

Talia arrived back at home base with Misty following her. She had seen how Misty had kept an eye on her the whole way back since she had advised that it would be best to just keep going rather than camp out for the night. It was only midmorning and the both of them were tired from the travel as well as the mission.

A deep mist constantly covered the area where the huge castle like house rested. It was situated on the edge of a high cliff overhanging a small portion of the vast lake. At the bottom of the cliff,

there was a strip of sand with a patchy dock. A neatly cut stairway, hugged the cliff so that the members of the Blaster organisation could get to the boats with ease. However there were only three small boats that the Blaster organisation owned and all of them were present which meant all of the members were home.

Talia stepped into the massive house after Misty had assured her that she would take care of the horses. She looked around and felt relief flood her being as she smelt the familiar oak of furniture and the fragrant smell of lavender that decorated each table. She slowly headed towards the kitchen even though she was covered in travelling grime. Her grey eyes were alight with happiness as she saw a middle aged woman prancing around preparing food for lunch.

The middle aged woman was Caitlyn Austere but everyone just referred to her as Mum. She had long blonde hair that was tied back in a simple ponytail with a thin blue ribbon. Her blue eyes looked up at seeing Talia and smiled with teeth as straight as ever. Her light blue flowing dress was adorned by a flowery apron and she looked as beautiful as ever. "Hello Tal, you're back so soon" said Mum as she rushed over and gently gave Talia a hug.

"Hey Mum, Misty is back as well. She's just tending to the horses" replied Talia in a cheery voice. However she could hear the dead tone in her ears. What she had said sounded like she was emotionless and dead. Her grey eyes looked up at blue who were calculating something.

"Go get cleaned up and come back down for a snack. Then you can rest until lunch is ready. I'm sure Misty will report to Mila first before coming here. I'll explain to Mila for you to report to her tomorrow. Uh!" said Mum as she halted Talia's protest in her throat. "You look like a walking corpse. Now hurry up so that you can rest." She watched as Talia turned on her heel and walked out of the kitchen. She stood there for a moment. She wondered if it was almost that time. However something caught her attention from the corner of her eye. "You can come out now."

Confidently, Nester stepped out from the other door that also led into the kitchen but from outside. It looked as though she had been standing out there for quite some time just minding her own business until Talia showed up. She had peered in with her black eyes and short black hair with a blank expression on her face. She was the hardest person to read since she hid her emotions very well. Her black armour and dress adorned her slender frame. Only a slender sword graced her back which was extremely light and fast. "How is she?" asked Nester with her voice belying her expression. She sounded extremely concerned.

"I don't really know" replied Mum.

"I think everyone felt it yesterday. Her magical prowess is still growing and it has already passed the extremes of what a normal person could handle. I'm surprised that she is still breathing and living among us. Her body will eventually give in if she doesn't take care of herself. Mila didn't just send Misty along on the mission to help out. Talia could have gone by herself but Mila was concerned over Talia's health. She has been looking worse and worse after each mission" explained Nester as she looked at the door where Talia had left.

"Why doesn't Mila just ground her for a few days? She won't have to raise any suspicions if she says Talia has a week off. Everyone gets breaks and yet she chooses to complete the missions. Even you've had a break recently" said Mum.

"She forced me to take one since she knew that she would need me for the mission that I just completed. She wanted me to be at my best instead of looking haggard like Talia; though I do think that I would have scared the lot away instead of having to slowly force them to work together against a common enemy" said Nester as she slowly walked around the table and sat down while Mum tended to the baking bread. "Talia would rather do missions than sit around. She won't rest no matter what anyone says."

Suddenly Laney walked into the kitchen and halted their conversation. "Hey Mum, Misty just reported to Mila and now they're both thinking that we should all have a meeting. I think it is about that time" said Laney before she plopped her bottom into a chair. "Oh, hey Nester" greeted Laney realising that she had been a little rude.

"Where is Michaela?" asked Mum since she had told Laney to watch her. Michaela was the youngest of them all but she was a member. She was only eight and already she had been on five missions. However at the moment, she was sick and hadn't been on a mission for several moons. The physicians had told them that her health condition was severe and there was nothing that they could do for the child. Talia had not met her yet since she was always leaving for a mission as she came back from one. "Didn't I tell you to keep an eye on her?"

"She is with Mila since she's done with her work. Michaela thought that she'd have more fun with her than me" said Laney in an annoyed voice. It was clear that she was jealous of the attention that Michaela gave to Laney instead of her. She heatedly flicked her shoulder length brown hair away from her face and huffed while staring at the ceiling in the direction of Mila's office. "You would think that tinkering with tools would be more fun than that office full of paper work."

Mum looked at Laney and smiled. She knew that Nester would not give her opinion since the other members had classified her as being a workaholic. However no one truly knew that Nester was more than just a fighter besides maybe Mila and herself. "Laney, I don't think she is interested in your gadgetry if she can't use it herself. You already know how she gets depressed seeing everyone else leave on missions and she is stuck in this house. If only there was some way to actually cure her illness" explained Mum.

Laney looked resigned and slowly placed her head onto the table with her arms almost reaching the other side. Nester just sat there amused that such a lady could have so much interest in tools rather than the kitchen. While a middle aged woman was so engrossed in the kitchen to realise that there were more important matters in the world. Such were their lives that Nester thought if all the main members had such a problem then they could probably be able to make one decent person.

Slowly Talia came back into the kitchen. She was now wearing a new set of her old clothes. She was clean but she still looked like a walking corpse as she dropped into a chair and Mum placed

a small bowl of porridge in front of her. She now noticed that there were two other people besides Mum and her who were in the kitchen. She tried to beam a smile at them which she knew would actually look more like a grimace than anything else.

Mechanically, Talia filled her spoon and dumped the contents into her mouth before she swallowed uneasily. Her mouth felt so awkward that eating this simple snack was like eating sand from the beach. Her mind was slowly closing down. She was beyond tired but she knew that they were the effects of her wielding the wind's prowess when she was unfamiliar about the amount. Even before she could even finish half of the bowl, she was already starting to nod off. Her head was slowly tilting to the side and she only had the vague feeling that someone was carrying her before she felt the softness of a bed.

Nester looked at Talia and sighed. She was worried about her and only now that she was in the room alone with Talia who was asleep did she drop her mask of uncaring. She had noticed that Laney and Mum were shocked to see her do such a thing as carry a comrade up to her room but she didn't care. Talia was important and it was her responsibility to make sure that she remained safe until she figured out why she was important. At the moment all she knew was that she had a feeling that Talia was an important person. She had seen with her own eyes what Talia had done. She had seen that Talia was almost at the crossroads in her life that were only permitted to gifted people.

Slowly Talia stirred and slowly opened her eyes. She could have sworn that she had been in the kitchen a little while ago. Suddenly she heard the door close. She looked over only to hear that someone was retreating away from her room. She assumed that it had either been Laney or Mum since Nester would have just left her there. However her logic found that Laney or Mum could not have carried her since they were not very strong. So her eyes narrowed at the door. It must have been Nester but why?

Talia was about to close her eyes again but she suddenly heard the unsheathing of a sword. She stayed calm as her head rested back on the pillow. However her voice pierced the silence like a knife. "I did not call for you" said Talia in a soft voice that almost had an edge of hate in it. "I do not want to see or speak with you. I'm sure I made myself clear after that incident."

A deep sigh escaped his lips. Shawn was sure that only Talia could hear him coming every time he appeared anywhere. Even the others did not know when he arrived at places. It was a little unnerving but he knew it was a reassurance of who she was. "I have come to speak with you on important matters. I did say that I was sorry for your friend but she made her choice. She chose your life over hers. It is not within my power to meddle with your affairs. All I can do is giving knowledge about how to strike and defend."

"Leave me alone" said Talia.

"Marina knew that you had a greater destiny. She chose to give you a chance to fulfil it. Why are you wasting your time here? You should be out there finding your own path rather than pursuing a career with this organisation full of vigilantes" said Shawn in his deep voice.



"If I had been a vigilante in the first place, she wouldn't have lost her life. There wouldn't have been a war. David wouldn't have made Marina or me leave to head away from the danger. We wouldn't have been caught by those lowly hooligans. We wouldn't have had to escape. We wouldn't have to fight our way out. I wouldn't have just turned my back and ran when she was captured. She wouldn't have died while making sure that I got away safely" yelled Talia as she sat up in bed and whispered the last few sentences as tears began to slide down her face. She continued to blame herself for her close friend's death which her father had placed in her care. She had informed David who had become saddened by the news but he never blamed her. *Why doesn't anyone blame me but myself?*

"No one blames you for anything. They know that you are important. You just have to realise this yourself one way or another. It can't be helped that you are who you are. You just have to embrace it and strive for the best. That way you can give back to those that you couldn't help. You have the power to achieve it. You just need to believe" said Shawn as he slowly knelt by her beside with his elbows propped up on the bed. He slowly placed his big warm hands over her folded ones in her lap. "You just need to believe."

She was too upset to notice that Shawn had heard her thoughts. She was too upset to retrieve her hands from his grasp. All she could do was turn towards him and cry onto his shoulder which he freely gave. Her tears stained his shoulder but it didn't seem like he cared and she was too depressed to pull away. Her arms hugged her chest while he wrapped his arms around her back and stroked it gently.

"It's alright, you can let it all out" whispered Shawn as he rubbed her back but only made her even more upset. He could see that Talia was almost at the point of breaking. He now realised that she was closer to that crossroads than he had thought earlier. Now he understood why Arlem had sent him to see her. He was about to say something else but he stopped since someone else was now present in the room.

Willow stood there in her airy matter and smiled kindly at the picture that she was witnessing. She knew that there would be no other way in which she would have ever seen this unless she had talked to Arlem in the first place. She could see that Talia was crying and on the verge of breaking which meant that it was almost the time for her to face her fate. Slowly she approached the too and Shawn nodded his head for her to take over since it was her thing that she usually did, not someone who was of the sword. Carefully she used her wind magic to flow through Shawn and take his place while he moved away. Her hand gently rubbed Talia's shoulders and cast a warm current of air around her so that it felt like she was bodily hugged.

Shawn stood back up and gradually made his way over to Talia's sword. It was still as sharp as ever and had that little spark that he had put into it so that it was its own master who could choose its wielder. He had never expected that Talia would acquire this sword in the manner that she had. It had been very auspicious and rumours had spread far and wide among their kind. Since the sword had been in his care for more than a thousand years and its intended owner had disappeared, he had thought that the sword would never pick a person to wield it. He slowly ran his fingers along the flat side of the blade and felt it tremor in happiness at seeing its maker.

"There, there now... Let it all out... We're here for you" whispered Willow airily. She could see that Talia was so distraught that Talia had not even noticed that she was there trying to soothe her instead of Shawn of the sword. Her white eyes gathered in Talia's being and knew that she had to calm the girl down or risk having her slip out of control. However, Talia slowly started to calm down. Willow was tempted to blow out the air in her lungs at the relief but knew that it would be inappropriate at the moment. Gently she stroked Talia's back to try and soothe her.

Suddenly Talia stopped her crying. She sat frozen as she realised that the person who she had been crying on was not Shawn of the sword. Grey eyes tried to peek in her peripherals to see who she had been crying on. She slowly noticed that her body was wrapped in warm air and the person she was crying against was soft and feminine. Slowly she was released from the woman who had been holding her and whispering into her ear. "Who are you?" asked Talia politely.

"I am Willow of the wind. You have spoken to me many times and all I have done is whisper back into your ear since you were not ready to see me just yet. I was only given the authority a little while ago after you had wielded me sufficiently. I'm sure this is a shock to find out that the wind is feminine?" asked Willow in a howl of sounds.

Talia smiled. "As strange as it might sound, I always pictured you for a woman over a man since you were always gentle. However I didn't expect to actually be able to see you. It is quite bizarre. Also thank you" whispered Talia who slowly wiped the tears away from her eyes with the back of her hand. She slowly looked across the room and noticed that Shawn was standing there looking at the sword. Carefully she tried to get up but Willow stopped her.

"Stay in bed, young lady. You need to rest. How do I know? The simple fact that I was totally immersed inside of your body told me that you were not taking care of yourself like you ought to be. You were straining to wield me in your condition. I was amazed that you were able to actually get back to here before your body decided to give out on you. Am I right?" asked Willow, knowing the answer and getting a reluctant nod of the head. "So the fact that you could wield me in your condition tells me that you have grown quite a lot. Also it is about time that we kick you in the right direction."

"What do you mean?" asked Talia gradually. Her grey eyes were slowly trying to close and her body was demanding rest after that bout of emotion. However she wanted to know what Willow meant and why the both of them were there in her room. She could not think of a good reason unless it was something like saving mankind from extinction or something similar.

Willow smiled brightly and only glanced in Shawn's direction for a wink before looking back at Talia. "I'm afraid that I can't tell you. You need your rest and your body is desperate for it. I will explain when you wake up. I'm sure a few hours will not matter. Now sleep" whispered Willow. Her voice was so soft and alluring that Talia closed her eyes and was carefully reclined back.

"That was a close call. I'm glad that I handed her over to you. I don't know what I would have done if she completely lost control" explained Shawn with a deep sigh of relief. He quietly walked back over to the bed and felt the need to place his hand on top of her forehead. It was a little strange since he had never been so close to anyone in his life except for her.

"I'm sure that she would have had you to remind her to calm down since she is closer to you than anyone else. Not even Marina could have stopped her on her own without getting hurt. Talia only stopped that time because she hurt someone she shouldn't have and they were only starting to become friends. Also I'm sure that she couldn't have chosen not to go overboard that time even if Marina had entered the room and comforted her instead of standing at the door" commented Willow before she used her magic to create a slice of wind to tuck Talia in. She also kept the bubble of air around Talia warm which also had a healing effect.

"If you were put into the same situation as Marina, I'm sure you would be undecided about entering that room as well. I am certain that you would have probably been frozen, unable to make up a decision whether to enter or not. The main thing though is that she had enough strength to stay conscious so that she could return Talia to her original form" explained Shawn as he carefully sat on the edge of the bed and absently wiped the few strands of loose hair away from Talia's face.

"So is that why Lady Felecia of the fates took Marina's soul?" asked Willow.

"I don't know what Lady Felicia is planning and why she took Marina's soul. All I know is that Arlem sent me here with explicit instructions to see her and make sure that we were communicating" commented Shawn as if he was somewhere else.

Willow sighed exasperatedly. Shawn was one difficult person to get answers from and it seemed like he wasn't going to answer any more. She could see that his gaze had drifted further and further away from reality. She had noticed that he would be more like this than he usually was. Usually he would be the one to pop up anywhere and try to prank people by scaring them out of their wits. He would be talkative and friendly but now it was different. She was starting to wonder if it was because of Talia that he was thinking a lot more than usual.

Carefully stepping away from the bed so that she didn't disturb Talia, she walked to the closed door. She had a feeling that there was something that was wrong with the room. White eyes narrowed, she tried to figure out what it was. She finally spotted a thread of magic that could only be seen in the currents of energy in the air. Her eyebrows shot to the ceiling as she was able to distinguish that it didn't belong to Talia. Her hand swiftly swiped the air where the thread was and tried to find out the identity of the owner but it was a mystery. She had never seen a magical thread of energy like in her entire existence.

Willow tried to probe the magical thread with her own magic and was surprised that it was rejected as if there was a barrier around it. Her mind flipped at the realisation since the only beings who would do such a thing were those few that she and Shawn were not allowed to speak to or even see. However she was confused by the fact that she didn't know why a higher being than her would have been in this room for. She could tell by looking at the thread of magical energy that it was recently woven and had only been in the room for less than a candle mark.

Swiftly turning on her heel, Willow was about to address her findings to Shawn but stopped at seeing him sitting there leaning against the backboard, asleep with his hand just over Talia's other shoulder. It was a sight to see and one that she would remember for entire life. She was

also tempted to use this moment as a small bribing opportunity since he would never reveal to anyway that he cared for a person like this. Knowing that extending the warm bubble of air to cover him would wake him up, she left him as he was and turned back to the door.

Her eyes were narrowed and determined. She had to find out who this higher being was in case they jeopardized Talia's future or did something to foil their plans. It would be a safe bet that whoever this higher being was, they would be disguised very well and would take her a bit of time digging around before she discovered who it was. On top of that she had to disguise herself and make sure that the higher being could not detect that she too was one of their kind. Her mouth thinned into a straight line as she thought thoroughly about how she was going to be able to do this. She knew that it would be quite tricky considering that she didn't know the capabilities of the person who she was trying to identify.

Slowly reviewing all of the methods that had been used for such an occasion, Willow came to the decision that maybe disguising herself as a member was not a good idea. There were downfalls since this organisation was very small and the members pretty much knew each other well enough to notice if there was a fraud or not. So there was only one way to do this. She was going to try and be recruited by them. It would have been the only way that the other higher being had been able to get into the organisation.

So turning to the window, Willow hastily blew her body out of the small cracks between the window and window sill. She floated gently to the ground in a flurry of air to make sure that she wasn't seen by anyone before becoming a physical entity. She had to solidify her form even further than she normally would otherwise people would be able to tell that she was not one of them. She even had to make sure that she was dressed in appropriate clothes and her facial features were organised in a manner which made her less beautiful. She also changed her hair and eye colour so that it would look more normal. Quickly giving herself a look over, she was satisfied by what she saw and hastily covered her entire body with a small dusting of magic so that others would not be able to detect her magical capabilities to such an extreme extent.

Happy with her transformation into a normal person, Willow smiled and started towards the front door. She now had to figure out a reason for how she had found this place since it was actually kept in secret and not many people would talk about it. There were already wild rumours about the organisation and their members that they were so revered, kingdoms would seek their help or try to avoid them at all cost. However she was still determined to identify this higher being that had visited Talia without their knowledge.

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## **Chapter 7**

Nester was sitting on the wooden floor with her back resting against the side of the bed. Her slender sword which she had forged with her own hands rested by her side within reach if she needed it as she drummed her fingers on top of the floor boards. Her black eyes and short hair were almost as false as her face expression that she had been wearing in front of the members of the organisation. She only knew that Mum had very good intuition to know that she was acting a

part. Mum had been the only person that she felt safe in talking to but always made sure that the topic suited her and not the other way around in case it raised too many questions.

She remembered everything that happened ever since she first became a member and also everything that happened way before. She wondered a lot about what could have been and where her life was going to lead her. Black eyes could see the currents of energy swimming around in her room as if she were standing on the ocean floor and looking at the currents of the water. She could even see the swirling magical energies that could only be described as beautiful thin threads of different colours and strengths. Her hand gently reached up to feel a thread and smiled gently at the small hope that was decreasing slowly within her chest. There was only a little amount of time left before she could fulfil her wish or lose it all.

Gently resting her eyes, memories swam in her head of a time when everything seemed perfect. Her life had been filled with a bright sun and happiness. She could run around all day and laugh until she was satisfied. However there was only one person who outshone all of the perfection that was in her life. That person was Silvia of the sun and stars.

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Silvia ran swiftly across the lush green grass. Her long blonde hair flew behind her in a wave of silky strands. Her silver eyes were bright and could illuminate any day and place that she wished. Her slender body and long legs made her beautiful and graceful in every aspect of her life. Her smile could make men swim in happiness for time without end. However her attention was only captured by the one she loved, Maria of the moon.

"I have to show you something" called Silvia as she held onto Maria's hand gently and tugged her along at a reasonable pace that Maria could handle. Her eyes were beaming with excitement and happiness that made her eyes as bright as the sun on high. Her fragrant essence of sunflowers and lilies filled Maria's senses as she ran ahead.

Maria ran with her love, Silvia. Her long black hair flowed with the wind as she kept up with Silvia. Her body was as slender as Silvia's and she was as beautiful but she was by no means as strong bodied. Her whole life had been more difficult than any other person because of the bouts of sickness that she had to endure. There were no cures for what she had and no one knew why it was to be when they were all immortals entrusted to fill the responsibilities that were represented by their name. Her body had been strong one moment and then weak as a new born baby the next. However, today was a good day as she felt much stronger than the day before. Also she was being intoxicated by her love's essence which made her dizzy with happiness.

"We're nearly there" said Silvia as she continued to haul Maria along by her hand. Her silver eyes were dancing by the time that they reached the place that she wanted to show her love. Hastily, she lifted her free hand into the distance and pointed at the setting sun which was painting the land in unusual colours of red that rarely were seen on any other day. Parts of the land that had water were purple while the green vegetation was tinged with orange and red. She glanced at Maria and smiled brightly, seeing Maria's shocked gaze.

"It's so beautiful and unique. I didn't know the sun could do this" commented Maria in a surprised manner. Her black eyes could see all different colours and many different shades of red. She could also see a rainbow of multicoloured strands of pure magical energy that naturally came from the land. She had never seen this sight before and was happy that Silvia had shared it with her. "Thank you, Silvia."

"Well seeing that we are both five hundred years old today, I wanted to show you something special. I'm glad I got the chance to" replied Silvia with a big grin that lit her face like a beacon. She could see that Maria was enjoying herself as she watched the magical currents. They were both five hundred years old but that didn't mean that they looked very old. On contrary to what the mortals thought, the both of them were only young teenagers when compared to their kind. So it was quite natural for them to play around and have fun rather than being immersed in their duties like their much older siblings and peers.

Silvia and Maria were not in any way related by blood. Their respective parents had created them to perform a duty that only they could do. Silvia was responsible for the sun and stars while Maria was responsible for the moon. Even though they were responsible for something that mortals would call minor, they could influence the outcome of each day with ease and their kind knew that. However no one stopped the two from falling in love since they were both partners and they were so much in love that no one had the heart to split them up. Even the higher beings were happy for the two of them.

After a few more moments of watching the sun set, Silvia carefully led Maria back to their realm of existence. It was a place where mortals could not step unless they had become pure souls that were blessed by the higher beings. Maria smiled all the way back to their home as Silvia held onto her hand. It was a blissful moment before both of them had to attend a meeting with the higher beings to determine if they were suited to be higher beings or not.

Silvia held Maria gently and slowly they stepped back onto an airy ground that was made of soft magical stone. It was quite a sight to see considering that there were lots of buildings made from the same matter as the ground. However everything seemed bright and cheerful with the way the other people of their kind traversed from one building to the next, either just having fun or busy fulfilling their duties.

No one even looked at the two young teenagers. It was almost as if they didn't know who they were, which would have been an understatement considering everyone was informed that there had been two more members added to their kind with high responsibilities. However no one was interested and so the two teenagers could walk anywhere they liked without getting unfriendly stares. It was a freedom that they could savour but they knew that if they were to become higher beings, they would be presented to the entire population.

Silvia and Maria made their way to one of the buildings where the meeting was being held. The building in question was located at the centre of their realm and only privileged beings were allowed to enter. Seeing how they were summoned to attend, a small message was all they needed to say for them to enter even though the attendant at the door was staring after them with a confused look.

Maria and Silvia remained holding hands as they walked casually to the main hall where they knew that the higher beings were patiently waiting. They weren't running late or anything, so Maria and Silvia were able to take their time and have a look at the many people who were around while they were on their way. Silvia had also pointed out how many of the halls were decorated by her sister, Elaine of the earth, who was a higher being and three thousand years older than they both were. In addition, she also commented that her sister was responsible for the way the mortal world looked. It had been her sister's pride and joy to create a place for mortals to dwell.

Maria had listened avidly as butterflies began to trounce around in her stomach. She was nervous of the fact that they had been summoned and also because they were going to be judged by one hundred higher beings. It didn't ease her feelings that her parents as well as Silvia's whole family were already high beings who would also be in the meeting as well. They would all be there glaring at the both of them and she could feel her face start to sink in worry.

Silvia, seeing that Maria was stressed, quickly halted their progress to the meeting hall. Her silver eyes swept Maria off her feet as she stared deeply into her black eyes. "There is no need to worry" said Silvia with a gentle reassuring smile on her face. "No harm will come of you and I will make sure to protect you at all cost. So please believe in me. I won't let your hand go and I will stay by your side." Silvia slowly let her smile widen as Maria gradually nodded her head.

As soon as they arrived at the hall, Silvia kept her promise and held onto Maria's hand while walking to the centre of the room. The room was huge and white. It was like a dome and the seats were arranged so that everyone could see into the centre of the room. Those that were seated at the back were on a higher platform while those closer to the front were only a touch higher than the centre of the room. The seats were arranged in a horseshoe manner so that all one hundred higher beings could see the centre of the room without any difficulties.

Maria looked around a little frightened but she stayed by Silvia's side and held onto her hand for dear life. Blood drained from her face as she stared up at the higher beings without spotting her parents. She could have sworn that they would also be present if all of the higher beings were summoned to judge. Black eyes could only see Silvia's siblings. She could not even see Silvia's parents who were also meant to be in attendance. It was strange that their parents weren't there. Suddenly she noticed that her hand was being gently rubbed by Silvia's other hand and her fear began to subside but still her face was pale.

"Greetings, Lords and Ladies, we are here at your summons" bellowed Silvia in a mighty voice that showed how childish she could be. Her silver eyes danced in happiness at the twitch of the lips that her siblings gave her. She knew that she just earned some extra pocket money since they had all dared her to announce her presence like that within the meeting. Silvia then toned down her voice and became so polite and sincere that it made her beauty stand out even though she was young. "Lords and Ladies, I am Silvia of the sun and stars. My partner here is Maria of the moon. I wish all of you are doing well?" She received a few nods of people's heads which was a good sign. "Please proceed to inform us why we have been summoned?"

A lady sitting right at the front and centre of the higher beings slowly produced a smile. Her blue eyes slowly looked to the left and right of her at the two people sitting on either side who were lords. They also smiled and glanced at the two girls before giving a nod of their heads and turning towards the lady. The lady nodded her head and slowly stood up to address the two girls. "It would seem that the assembly is amused by your introduction. However it will neither improve nor diminish the outcome in the least bit. We, the assembly of higher beings, have summoned you to stand judgement" explained the Lady in a formal matter.

Silvia felt a tug on her hand and turned to see that Maria was still frightened by the assembly. She gave her love a reassuring smile before moving closer so that Maria could whisper into her ear. However she knew that the assembly would be able to hear since every word was being recorded for the lore-keeper. She could have sworn that she had told Maria before coming in that every thing would be recorded.

Maria slowly moved closer to Silvia's ear. She kept her eyes on the assembly while she spoke softly into Silvia's ear. Her face was still pale and her eyelids wanted to close for a little rest. "Silvia, can you please ask them if we can postpone this meeting?" asked Maria in a weak voice that immediately caught Silvia's concern.

The entire assembly had heard and were confused as to why Maria had asked for it while Silvia looked worried. They continued to stare at the two and waited. Only the three main higher beings at the front were busily conversing. The two on either side of the lady were visibly arguing why the lady just watched the two girls.

Silvia swiftly turned and faced Maria. She shielded Maria from view while her eyes blazing silver with torrential magical power quickly scanned Maria's body. Her eyes had seen Maria's pale complexion but she had thought it was from the stress of being summoned. Slowly she raked Maria's body, even though it was prohibited from using magic within the meeting hall. However Maria was in a dire situation since the meeting could not be postponed. There were rules and regulations that stated when passing judgement, members and candidates are prohibited from leaving until denied or approved.

Maria looked deep into Silvia's eyes. It was the only thing that was keeping her on her feet since Silvia's magical energy had wrapped her up so that she could probe her. Her black eyes wanted to close and her body just wanted to crumple on the spot. Her body was working against her effort to try and stay conscious. Slowly she raised her arms and placed them gently on Silvia's chest before her legs gave way.

Silvia quickly grabbed hold of Maria and gently let her down so that she was lying in her embrace. Silver eyes were still trying to locate the source of the problem while the higher beings stood up to mumble things to one another. Only Silvia's siblings and the lady at the front had left their seats to see to Maria. Silvia looked up as they approached as she continued to gently rub Maria's arms. "What's wrong with her?" she asked frightened for Maria's sake.

Elaine knelt down beside her sister and gently tried to pull her away but Silvia refused to budge. Her brown earthen eyes looked up at the Lady who knelt on the other side of Silvia to assess



Maria. "Lady Felecia of the fates is there any possible way you can help Maria of the moon?" asked Elaine sincerely. She was just as worried as her sister and knew that if Maria's condition worsened than there was no hope of Maria recovering from this bout. She also knew that her sister Silvia would be devastated.

Lady Felecia took a good look at Maria. She used her own magical energy to probe Maria while in her peripherals she could see that Silvia was on the verge of panic. Her blue eyes could see that the only thing that was holding her back was the fact that she had stepped down to take a look herself at Maria's condition. But sadly she shook her head. "Maria's condition is worse than it was before. I'm afraid that her body won't be able to fight this bout off. Since this meeting is a judgement on the both of you, I will accept you both as higher beings. The others can continue arguing among them but I have the final word. You may leave and take her to somewhere she can rest peacefully" said Lady Felecia in regret as she slowly stood up.

Suddenly the domed room began to shake. Everyone in the hall quickly fled or ducked onto the floor for the tremors to stop. Elaine had jumped back with Lady Felecia as they both stared in shock at Silvia. The hall did not look like it was going to hold out much either as it started to show cracks along the walls. Some of the higher beings had quickly recovered to support the walls from crumbling down onto the others.

Silvia knelt with Maria in her arms. She was in the centre of the room as magical energy oozed from her being like waves of tsunamis. Her silver eyes were blazing like stars in the night sky as she looked down at Maria's fragile body. Tears were streaking down her face and she was almost on the verge of going insane however only one thought sustained her mentality. "I need to save her."

Carefully wrapping the both of them in a cushion of magical energy, Silvia began to pump all of her magical energy into Maria. It was the only way that she knew of to overcome the minor flaw within her body. Magical energy could heal anything if a high volume was introduced to a weak body. She had the power of all the stars and suns out there to have just enough energy to make sure that Maria was saved and cured. However, there was a high price in which she had to pay in return.

Maria slowly stirred. Her eyes fluttered open and saw Silver putting the last of her magical energy into her body. She abruptly sat up and held onto Silvia's fragile form. Her black eyes widened in fear as she saw that Silvia's eyes were dimming fast and the exuberance that she had showed was but a figment of everyone's imagination. She slowly stood up with Silvia and stared into her eyes. "What have you done?" asked Maria in shock and worry.

Silvia smiled gently and slowly lifted her hand to caress Maria's face as a lonely tear fell down her soft cheek. "Please don't cry. The price was worth you being alive and well. I'm sure that you would have done the same for me. So please be happy. You know how our world works. I will just be thrown into the sea of mortal souls. I will be born as one and when I return to this realm, I know you will be here for me" said Silvia as she slowly began to fade away in a dust of twinkling light. Her hand remained on Maria's face as she leaned forward and gently pressed her lips against Maria's. "I love you" she whispered before she had completely faded away.

Maria stood there shocked. Her only friend, her love, had given up her immortality just for her wellbeing so that she wouldn't get thrown into the world of mortals. She gradually sunk to her knees as tears rolled down her cheeks. She was stunned and her mind was completely blank.

Elaine stood nearby with her hands cupping her face as she wept softly for her sister. Her brown earthen eyes had become like mud as she stood there with her other siblings also crying or trying to soothe the others. There were ten of them altogether but now one was gone, lost in the sea of mortal souls. She didn't even know how she would explain this to her parents since they were forbidden to come to the meeting and she was the eldest.

Lady Felecia quickly rushed towards Maria and gently placed her hands onto the child's shoulders. She probed Maria's body and was amazed by the complete change of her body. "She completely healed you" whispered Lady Felecia in awe. Her brow was then immediately scrunched as she fell into her thinking process. However, she quickly turned back to Maria and smiled as an idea surfaced. "There is still a way to get her back. However it might take some time before she can return. It will all depend on when she will be born into the mortal realm. If you want her back, work with me and I will guarantee that the odds of her returning will be in our favour" explained Lady Felecia to a now determined Maria.

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Nester fluttered her black eyes open. She didn't know how long she had dozed off for and quickly looked at the window. It was still light outside and the air currents suggested that she had only closed her eyes for at least four candle marks. Gradually standing up, she stretched out her body and picked up her sword to sheath it onto her back. She walked to the door and halted just before reaching out to the handle. She felt tears slide down her face. Hurriedly she wiped them away. There was no way that she would reveal to the others the sadness that she felt at being able to see the person she loved but not being able to show them, touch them or receive any form of affection in return.

Gently she rested her head against the back of the door. Her black eyes stared at the ground as tears kept on falling. However she pulled herself together. It was almost time for dinner and Talia would be there whether she was still tired or not, seeing how she would have missed out on lunch. She carefully put on a stoic expression and prepared herself to face the people whose lives she would change forever.

Stepping out of the room, she was rooted to the spot. Talia was standing there in front of the door. It looked as though Talia was heading down for dinner. It almost seemed like a coincidence that she had stepped out as Talia was passing through. Her stoic mask was impeccable but it almost slipped at the shock and the flood of memories of her love, Silvia. Slowly giving Talia a nod of her head in greeting, she decided to walk with her to the kitchen.

"When did you get back?" asked Talia to make conversation.

"I came back this morning about a candle mark before you and Misty" replied Nester in a monotone as she kept her eyes in front of her. She could see that Talia was staring at her

strangely but she ignored it since Talia had always looked at her like that. "I heard you hit a bit of trouble on your way back."

"I'm sure Misty was the one that told you about it huh?" commented Talia with a rhetorical question since she assumed Misty had told Nester since Misty was the only one present. However, she never got a confirmation or not since Nester seemed to want to stay quiet. "I guess news fly when you have Misty around. I'm sure Mila will want to assign me to more missions after that; although I don't really mind. Has she assigned you with another mission yet?"

Nester started to walk down the stairs. Her hand travelled down the rail as she walked to keep her balance. Her black eyes glanced back up at Talia and slowly she shook her head. "Mila hasn't assigned anything" replied Nester. Suddenly Nester put out her arm, without touching, to stop Talia in her tracks. She turned bodily to face the surprised Talia who had only just stepped down onto the landing. "Next time you think that you have to use that amount of magical energy, make sure that you have enough left so that you remain alert to defend yourself. Next time, Misty might not be there to cover your back."

Talia was taken aback. Her grey eyes looked at Nester in complete surprise. She had never seen Nester show so much emotion in something before even though at the moment it looked like hate but there had been a small warning. She had never seen Nester care about another person either let alone her own life. She was so shocked that she could only watch as Nester found herself stunned by her own outburst. Grey eyes continued to watch Nester quickly gathering her wits and leaving for the kitchen. *I wonder what is up with her...*

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## Chapter 8

Willow sat at the kitchen table as five sets of eyes stared at her. She smiled at all of them and gazed at each one in turn. She had actually knocked on the kitchen door instead of the front door and Mum had let her in before informing the others of her presence. She had been so surprised at Mum's politeness and cheerfulness that she had just told Mum her real name. So now all of them knew that her name was Willow and that she wanted to be a new recruit for the organisation.

Mila looked at Willow carefully. She had not expected a fairly beautiful blonde with hazel eyes who had the figure of someone more fit to be a royal or noble. However, she knew that images could be deceiving since Talia and Nester were both really slender and pretty but they were more dangerous than an entire army unarmed. She had seen what the two top members of the organisation could do and now she wondered what Willow would offer to help their cause.

"My name is Melanie but you can call me Laney" introduced Laney as she politely shook hands with Willow. Her brown eyes had seen how Willow was quite nervous under all of the scrutiny. So she knew that she had to break the ice or they would be sitting there for a while. "I am the person who you will come to after being assigned a mission. Well, that depends on if Michelle, also known as Mila or the boss, sees that you are fit to join." Laney had gestured to Mila who

still seemed to be analysing Willow to find anything mysterious about her. "Anyways, I'm sure you have your talents, otherwise you wouldn't be here, right?"

Willow nodded her head emphatically. She was still wondering what her trick would be considering that her specialty was manipulating air currents. Her new hazel eyes looked around trying to figure out what she should say and make sure that she didn't say something that she shouldn't. "What are the requirements to be recruited?" asked Willow in a soft, airy voice. She knew she had forgotten to change her voice but it was too late. She had already spoken to Mum with it.

Mila slowly placed her hands on the table and fully placed her attention on Willow. She received Willow's attention in return and slowly folded her fingers together in front of her. "There are a few requirements that must be met before you can even be a candidate to complete the test. My name is Michelle but as you know everyone calls me Mila and I'm the boss who assigns the members with their missions. I will have to interview you personally before you can fill out the other requirements to become a candidate" explained Mila in an authoritative voice.

Little Michaela spoke up in her very cute voice. "I'm special; I didn't need to take the test. They let me join when Nester brought me here. She was nice and told me that I could have a home here." She sat in the chair that was next to Mila's and had her elbows on the table with her head propped up in her hands. She smiled sweetly and turned her cute blonde head to the side which made her so adorable with her brown eyes.

"Are there any requirements that need to be met prior to the interview?" asked Willow but she already knew the answer to that. There were several specific rules that automatically prohibited people from becoming candidates. She waited patiently as Mila carefully explained.

"There are several fine points which may make you ineligible to become a candidate. You are not allowed to be an heir to a throne or have any criminal records. You also have to be willing to forfeit your life for the organisation if we require it. The organisation will not be held accountable for any criminal deeds that you do. Candidates must have an ability that contributes to the organisation. Any member of the organisation is allowed to forfeit your right to become a candidate if they have a just reason. If there are any more questions please ask" stated Mila as if she had just read all of the fine print from a textbook.

Willow found it quite amusing that Laney, Misty and Mum had pretty much fallen half asleep through that short speech while Michaela watched avidly. She smiled at Mila, knowing that the girl would assume that she understood the criteria. Her hazel eyes were dancing with glee since she just figured out a way to be able to not become a member and still be able to find out who the thread of magic belonged to. All she needed to do was meet all the members.

"So now we just have to wait for two more of our members who will be down shortly" said Mila as her gaze remained fixed on Willow. She watched every little movement and noticed that Willow was very graceful. Also her movements were not like a warrior and she didn't have a build to be one either. Slowly she raised her hands to sit just in front of her mouth as she assumed her thinking pose.

As if right on cue, Nester entered the kitchen via the main hallway. Her black eyes viewed the room full of members of the organisation but not enjoying their dinner. The table was empty even though the aromas in the kitchen were so enticing; she had assumed that they had already served out everything. Her eyes then narrowed onto the unfamiliar face. Luckily she had once more donned her stoic expression otherwise they would have turned most of their attention directed towards her.

Willow looked up with hazel eyes and was surprised to see a very young lady wearing a black dress with armour and a sword strapped to her back. She immediately had to suppress the urge to actually stand up at her appearance however she didn't know why. With hazel eyes narrowed, she probed the young lady only to find out that the magical thread matched. Her eyebrows almost shot into the air at identifying who it belonged to. Now she just needed to know who she was.

Suddenly the door opened and Talia stepped in only to stop abruptly since Nester was standing in the way. She swiftly manoeuvred around Nester before bumping into her and ended up standing beside her. She still had the confused look on her face as she looked around the kitchen and noticed Willow of the wind casually sitting at the table in a disguise. Grey eyes glanced to her side and she had that weird feeling again which prompted her to look away. "What's happening? Where's the food?" asked Talia to end the awkward silence.

"Dinner is postponed since we have a guest who wants to become a candidate for the membership test" informed Mum who was standing near the pots to make sure that the stew wasn't getting burnt and remained warm for it to be served once business had been taken care off.

"No!" said Talia and Nester at once. They both looked at each other however it looked as though Nester was glaring and Talia was shocked. Nester then turned on her heel and went to storm out but Talia grabbed her arm. It had been the first time that Talia had touched Nester in any way and now it seemed as though it had been a huge mistake. Nester glared fiercely at Talia as if she wanted to hurt her while Talia was shocked by her own actions.

The whole kitchen seemed to be watching the two of them since this was very unusual. It was because they usually just ignored each other that it almost seemed like they hated one another or they were jealous. However this byplay seemed a bit more than that as the two of them became the centre of everyone's attention. Even Willow was surprised at the animosity that the blacked haired young lady showed to the other.

Nester glowered at Talia as her body was frozen by the simple touch. Her mind was already unstable as her dreams continued to haunt her and her hopes of finding Silvia were sliding further down the drain. Her time was running out and she had Talia to contend with. It seemed like a cruel joke that even as she stood here, anger would explode in her heart at the sight of Talia but were now intensified by her actions. Before she had simply ignored the feeling however now that they were forced to interact more, she just wanted to let her rage take over.

Talia stood there. Her mind was screaming for her to retrieve her hand since Nester looked like she was about to murder her. However, her heart was yearning for more than just a simple touch. She didn't know what prompted her to grab Nester's arm but she knew that she had faced this

feeling before. Whenever they were in the room together, she just wanted to diminish the distance between them but her mind had told her to back off since Nester always gave her that heated stare. She didn't know why she felt like this and didn't know why Nester hated her so. She just wanted to know why she was having these weird feelings.

"Let go of my arm" growled Nester furiously. It almost looked like she had wanted to draw her sword and detach the thing that was hanging onto her. Her black eyes were starting to show a tint of dark blue in them as her fury began to swell. Her entire body was rigid with poised reflexes if Talia were to try anything else than simply letting go.

"Why are you so angry at me?" asked Talia as she continued to hold onto Nester knowing that she was putting herself into further danger. Her grey eyes could see that hatred filled Nester down to her core but she only ever directed it at her, Talia. Her mind was telling her to find out answers as well as get far away as possible however her body was tingling to just gather Nester into a full body hug. "What have I done to make you hate me so?"

Gradually Nester's eyes turned deep blue and the room became thick with tension. The natural swirling magical energies within the room began to electrify as another magical thread began to vibrate violently within the air. However everyone except Willow and Talia were oblivious to these magical currents. The only thing that they could feel was that the air seemed heavier while Willow and Talia could see that magic was starting to be wrapped around Nester's body.

Nester spoke in a mere whisper that could have been uttered vehemently by an enemy sneaking up on its prey. "You haven't done anything wrong. I don't know why I get so angry with you but I do. Now let go of my arm unless you want to lose it" warned Nester. Her deep blue eyes were becoming more tinted with blue instead of being just black.

"Ahem!" Willow cleared her throat noisily to get everyone's attention and try to dissolve the strange situation in front of her. "My name is Willow and I don't even know your names. Anyways, why did you immediately say no for me to become a candidate when you don't even know me?" She had brought up a good question which the other people present in the room was interested in knowing. Her hazel eyes stared at Nester since it was whom she wanted an answer from most.

Nester stopped her fleeing and directed her heated gaze at Willow. It too was burned with hate but slowly dissipated and her eyes were slowly returning back to their normal colour. She stared at Willow as if it was the first time that she had seen her. It looked as though she had been so captured by Talia's actions that she had lost sight that she was in a room full of people who could see her every movement and emotion. Black eyes stared around at everyone in shock and her body wanted to leave the room but her arm was still held by Talia. There was little choice but to answer the question so that the attention on her was diverted elsewhere. "I am Nester and it is quite suspicious how you know of this place. All members are actually scouted out since this is how the organisation works so that members are anonymous and our base remains a safe haven when we are not on missions. So, how did you know of this place?" asked Nester in a cold voice that was devoid of emotion. Her face had slipped back on the stoic mask so fast that she could have been a different person.

All eyes stared at Willow. Mila was actually thinking the same thing and was going to ask that exact question first before she started the proper interview. It seemed as though Nester was more worried about the security of the base than she let on. Mila could see that Nester was under a lot of stress for she knew that it wasn't because of the missions. She had assigned Nester the same amount of missions as Talia but in-between missions, Nester would be out and about. She didn't know where Nester went and what she did but she had assumed that Nester was looking for someone. It was the only explanation that seemed plausible and she wondered whom Nester was searching so desperately for.

Mum stood at the pots while stirring the contents. She could feel the tension in the room and knew that all of the occupants were hungry. Her blue eyes swept the room and sighed. This small business meeting didn't seem to have an end in sight and it had already turned dark outside while Talia and Nester had their little interaction. Her feet were starting to hurt as well and she knew that Michaela needed to get something to eat soon so that she could go to bed and rest since it had been a long day for all of them. Carefully she started to scoop out the stew into the bowls that had been prepared earlier. Her back was turned to the room but the noise that she was making un-doubtedly got everyone's attention. "Come get your stew and settle everything tomorrow. It is already late" she said kindly as she deposited the first bowl onto the bench.

Michaela got up and got the bowl first and the next serving was taken by Misty who had been interested but did not voice anything since she was gathering information like usual. Her gossip list was quite extensive and she even had a few topics that referred to Talia's and Nester's relationship. Her hazel eyes had actually lit up when Nester and Talia were having their little interaction.

Mila sighed. Mum was right and there was plenty of time tomorrow to sort out all of the details. Also there was no point now in dismissing Willow since she wouldn't be able to leave at this time of night. It would be too dangerous to travel since the area was notorious for beasts and other monsters lurking in the dark. She quickly gathered herself up and spoke to the room at large. "We will continue this discussion tomorrow. Willow, you will be staying for the night since it is dark and can get extremely dangerous. I'm sure that Mum will organise a room for you. Nester and Talia, I expect both of you to be at the meeting which will be held right after breakfast so that we can resolve this matter. Also there are a few missions that I will assign to you afterwards" informed Mila before she got up herself and collected her own bowl after Misty.

Slowly the rest of the members got their servings as well as Willow who had looked at the food with a bit of trepidation. However, her eyebrows shot up to her hairline in surprise at the pleasant taste that entered her palate. She was swimming in a sea of pleasure since the places that she usually went to eat at in the mortal realm were not very tasteful. She had enjoyed the food in her own realm more and seldom came to the mortal realm to eat unless one of her friends had badgered her to try some of the places. She wondered if Mum had not been one of them once upon a time ago with her culinary skills.

Nester took her bowl after being released from Talia's grip. She was still angry but never let it be directed at anyone else. She was even surprised when Mum had gently patted her on the shoulder and smiled as though she wanted to soothe her anger away. She slowly sunk to the corner of the

room which was furthest from Talia and ate in silence. She was once again lost in her sea of memories that she cherished more than anything to try and forget about her unusual hatred towards Talia.

Talia sat close to Mum after they both got their bowls. She would glance a few times in Nester's direction but it was obvious that Nester chose to ignore her. So her grey eyes would glance over to Mum who slowly shook her head to notify her not to push the matter tonight. Her insides were gnawing with emotions that she didn't know where they originated from. She wanted to soothe Nester's anger and make her feel better. She wanted them to be friends like she was to the other members. However, she didn't know what that would evolve to since she just wanted to touch and hold Nester every time that they were in the same room. There had been times when she would think about Nester and end up having a smile on her face for no reason at all but remembering her.

Mechanically, Talia emptied her first bowl and refused to have another since she was no longer in the mood for food. Mum had looked at her with concern but she smiled at her and excused herself from the table. There was no point in pursuing the matter with Nester tonight since Nester was blatantly refusing to even look at her. So she trotted back to her comfortable room where Shawn was waiting. She knew that she still had to talk to him and that she was still tired from yesterday's ordeal.

Stepping back into her room, she looked around and saw that Shawn was missing when he should have been there. He had said that he would be there upon her return. Now it looked as though he had urgent business to contend with and had left without a word. However, it did not matter. Talia could speak to him in the morning before breakfast. She could easily call him forth since they were bound by a thin thread of magic. She still remembered the first time that she had met him.

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It had been just after she had received the sword. Shawn had appeared out of thin air and almost scared her to death. She had quickly eaten dinner with David's family and rushed back to her room to talk with the strange man. As it turned out, Shawn had been more than a man. He was not mortal at all. She had discovered that he was what the mortals called gods but she had never believed that they existed until then. He had only talked about the sword that she had just received at the time and she found out that he had forged it with magic. Then he had hastily disappeared before she could ask anything else about him. However, she was still content to leave things as they were since she didn't really know the extent of the god's powers.

Talia could still remember the first day that she had called forth the wind god to help her put out a field of fire. She had cast her own magic to try and douse the flames with buckets of water but she knew it would take too long. She had then unknowingly called for the wind to spray the dry air with water from the well. Her magic had swelled at that point and she had been able to coerce the wind god to lend her more power to help the farmers.



The farmers at the time had been afraid of her after she had exposed that she was gifted. She had only been passing through at the time and seen the fiery blaze. She had rushed to help out since the farmers were yelling for help or were trying to put out the flames themselves. Her gift had helped them but had also distanced them from her. The wind had never shown her what she looked like and so she had assumed at the time that the wind god did not have a physical form.

During all of that time extinguishing the flames, she had not noticed that a pair of blue eyes was staring at her. Talia had left the farmers and was intercepted by the woman with the blue eyes who happened to be Mum. She had listened to what Mum had explained and now knew that there was a place where gifted people could go without being scorned by people who knew that she was gifted. Mum had intercepted her life at the time that she had been running away from her guilt after informing David of his youngest daughter's death.

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Slowly sinking into the soft covers of her bed, Talia wondered what Willow was thinking. She had seen through the disguise and knew that Willow had diverted most of her attention onto Nester. It was like Willow was intrigued by Nester to the extent that she had to look like a mortal to discover Nester's secret. Now that she thought about it, her first meeting with Nester had been a shock to both of them.

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Talia had shook hands with Nester in greeting but had found that her gaze was filled with hatred towards her. Also Talia had felt as though she had met Nester before but she knew that she hadn't. On top of this, she also had the urge to hug Nester and to make her anger disappear. She didn't know why she felt like the way she did. She knew that it was highly unusual but didn't want to alarm Mum at the fact that she was having these urges or feelings towards someone who she only just met. Grey eyes had looked at Nester curiously but they never got the chance to actually talk to each other since they were assigned missions and Nester was always away on more missions than she was. She only got the chance to talk on passing which was always limited to a greeting and a polite dismissal that one or the other was busy. However, each meeting had become more strained as time passed and she had seen that Nester's hatred had grown instead of diminishing.

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Grey eyes watched the ceiling as she thought about Nester and she found that another smile had popped up on her face. She knew that she had seen Nester as a girl but lately she felt as though she was seeing Nester as a beauty that she wanted to cherish for the rest of her life. Her own heart could not seem to beat normally around Nester and she found it harder to control its rhythm. Her heart would thump loudly and more quickly as she set her sights on Nester which had always placed a confused expression on her face. She knew that nothing would happen since Nester seemed to hate her so passionately without any due cause.

Slowly turning to her side, she watched the door. She knew that her quarters were shared with Mum and Michaela since it was quite a big room but her comfortable portion was sectioned off by a curtain that always remained covered. She felt lonely as she lied there and waited for Mum or Michaela to arrive soon. Both were the only ones that were privy to converse to her about Nester's actions and feelings towards her. She just didn't get it and wanted to have a clearer picture of what was going on after their little incident in the kitchen. She knew that Mum would definitely talk to her because it was in her nature to check up on everyone which was another reason that they referred to her as Mum.

Grey eyes gently closed to rest for a few moments. She intended to open them as soon as Mum or Michaela entered the room but she was fast asleep when they entered. No one decided to disturb her since she still looked pretty tired from her ordeal. She didn't even notice that Willow had entered the room to talk to Mum but had actually used a bit of magical energy to enclose Talia in a healing cocoon so that she would be much better sooner.

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## **Chapter 9**

Steven and Joshua arrived at the start of the hill that led to where the two young women who they had been trailing for most of the day. They had camped the other night instead of continuing and had found out that morning that their prey had not rested. It was by luck that the weather remained good and the trail they were following was not covered or erased. They were still mounted on their borrowed horses as they stared up at the large stone house which almost resembled a castle except it didn't have any protective walls.

Steven led his mount slowly up the hill since it was already dark and they assumed that all the occupants of the residence were asleep. It would be easy to get there without being heard since their horses were trained for that purpose. He glanced at his brother who had grown silent upon reaching the house. However he didn't want to question him since they were still in a wide field where ears could be anywhere. It was only when they were resting in a patch of trees that he decided to speak up in a whisper. "Why are you so quiet, little brother" asked Steven.

Joshua's blue eyes looked up to see that the huge house was not far away. He turned to his brother and smiled nervously. "There are rumours around these parts that there is a house in the most dangerous part of the woods. We are in the most dangerous parts and there is a house on top of that cliff that slightly overhangs the huge lake. They say that the house belongs to the notorious Blaster organisation. I think it is that house there" explained Joshua in a mere whisper which showed every bit of his fear.

"Get a grip on yourself, little brother. We are only here to retrieve that ring and return it to its rightful owner. I'm certain now that the young lady warrior must have stolen it if this is indeed the organisation that is most revered by a majority of the kingdoms around here. There is no way that one of them Blaster people could be a gifted royal since there is another rumour that says members are not heirs to any throne" said Steven who stared sternly at his brother. He could see that Joshua was starting to follow his logic. As he thought about it more himself, he assured

himself that he was right and the young lady warrior was most probably a murderer. He was going to revoke her membership to this organisation by delivering the most severe punishment a person would be given for killing a gifted royal. "We have a duty to perform."

"If this is the Blaster organisation, won't she be gifted as well? Didn't you notice that she was armed? Also we don't even know what she can do. She could have been doing anything within that mist when the Sky-rider was landing" said Joshua who had brought up a good point. "It will be most difficult to do our duty if she can easily kill us once she sees us. Also the other members would be obliged to exact punishment on us first before bothering to ask questions."

"We will have to wipe out the organisation then. We will go to each room and make sure that no one wakes up in the morning. I'm sure not all of its members would be home anyway since they do butt into other people's business a lot" said Steven before he trotted his horse once more toward the huge house which indicated that the conversation had come to an end.

Joshua had been about to voice his other objections to this endeavour but knew that once his big brother had made up his mind, it was hard to deter it. Slowly he nudged his horse into a trot to catch up to his brother. There would be plenty of time later to discuss and deal with any consequences that might arise after all of the people currently in the house had been dealt with. His dark brown hair flopped up and down just like his brother's as he caught up. His blue eyes widened as he realised that they were pretty much at the doorstep.

Slowly sliding out of their mounts with the least amount of noise, Steven and Joshua tied them to a nearby tree. They both came to the decision to enter the house via a balcony which they assumed would lead them to the first bedroom and their first targets. They had both stowed their swords onto their backs so that it would be easier climbing up. They were lucky to find a tree that would help them reach the balcony with ease.

Steven climbed up first while Joshua followed. It had always been like this since Steven had better reflexes should he need them. It was quite amazing that they did not find a door that led inside. There was an open archway that led straight into the room and Steven could see that there were two occupants who were in bed. He couldn't see very clearly inside since the clouds had obscured the light of the full moon. Quietly he stepped into the room with his sword drawn.

Joshua withdrew his sword as well before entering the room. He looked around and could barely make out anything in the dark. He was lucky that there were no objects in his path otherwise he was sure that he would have bumped into it and caused his brother more trouble to deal with. Carefully he made sure that he was close enough to his brother so that his brother knew where he was but also far away enough that he wouldn't accidentally stab him either.

Steven carefully manoeuvred to the bed with Joshua just behind him. He signalled for Joshua to go around to the other side of the bed since it would be best to strike both occupants at the same time. He intended to strike them in the head with the flat of the blade just like his little brother so that the two occupants would remain unconscious whether there was a loud noise or not. As soon as they were in position, Steven lifted his sword up over his head and was about to swing down when the occupants seemed to move beneath the covers. In their sudden panic at being

discovered, both brothers used the sharp edge of their blades and stabbed the two occupants before a sound could be heard. They heard their swords stab through flesh and bone but were surprised that little noise had been made.

Slowly the clouds high up in the night sky began to move and the full moon was able to cast its luminescence into the large room. Joshua could now make out the features of the room. Blue eyes looked at the bed which was covered in blood. He quickly withdrew his sword and watched horribly as the covers came off unintentionally and revealed to him the bleeding body of a woman and child. His mouth dropped open in fear as he saw that both of them were still barely alive and that they were in so much pain and shock that they didn't make a noise.

Steven's eyes were widened in shock. However, he was so well versed in war that he raised his sword again to deal the finishing blow so that both were put out of their misery. His face was expressionless as he glanced at his frozen brother. He knew that he would have to strike twice since Joshua didn't look like he was going to be able to move. Steven closed his eyes briefly in regret but quickly opened them and drove his sword down without hesitating.

CHING!!!

Steven's blue eyes bulged out of his head as his sword had been blocked by a young lady who he didn't recognise. He could see her short, black hair and furious, black eyes clearly. She was wearing black armour over a black dress and her sword was pressed up against his from delivering the final blow. He was shocked by her appearance and strength as she pushed him away effortlessly. His blue eyes could see that she was going to defend her friends and not strike unless it was necessary. He observed her carefully and found that she was actually very skilled and a force to be reckoned with. He glanced at his brother and was not surprised to find another girl standing next to his brother. He recognised her as the brunette who travelled with the one that they were after.

Misty stood ready with her sword just touching the skin on the neck of the intruder. She had noticed that his sword was slick with blood and knew that he had been the one who had stabbed Mum while the other had stabbed Michaela. Her hazel eyes were shocked with fury but she knew that she could not punish him until they held a trial. She quickly looked over at Nester who had only just stopped the other intruder from finishing what both of them started.

Mila and Laney rushed into the room via the open door that Misty and Nester had used upon sensing that there was something wrong. Mila quickly assessed the situation and to her horror, she quickly ran over to Mum's and Michaela's side. She hastily grabbed the covers off the bed and used them to try and stop the bleeding. She had seen many wounds in her life and knew that these were fatal. Her two poor friends were going to die. She could already feel tears starting to drench her cheeks as she continued to press the blood soaked material against their wounds.

Laney had hurried after Mila and was doing the exact same thing but to Michaela. She could already see that Michaela was fairing worse than Mum since her body was already weak. She gently murmured reassuring words into Michaela's ear to try and soothe her as tears rolled down

her cheeks at the pain that crossed Michaela's face. She glanced up at Mila who was also crying and knew that there would be nothing that they could do since Mila was their top healer.

Willow was at the door and looking in after she had heard the commotion. Her hazel eyes gathered in the people who were in the room and at the situation. She would have sighed if she didn't have to keep the disguise for a bit longer but she needed to find out all of the facts. "What happened?"

Misty decided to speak up since she knew Nester was busy making sure that the other intruder didn't do anything. "Nester and I rushed in here since we both had a gut feeling that there was something wrong. Nester had heard something and rushed into the room with her sword drawn only to block a finishing blow towards Michaela" said Misty. She was a little surprised to see that the intruder she was holding prisoner was beginning to shake in shock. She assumed it was because she was giving him the names of their victims. However she continued to tell the short tale. "I ran in and apprehended this guy while Nester dealt with the other. Mila and Laney only just arrived to tend to Mum and Michaela."

"Where is Talia?" asked Willow hastily. She quickly rushed over to the curtained off area in a rush of air that discarded her disguise because of her worry that she had lost the important person whom her kind were interested in. Her hazel eyes became white as snow, her complexion was pale and her blonde hair had lengthened and changed to white silky strands. She swept her hand away from her body when she was halfway across the room to lift the curtain so that she could confirm if Talia had been harmed. She made it over to the curtained off area and sighed in relief at Talia's deep slumber which the healing field had placed her under. Slowly she turned around and could see that everyone looked at her in shock except for Nester.

Joshua and his older brother, Steven dropped their swords and had their blue eyes widened in surprise. They both quickly dropped to one knee and bowed to Willow as if she were a queen. They both bowed their heads and refrained from looking up into her eyes since they knew it would be rude and not proper.

"You're a god" stated Misty as her hazel eyes widened.

Mila saw an opportunity and quickly opened her mouth to speak but Willow had raised her hand to halt her. Willow knew what was going to be asked. She slowly shook her head in the negative and saw sadly how Mila's small spark of hope died as quickly as it came. "I cannot do anything for them. It is not within my power to meddle with their fates" informed Willow in her airy voice that seemed to carry on a non-existent wind. Her white eyes glanced at Talia and slowly she swept her hand as if she were erasing something. "I wish there was a better way for her to wake up but she has to be informed about what has happened."

Slowly Talia's grey eyes fluttered open. She slowly stretched and sat up gradually. For a small moment she was oblivious to everything within the room however she saw something in her peripherals and glanced over. Shock plastered her face at the crowded room. She quickly looked at the bed which Laney and Mila were on with Michaela and Mum. She saw the copious amounts

of blood and knew immediately what must have happened while she had been asleep. She cursed herself for not waking up like she usually did when there was danger of any kind.

"I'm sorry, Talia. I had placed you under a deep sleep so that you would heal faster. If I had known that this was going to happen, I wouldn't have set up the healing field" informed Willow as she bowed her head at Talia with a regretful expression.

Talia soaked in the information and started to feel anger within her heart at Willow. She could see that her friends were dying and there would be nothing that she could do to help them unless she used magic. She quickly clamped down her anger and tried to focus on what she could do to help her friends. "Willow of the wind, please excuse me but I need to help my friends. I trust that you will stay so that we can have a talk after I am done" said Talia with so much authority in her voice that it sounded as though Talia was the master. Everyone else had been shocked by their little discussion and how they spoke to one another.

Swiftly, Talia stepped to Michaela's and Mum's foot of the bed. Her grey eyes could see that everyone was looking at her with awe. Briefly closing her eyes, she called upon the anger that had momentarily filled her heart to invoke the magical power that was stored within her body. She opened her eyes again but this time they were blazing silver that illuminated the room as if the midday sun were blazing in through the window. Her sight had been enhanced and now she could see the currents of magical and life energy swirling around the room. Her blazing silver eyes could see that Michaela's and Mum's life energy were leaking from their bodies. Their flames of life were diminishing at a speedy rate.

Carefully lifting her hands to not disturb the magical energies too much, she discharged her fine threads of magical energy and cocooned herself with Michaela's and Mum's bodies. Her blazing eyes scanned their bodies carefully for a solution. She had limited knowledge about her own abilities but she remembered one time when she had to heal her broken arm during a mission. All she had done was pool a lot of magical energy to the area to see what was wrong with it but her eyes had been amazed by her discovery. She had sat there, shielded behind a tree, watching the bones in her broken arm knit together like nothing had happened to it. She was going to try the same thing in this case however she didn't know how much magical energy she needed. So she became determined to just use all of her magical prowess since it would achieve the most positive outcome.

Nester stood there in shock. Her black eyes which had been curious about Talia were as wide as can be. She had known that Talia was associated with her kind but she didn't know that she could be revered by one. Her black eyes had then noticed Talia's blazing silver eyes for the first time. She finally understood why she had felt so much hatred towards her. It was because it was the same feeling that she had when she had lost Silvia. It was the last thread of emotion that she had felt towards her. Abruptly the sword in her hand clattered to the ground.

Nester watched as Talia slowly covered herself and the two injured friends in magical threads that could only be for one purpose. However she was unsure whether Talia knew of the consequences if she went too far. She was frozen to the spot as only Misty and Laney looked over towards her. Her black eyes had begun to water. Memories of the ancient past began to

resurface. She was once more watching Silvia pour the last of her own life into her body. She could only watch then as Silvia faded away with only a small glimmer of hope that they would be reunited.

Hastily freeing herself from memories long past, she made her legs and arms move. Her body headed straight for Talia. She wasn't going to let her do it again. She wasn't going to just watch as Silvia used all of her magic to heal her friends. There was another way. She moved faster and slowly left the ground in a leap towards Talia to stop her from connecting the last threads of magical energy. Her hands were outstretched as she intercepted Talia and both of them fell to the ground in a bundle.

"What are you doing?" asked Talia perplexed.

Nester slowly untangled herself and got to her feet. Before Talia could do anything, Nester had already whipped up her hand and immediately enclosed Talia in a glass prison that would stop her from doing anything including using magic. She slowly looked into Talia's enraged blazing silver eyes which were doing everything within her power to try and break out of her prison.

"What are you doing?" asked a confused Willow. She would have challenged Nester but she knew deep in her heart that there was no point. She could already sense the high volume of magic that Nester wielded and knew that she was a higher being. However she truly didn't know who Nester was. She had been to the higher beings meeting hall on several occasions and had never met a few of them. What she recalled was that only one of the few was a female and that higher being was Lady Felecia of the fates. Nowadays no one was able to talk to her unless they were ranked as a higher being.

Nester slowly turned and faced Willow with her eyes now shining blue which were simmering with magic. She could see that Willow had almost withdrawn from the room by her gaze but right now it didn't matter. Her disguise from the first time that she stepped into this realm fell to pieces in front of the people who she had worked with for at least seven mortal years. Her hair was now long and silky black, her dress and armour were replaced by an elegant white robe and dress, and her stoic mask had been lifted away.

Everyone could see the sadness that adorned her face. They could all see that she was slightly clutching her heart and was glancing at Talia every now and then. They were all shocked that the person that they had known was no longer the person standing in front of them. Laney and Mila had almost fallen off the bed from the shock of now knowing they had been surrounded by gods the whole time.

The luminescence of the full moon began to cloak her in a little light. Her shining blue eyes looked over at Talia and smiled a tearful smile. She gently placed her hand on her heart before she stepped towards the bed. Carefully and elegantly extending her arms, she wrapped her friends up with her magical energy and smiled one last smile at the occupants in the room. She had one last glance at Talia before she, Michaela and Mum disappeared in a flash of light.

Talia fell out of her prison since she had been thumping on the walls to try and get out since magic didn't work. Her blazing silver eyes looked at the occupants in the room but knew that she couldn't put any blame on anyone for not trying to stop Nester or whoever she might be. Crossing the room with light feet, she approached Willow who had looked thoughtfully at the ground.

"You are going to ask, 'why didn't I stop her'. I wouldn't have been able to even if I tried. She has more power than you know and she is one of my people. In our world, she would be known as a higher being. In this world it is akin to saying she is the goddess of gods. Higher beings make the rules and we normal gods have to follow them. It was one of these higher beings who had come to me and told me to take a trip out here on the exact day that you had needed my help" explained Willow slowly as she thought about all of the coincidences that had happened. Her white eyes were narrowed as she thought about every time that she had come to this realm of mortals and it had been on the insistence of one higher being known as Elaine of the earth. She couldn't figure out why a higher being had approached her to suggest something and she had naturally followed like a master issuing an order.

"Why would a higher being meddle in mortal affairs? Why did she take them away when I could have healed them? Why did she lock me in a prison and not tell me anything? I don't know what it is but something is wrong here. It almost seemed like she was saying goodbye to me. It was the first time that she had smiled at me" whispered Talia as she too took up an interest in the floor boards while she thought through everything. Her fists were clenched tightly in frustration.

"They would have their own reasons. They don't exactly tell us normal gods what exactly they do. We just do what we are assigned to do which is represented in our name. The only reason that I know of in which a god would interfere in the mortal realm is if they want to just have some fun in toying with people's lives or that they are in search of something that can only be found in the mortal realm" explained Willow as a new light dawned upon her. She quickly looked around and assessed everything that she saw within the room. She then finally noticed for the first time that Talia had a ring on her finger. "Where did you get that?"

Talia was about to put Willow in her rightful place but stopped at seeing the sparkle in her white eyes as if she had discovered something. So she answered carefully and truthfully. "I received this ring from gods know where. I've always had it but never knew who gave it to me or anything. No one even knew who I was; they didn't even know who my parents were. So I had assumed that this ring was from them. I never actually found out who they were and I haven't really pursued it. It just seemed like a normal ring except that whenever I took it off, it would be back on my finger or on the necklace that I wore."

"Is there anything special that you know about it besides that?" asked Willow.

"Some people can see it and some don't. Well the majority of people can't see it because I have tried to ask some jewellers if they had seen a ring like my one. At first I thought they had been joking with me that they responded that they have never seen a ring like it. Then I found out that they couldn't really see it when I bullied a jeweller to answer me properly. Also it sometimes



glows" explained Talia as she fingered it around her finger. She could tell that it was filled with magic but she didn't know why. She also knew that it harmonized with her own magical energy.

"When were you born?" asked Willow.

"I don't know" answered Talia stubbornly. "I have already told you that my earliest memory is of the elderly woman who died to protect me." Blazing silver eyes looked around the room and had noticed that the two intruders were still on their knees but were now bowing towards her.

"Please forgive us" said Steven and Joshua together. Steven then took the lead since he was the oldest. "My brother and I were under the impression that you might have stolen it from a gifted royal since they are the only ones to have a ring like that. We thought you had killed the owner. So we came here to exact punishment on you for being a murderer and the organisation for their negligence. I humbly ask that you show leniency towards us."

Talia didn't even bat an eye at them she turned swiftly to Mila who nodded her head to handle the rest. Her blazing silver eyes then rested back on Willow who seemed to be deep in thought. However, Talia couldn't wait around. There was no knowing what Nester would do and she wanted to save her friends. She glanced toward the balcony where she could see the full moon in all of its glory. She slowly began to review everything that she had done and finally understood why Nester must have interfered. "She thought I didn't have enough magical power. She even warned me about it. She went out of her way to stop me from facing the consequences if I had to heal Michaela and Mum" said Talia thoughtfully.

Suddenly Shawn appeared in the room. He looked a little rattled and ruffled as if he had been given dire news and had been rushing around for the last ten years. His black eyes quickly captured Talia's silver eyes and slowly bowed his head. "You need to find her and stop her. Felecia came warring out of the meeting hall looking quite furious and had told me to tell you to find her" he said quite breathlessly.

"Where would she be?" asked Willow.

Talia continued to stare at the full moon. She had seen how the light from the moon covered Nester as if it were a part of her. Finally the confusing pieces of the puzzle were sliding into place. There would only be one place where Nester could have gone. Quickly gathering her magical energy, she disappeared in a blink of an eye, leaving Willow and Shawn there to do as they pleased.

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## **Chapter 10**

Maria stood on the surface of the full moon. She had placed Michaela and Mum into a cocoon of moonlight that would halt the worsening of their condition. Her shining blue eyes surveyed the moon and remembered how beautiful it once was. She could still remember the day that she had

first come to the moon's surface with Silvia. It had been a lovely day that they had spent just having fun.

Silvia had shown Maria all the different moon plants that were growing because of Elaine of the earth who was her eldest sister. Her smile had brightened up the moon and made Maria feel better than she was. Her bright silver eyes had been happy at showing her everything there was to find on the moon which Maria was now responsible for. She had also carefully explained how to take care of each plant.

Maria had smiled at Silvia. The moon had looked so alive back then and now it was a shell of its former self. She had neglected it for over a thousand years. That day she had stopped caring for the moon had been the one in which Silvia had given up her immortality to save her from falling into the sea of mortal souls. She could still remember the smile that graced her lovely face as she faded away within her grasp.

Tears slowly fell down the sides of her face as the memories slowly faded away back into the recesses of her heart. It would stay there forever with what she had in mind to heal Michaela and Mum since their souls were almost going to leave their bodies. She slowly knelt down onto the dusty surface of the moon and looked up at the stars. It would be the last time that she would do so even though she had fond memories with Silvia sitting beside her, listing all of the constellations that the mortals had described.

"I have spent five hundred years in pain but in love. I have spent a thousand agonizing years waiting for her to be reborn but she won't be able to see me again. I won't be waiting in our realm to welcome her back" said Maria loudly. Her shining blue eyes were still looking up at the stars but she had noticed that there was an extra person on the surface of the moon. She wasn't alarmed by them and knew that there was nothing that they could do to deter her from what she had planned. She could still feel her magic slowly seeping into Michaela's and Mum's bodies. There was no stopping it.

"Why won't you wait for her?" asked Elaine. Her earthen brown eyes looked at Maria with concern. She was saddened that Maria had already started the unbreakable process of fully restoring a person's life, yet she was doing two and Silvia had only managed to heal one immortal from what was now a simple flaw in an immortal's body. Elaine could see the consequences of Maria's actions and knew that Maria was well aware of that fact as well. She assumed that it was the only reason Maria had returned to the surface of the moon rather than heal the two mortal women back on Earth.

"A thousand years is a long time. I have experienced more than she can remember. Even if Felecia had managed to finally pull her out of the sea of mortals and restore her slowly to what she used to be, she is not the same person that I knew" commented Maria sadly as she continued to study the stars a final time. Elaine had even noticed that Maria had dropped all titles to higher beings. "If she were to come back fully restored, she won't remember the five hundred years that we had spent together. She won't remember the sacrifice that she made for my sake. All she will remember is the hatred that I have shown her for seven mortal years. Even so, no one will be able to erase the thousand years that I have waited for her return. It just won't be the same. It will

never be the same." Maria finally lowered her eyes once more to the surface of the moon. She finally met Elaine's eyes and could see that Elaine was worried and sad. "It just won't be right."

Suddenly another higher being appeared on the surface of the moon and began to walk hastily towards Maria but stopped short at seeing the magical energies that were swirling around. Felecia looked at Maria in fury and closed the distance between them in three swift strides. She raised her hand and was about to slap Maria across the face but Elaine held her back.

"I know that you have worked tirelessly to return Silvia to her original state, however you cannot deter this one. She has already made her decision and there is nothing you can do to change that. All we can do is talk to her. She has already sealed her own fate. Hitting her will not change it" informed Elaine as she gently let go of Felecia's arm.

"Why couldn't you just listen to me? You spent the last seven years running around wherever when I explicitly told you to stay in our realm. You have discarded your responsibilities and now all you want to do is erase your memories by giving up your immortality and plunging head first into the sea of mortal souls? Once you dive in there, I won't be able to pull you back out like I can with Silvia. Silvia's powers remain intact because she was rectifying a problem that the members of the higher beings had overlooked. If we had known about your condition sooner, she wouldn't have had to trade her life for yours. Your parents were reprimanded and had to face their penalties for negligence since they were also responsible for you" complained Felecia as she explained what had been going on since Maria had decided to discard her duties. Her blue eyes looked furious but she slowly turned her head and sighed. "Is this truly what you want?" asked Felecia more politely than she had been before.

"I don't want to remember all of those years that I have spent just waiting for her. I would rather start as a new mortal who will fall in love and not know the pain of losing someone who is more apart of me than I realise. Would you be able to spend the rest of your life knowing that you had been separated from your love and having them return without the memories that you might have shared? Would you be able to love the new person who is nothing like the one that you knew?" asked Maria as she stared into those blue eyes that were now starting to show signs of understanding but not accepting.

"Did you know that I had to make up her fate and make sure that I had sent two of our kind to watch over her? Shawn and Willow were sent to the mortal realm without any piece of knowledge about this. They willingly went and made sure that Silvia was always protected. They had to twist mortal souls to do their bidding so that Silvia could survive. Her powers are still growing and she will have to die one day before she returns whole to us. That was what we had agreed to do. You told me that you wanted her back whole" said Felecia as her voice became heated once more with anger.

"Is she really whole if she doesn't know who I am? Is she whole if she can't remember the things that we did together? Would she really love me like she did before but now knowing all of the bad deeds that I have done? What would you really know? You still have the person you love right here without anything wrong with her" retorted Maria as she gestured towards Elaine.

Felecia and Elaine were taken aback. "Where did you hear this? Who told you?" asked Elaine as she stepped closer to Maria. Her eyes were concerned but she was more worried about Maria. The process was already fifty percent complete and she had noticed that Maria's eyes were no longer shining blue. They were now black as if she had stopped using her magical energies.

"No one told me. Anyone can see the way that you two interact in public. If you weren't in love, I should know. I was blinded by it and didn't care for my body. On that day, I felt a little better but after our little outing, I could tell that it was going to be a very bad day. However it is stated in the chronicler's books that the meeting shall not end until judgement is passed. Why do you think I had asked Silvia to ask for the meeting to be postponed when I knew of this rule? Everyone had been too busy to notice that I was not well. The only person who cared was Silvia" explained Maria in a crestfallen voice. Her speech had become slower and it seemed to take more energy for her to say what she wanted to say.

She slowly stood up without accepting any offers of helping her up. She slowly walked to the cocoon that held the two mortals. The process was nearing seventy five percent complete. It would only take another short while before the two women who had been her friends to be fully restored with their lives. She needed to stand close to the cocoon for the final ten percent since she had to force the last of her magical energy into the two. It would be like stuffing a chicken with the little left over stuffing to make it full to almost bursting.

"Was there another reason why you decided to heal them yourself?" asked Elaine.

Maria smiled beautifully. "She would have done the same thing that I'm doing now. She would have been thrown back into the sea of mortals seeing how you had almost restored her immortality. She would have if I hadn't intervened. Your efforts would have amounted to nothing if she had been thrown back in again. I didn't want it to happen. I didn't even know that it was her all along. I only realised it when she had tried to bind her magical energy to their bodies. So it is a win, win situation where we both get what we want" explained Maria a little cheerfully.

"Do you still love her? Do you love Talia?" asked Felecia.

She smiled again. Black eyes turned to face the cocoon. "I do still love her. I do love Talia." Maria sighed heavily. She could feel that the last ten percent was nearing. "Elaine, can you please take these two back when I'm done? I don't think it would be wise to leave them here once I'm gone." Elaine nodded her head in the affirmative and felt a tear streak her face.

"You understand the consequences?" asked Felecia a final time.

"I am aware" replied Maria as she slowly closed her black lifeless eyes. She could no longer see. She could only hear and feel. Her hands intertwined with the magical threads and slowly she began to pump that last bit of magical energy into their bodies. She could feel that her mind was slowly losing sight of the present reality. She was only aware Elaine and Felecia were standing by as she was fully restoring these two mortals with their lives.

Suddenly Maria felt arms wrap around her in a tight hug. She smiled knowing the embrace as her love, Silvia. She was happy that in her final moments, she could feel the one she loved that she had sorely missed. "Hello Silvia, I've missed you" whispered Maria as she was nearing the final touches to process.

"I've missed you as well, Maria" replied Talia as she hugged Maria from behind and whispered gently into her ear. She smiled brightly and could see that Maria was almost finished with her task. "Will you let me handle the rest, my love?"

Maria muttered an approval and slowly released her hold on the cocoon. She wasn't even aware that the one who was holding her was Talia and not Silvia although that could be argued at this point. She could still feel Silvia's embrace and slowly nestled her body comfortably into Silvia's body.

Talia felt eyes on the back of her head. She had just appeared out of thin air in a blaze of light that equalled ten suns. Her memories were slowly returning to her whole. She knew who Maria was and she was beginning to know who she was herself. She even recognised that the two higher beings staring at her dumbfounded were Lady Felecia and Elaine. Her blazing silver eyes cast a light across the surface of the moon as her body glowed like the brightest star.

The moon was swept up into a bright yellow healing light. Talia could see that the energies in the moon were returning to how they once were when she had been here last. Her eyes swept the entire surface that was around her and was satisfied as the dead moon surface became alive with life. She then focused her blazing silver eyes on the cocoon which Maria had relinquished her control over. She was also keeping a close eye on Maria as well since she was channelling magical energy back into Maria without her knowledge.

"So, what have you been up to big sister?" asked Talia in a cheery tone.

Elaine was about to answer as if it had been a normal question but Felecia slapped her hand over her face to stop her from saying anything. Blue eyes scrutinized Talia as if she were a specimen to be dissected and viewed. "What is your name?" asked Felecia carefully.

"In which realm are you referring to?" asked Talia as if she were having a stroll in the park. It was as though finishing off where Maria was almost complete and healing Maria at the same time were child's play. Her hands seemed to dance among the threads of magical energy as it was reworked or nourished. She didn't wait for Felecia to answer. She might as well just save Felecia's breath. "In the mortal realm they know me as Talia but in the god's realm, I am Silvia of the sun and stars. So who do you want to talk to? Do you want to talk to the goddess or the mortal? Because I am both although at the moment I am more a goddess."

"How is this possible? When you were thrown into the sea of mortal souls, you should have forgotten everything. There is no way that you could have been reborn with your memories intact" said Felecia incredulously. Her blue eyes were narrowed in thought as Elaine seemed to catch on finally.

Talia lifted her right hand negligently that was adorned by the ring with its silver band and blue rose diamond. She smiled as she slowly retrieved it and went back to work while making sure that Elaine and Felecia understood perfectly well who she exactly was. "Willow and Shawn had been wondering why I was wearing this ring. As it turned out, they only noticed it a few candle marks ago before I raced here. I was curious as to why I had it in the first place. However if my memory serves me right I think I remember why. This ring is magically empowered to store all memories of those who came before as written in the mortal language."

"Are you suggesting that it has the power to store the memories of its former owner?" asked Felecia who had now realised the full capacity at which Talia had been able to retrieve the five hundred years that she had cherished with her love, Maria.

"That was its original intended purpose but the god who forged this one for me specifically had bound the ring to my life force. So no matter where I went, it would always return to me. The god who forged this was actually at the time thinking that I would like to preserve my memories so that I would be able to retrieve any memories that I wished. However I did not question him since it was a gift. Otherwise I would have noted that unlike mortals our memories stay intact no matter the passage of time" continued Talia as she finally put the final touches on the cocoon that covered her two mortal friends.

The cocoon blossomed in strength as if it would burst at any minute however it just illuminated brighter before being absorbed into the bodies of the two mortals. With another flick of Talia's hand, the two mortals were sent back to Earth, to Mila's room instead of their own. She didn't want to frighten them with the image of their own blood soaking the bed. However she was also wondering if Shawn or Willow had even bothered to fix the room up.

Carefully, Talia turned her attention fully onto Maria who had decided to doze off. She smiled at the lovely body that was resting comfortably against her. She had wondered how long Maria would try to stay awake for since her body was so tired because of the process in healing the two mortals. Also Maria's body would be even more strained since Talia was forcing magic back into her body.

"Who gifted you with the ring?" asked Elaine.

"Maria did" replied Talia gently with a lot of affection in her voice. "Her intention at the time was that when her body gave out, I would never be able to forget her. I would be able to cherish the memories that we had together. She wanted me not to worry about her. At the time of her explanation about this ring, she had implied a 'what if' situation. I loved her and kept the ring. She was actually preparing for her own demise. She was preparing for the day that she would be thrust into the sea of mortal souls. She thought that we would never be able to see each other again."

"If you have had this ring the whole time, why didn't you remember earlier?" asked Felecia as she slowly noticed that the moon was returning back to life and plants were growing at her feet. Elaine had been happily surprised as well since it had been her initial work to grace the moon with its beauty and elegance.

"The ring required her to send magic into it. Once she did, it would slowly release the memories stored into it to the person wearing it. I had been surprised at the images that floated in my head when she had placed me in that magical prison. I didn't piece everything altogether until Willow prompted me. She drew my attention to the ring where I was about to release my own magical energy into it and probe its origin. The ring then flooded me with memories and knowledge. I was whole once again and I knew what Maria was up to since my naïve self had tried to do the same thing without knowing the consequences. If Maria hadn't stopped me, I would have had to repeat everything all over again even though there might be a chance that I wouldn't be gifted with magical prowess" explained Talia as she slowly lifted Maria into her arms. She turned and faced Elaine and Felecia with a smile.

"Where are you going?" asked Elaine, sensing that her youngest sister was about to leave the beauty of the moon behind. She had been so surprised by everything that she had not realised that Talia's body had reverted back to her mortal self. Her earthen brown eyes could see that Maria was still with them although tired.

"I want to take her to our special place where we can rest. She will most likely wake up and have a tantrum before I can tell her that I have my memories back. I'm sure that she will be overjoyed" replied Talia with a full grin that lit her face like a lantern. She slowly turned on her heel and faced the Earth. Her blazing eyes shined brightly before she was enveloped into a sun blazing light that took both of them away.

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Talia returned back to Earth with Maria in her arms. She brought them to the place where they had watched their last sunset together before that were forced apart. The sun was due to rise in a candle mark or less. She could still see the lakes and trees. They would all be bathed in a different light, a new light that would signal a new era in which they lived.

Carefully sitting down with Maria in her embrace, she closed her blazing silver eyes and waited for the sun to rise. Her face relaxed and her heart beating in time with Maria's, she could slowly feel her immortality that was ripped away from her return slowly. Even her magical energies were gradually being replenished to the level that she had before. Waiting for time to pass, she didn't know that Maria had opened her shining blue eyes that were brimming with power.

Maria looked up at Talia and could see that she was no longer on the moon. She was confused and could have sworn that Michaela and Mum had been in her care. However, if she was able to revive them from the brink of death then she wouldn't still be alive. She should be in the sea of mortal souls just like how Silvia was thrown into it. She knew that she was still an immortal and that her powers were intact. She could even sense that there was nothing wrong with Talia either.

Maria lied there as she studied Talia's face. She could see that there had been a major change in her but didn't know what it was. Also she could feel that her hatred that she felt strongly was simmering under the surface. This only affirmed her thoughts that the person in front of her was actually Talia and not her long lost love, Silvia. Slowly shining blue eyes glanced at Talia's hand which she had glimpsed a ring on only a few times but had no time to actually have a proper

look. Her breath caught in her chest at the realisation that the ring was actually the one that she had given to Silvia all those years ago.

Grey eyes fluttered open. Talia bent her head down and looked into Maria's shining blue eyes. "How are you feeling?" she asked. Grey eyes could see that Maria was confused, shocked and uncertain all at the same time. She could feel that her body was tensed because it was unsure whether to get up or not. Happiness dwelled in her heart as she felt Maria's heart quicken as she continued to stare into those blue eyes.

Bit by bit, the sun snaked up into the sky and dowsed the land with its beaming morning light. The land burst into life as magical and natural energies twirled around in a sea of air. Birds could be heard as they squawked or chirped their morning calls to each other while all the other animals came out of their nests to eat and play.

Talia felt the first rays of sun on her back and smiled brightly at Maria. Her body was absorbing in the natural energy as if it hungered for an infinite amount. Gradually her complexion began to glow a nice golden sheen that anyone who happened to see her would think that a light from the sky had spotlighted her. Her long blonde hair began to fuzz with overwhelming energy as she concentrated on feeding this new amount into Maria's vessel which had not recovered fully yet. Her grey eyes became burning silver as if they were stars in the night sky. Her embrace was softer now and more comfortable as well as warmer.

Maria watched the change in disbelief. It looked as though Talia had become an immortal once more just by simply sunbaking in the first rays of morning sunlight. Her blue eyes which were brimming with power softened as she saw for the first time that the person who she was embraced by was actually Silvia. It was as though the time that they had been apart had never even existed. Even the seven years that she had spent hating Talia had disappeared into nothing.

"Do you know it is just as beautiful at sunrise as it is at sunset?" commented Talia as she smiled fully and let the warmth flow from her to seep into Maria's iced heart. Little by little, she could see that Maria's heart was melting. The anger that had been simmering just beneath the surface had been a figment of her imagination. Her burning silver eyes put hope and reassurance into the deepest corners of Maria's mind and heart.

"Are you really back?" asked Maria as tears began to streak down her face. Hope was flaring up in her immortal soul as she felt the love that poured from Talia and was directed at her. "Do you really remember?"

"Thanks to the gift that you gave me, I remember everything" replied Talia before she drew her face forward and erased any doubts left in Maria's core by placing her soft lips against Maria's in a gentle and passionate kiss. Talia felt Maria place her hand on her cheek and so she gently leaned back to look at Maria's face once more. "I really am back" she whispered as Maria hastily wrapped her hands around Talia in a fierce hug with tears sliding down her face. Talia just smiled and returned the hug just as fiercely.

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## Chapter 11

Maria stepped out onto the renewed surface of the moon which was brimming with all sorts of flowers. The air was fresh and she could feel her soul be cleansed by the fragrant flowery smells. Her black eyes slowly swept the area in satisfaction. The moon had been completely restored and was once more a beautiful and healthy place.

Maria quickly turned on her heel and faced the Earth that looked so blue from where she was standing. Her arms slowly extended out in front of her as she waved her wrists around a few times to manipulate the natural and magical energies to create a doorway that would lead her to the surface of Earth. She was smiling as the gateway to Earth opened and she swiftly rushed through it to find the person who had returned to her and that she loved with all of her being.

Arriving at the Blaster organisation, Maria converted her body back to the standard that it was in when she had donned the disguise to look for Silvia. She gently rapped at the door and waited patiently for someone to answer it. Her stoic mask was in place as the door swung open and she saw a young woman who seemed only just out of her teen years standing there.

"Hello, how may I help you?" asked the young woman.

Maria smiled and could see that this young woman was a warrior with her broad shoulders and stocky build. She could tell that if this woman were in a sea of women that no one would bat an eye or even talk to her. It wasn't as though the young woman looked ugly; it was just that she looked quite plain. "Good morning, I was wondering if I could see your boss?" asked Maria in a neutral tone.

The young woman was about to say something but her voice caught in her throat. She seemed to be looking behind Maria with her light brown eyes wide in shock. Maria was able to know exactly what the young woman had seen since now an arm was draped over her shoulders. There could only be one person brave enough to pull off such a feat considering she was madly in love with them.

"Hello dear, I hope your trip had not been too tiresome" commented Maria as she glance beside her and was rewarded by a broad grin. She slowly turned back to the girl since the pair of them together now seemed to quieten the girl into a squeak. "May we please come in and see your boss?" asked Maria politely.

The young woman had automatically nodded her head in approval. She had actually jumped back to let them in once she had realised that she was blocking the way. Her light brown eyes had followed the two beautiful women closely and knew that they would have made a lovely couple but in her reality, there was no such thing as a girl falling for a girl.

Maria walked in with her love still wrapping her arm around her shoulders. It was warm and affection but she knew that it was mainly to ensure that both of them could get in without being asked too many questions. They only made it into the hallway when the two of them sniffed the air and found that their mouths were watering from the delicious aromas that were coming from

the kitchen. Both quickly turned and headed towards the kitchen instead of following the directions that the young woman was giving.

Maria stepped into the kitchen first and saw an old lady with greying hair. She was wearing a light blue dress and a flowery apron. Her back was turned to the room and she seemed oblivious that Maria and Silvia had stepped into the room. Maria slowly pulled out a chair and quietly sat to watch the old woman work while her love, Silvia stood just slightly behind her chair.

Silvia had also changed her appearance so that she looked exactly like she had when she had been a part of the organisation. Her grey eyes stared around the room and remembered all of the fond times that they had as well as the delicious foods that she had tasted from this old ladies culinary skills. Her long blonde hair fell down her back and she was once more wearing the leather boots and pants as well as the chain mail and shirt. There was an empty scabbard on her back just like Maria did on hers.

Dancing around the kitchen gracefully as if the years had not weakened any of her joints, Caitlyn Austere picked up some herbs to put the final flavours into the stew that she was making for lunch which would be served soon. Her nose sniffed the air just above the pot and smiled at the perfection that she had just made. Twirling around, she placed the bottle of herbs back on the herb rack and as she was about to twirl back to the pot, she stopped in her tracks. Her blue eyes were deceiving her as she stared at Silvia and Maria. Her mouth had dropped slightly open and her blue eyes had widened in surprise.

The young woman who had answered the door spoke up as she had entered through the kitchen doors after informing her boss that they had two guests. "Mrs. Austere, I'm sorry to have disturbed you but these two guests arrived to see the boss. They happened to find the cooking smelling very enticing. I'm sure that the other members will be down shortly for lunch since it is our only recorded holiday. The retired members will also be down as well" informed the young woman.

"Thank you Annette, I will entertain these guests while you go and wash up before lunch is served" replied Mum. Her blue eyes were still fastened onto Maria and Silvia that she didn't even notice that Annette had left. She smiled widely as Maria got up and hugged her. Another hug was soon followed up by Silvia as well. They were both beaming at her with wide smiles that back then had been hard to get. "How are you, Nester and Talia?" asked Mum.

"We are fine and happy" replied Silvia as she responded to her mortal name. She saw Maria giggle slightly behind her hand since she suspected that Maria had seen her hesitate but recover quickly. "I see that you are still dancing and cooking as usual, Mum."

Mum smiled at the sentiment. It had been a long time since someone had called her by her nickname that she had acquired when the organisation was slowly being founded. Her blue eyes danced with joy that it was hard for her to keep a smile from gracing her lips. "Are you here for the Blaster organisation holiday?" asked Mum with a giggle.

Suddenly five female heads popped into the kitchen. Maria and Silvia didn't recognise any of them. It looked as though they were all newly recruited. Maria and Silvia sensed that only two out of the five present were gifted with magic. These two individuals were looking at them suspiciously. However all of the five young women quickly took their seats at the table and began to mind their own business but Silvia and Maria knew that they would be listening in on their conversation.

"We are here partly for that and a few other matters that need to be sorted. I'm sure that we will hold the business part later on after the party is over. Speaking of which, how many have you got under your wing now?" asked Maria in a cool neutral tone which Mum recognised instantly. Maria was being the same as before so that she didn't reveal to the five young women her motives.

"We have these five here plus the one that you met earlier are it. We have Mary, Tory, Helen, Paige, and Elizabeth. They are all valuable to the organisation and all had to take the test. I'm sure that you will never have to though" said Mum with a small spark of glee. She was having fun toying with her eavesdroppers.

"So when can we see the boss to talk? Rumour around here is that the organisation is a shell of what it used to be. I'm sure that we will be able to change that" commented Maria. Her black eyes sparkled in mischief at playing along with Mum's games however no smile was on her lips which suggested that she was serious.

The five women in the room looked outraged by the statement and there were a few muttered words that wanted to put Maria in her place. However the kitchen door opened once more, Michaela, who was now a middle aged lady, walked in. Her face which had looked like she was ready to tackle another business related matter dissolved into a huge grin which lit up her eyes. The five women had immediately fallen silent and watched avidly at the change in their boss' expression.

"Hello little Michaela," said Silvia as she ruffled Michaela's hair childishly, "It has been a while now. How have you been?" Silvia was amused by the way that the five women were ogling at her as if she were an alien. However she just ignored them as Michaela looked like she needed a warm hug. Maria also gave Michaela a hug and had gently placed a small kiss on her forehead.

"I've been very good. Business is going along smoothly. What brings you both here? There must be a million things that you need to do with all of the responsibilities that you have" replied Michaela with a wide grin. She had definitely grown from an adorable child to a lovely young woman who could be gentle and fierce.

"I think it would be best to discuss business later. There is a party right?" asked Silvia who smiled with glee. It almost looked like she had reverted back to a ten year old. Her grey eyes lit up as though she was about to get presents. Carefully, she guided Michaela and Mum to a seat at the kitchen table. "We were invited right?"

Michaela smiled appreciatively as Maria started to serve lunch with Silvia's help. "Well, you are actually late for the invitation that we had sent you. I'm really surprised that you could make it this time. All that we heard about you two was that the both of you were very busy sorting out one thing and another. I was actually going to have to break it to the others that the two of you might not come" replied Michaela as she helped herself to her own serving as everyone else started to eat.

Maria also served out four more bowls and sat them on the table. She then seated herself and started to savour the cooking that she had missed. "Did you tell them that we were coming?" asked Maria between mouthfuls. However all she got in reply was a mischievous grin that explained she was up to something.

"I'm sure that no one has told them anything considering they are old and grumpy most of the time. Well Misty isn't really grumpy; she is more... um... talkative that no one wants to stick around to talk to her. Mary had made that mistake when she became a candidate." Michaela became silent and started to eat. So the rest of the table followed suit since they were unfamiliar with the guests.

Suddenly the kitchen door opened and Annette came in followed by Misty, Laney and Mila. Annette quickly took up the seat that was closer to the younger members of the organisation while the three retirees sat either next to Michaela or Mum since Silvia and Maria were between them. The three retirees didn't even look around at the other members at the table. All they were eyeing were their bowls which had been prepared for them.

"I remember the good days when most of my work was reconnaissance. I could wield a sword that was bigger than me and heavier" began Misty to the unfortunate Annette who sighed but politely listened. "I could get in any place without being noticed and get out without even alerting anyone that I was there. I could also make mist, you see, to conceal my whereabouts if I was running away or hiding. The only time that I really fought was when we were going up against two armies and they were going to go at it with each other but I made them all fight me instead. They ended up working together and now their kingdoms are good friends. Their feud ended since a prince from each kingdom had been present in the army."

"If I can recall correctly, you were actually escorting Princess Rebecca of Ruric Kingdom to safety. I believe that it was actually Nester who had managed to turn their objective from killing each other to trying to kill her. Is that right?" asked Silvia with a smile.

Misty had frozen as soon as she had heard Silvia speak. Her old hazel eyes looked over to see that Silvia and Maria were sitting there eating away. She dropped her spoon in her stew and splattered all the people who were around her. No one else had been really listening except for Annette, Michaela and Mum. So the younger members were sniggering that Misty had been caught lying about her deeds once Annette had explained and the retirees were staring in shock as they were staring at what Misty was staring at.

"Well, I'll be damned. You two made it here" exclaimed Mila who quickly stood up and went to hug Silvia and Maria. Laney and Misty followed suit with a few whispered comments which

made Silvia and Maria laugh. The three retirees had been so shocked at the happiness that Maria and Silvia showed that they couldn't believe the entire original members of the Blaster organisation were back together on base.

"Excuse me" piped up Helen. "May I ask whom they are since it is obvious that you oldies know? We haven't really been introduced and Annette mentioned something about business as usual. So are they going to be new candidates for the test?"

"What is the test?" asked Silvia out of curiosity.

"It's the same as it's always been" replied Mila who smiled widely. "The candidate will have to fight the best member in a one on one fight with any weapon that they choose. Are you two willing to take the challenge? I know that it will put these young pups back into school but it will definitely improve the organisation." Mila nudged Silvia and Maria in the ribs to persuade them into accepting.

"Can we up the stakes?" asked Maria.

Mila and the other retirees smiled widely.

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Maria and Silvia were standing in front of all of the young members. They were both smiling as they stood there and waited for the group of six young women prepare themselves. Mila hastily walked to the middle and started to lay down the rules of this test. "You can use anything you like. You are allowed to use magic if you are able. Remember that this is purely a test. Make sure to try and not kill each other" informed Mila.

"Where are their swords then or whatever they are going to use?" asked Tory.

Maria slowly extended her hand out. This was one of the reasons that they had returned to this place at this time. They needed to retrieve their swords from those that had sealed them away from any mortal hands. She remembered thanking them for their efforts and had told them that she would retrieve it later on. The natural energy in the air began to sizzle as magical energy swirled around to form a small portal to where her sword lay dormant. Carefully inserting a few magical threads of her own energy into the portal which was not visible to any eye except those of the gods, she retrieved her sword with ease. A blazing blue sword came forth and was instantly in her grasp as she closed the portal away. A smile graced her lips at finally being able to hold something that she had made with pride. Slowly the blue glow dissipated and only revealed a clean silver sword that reflected her image cleanly.

Silvia extended her hand in front of her and smiled. She looked around at everyone and saw how they had been surprised by Maria. However, her trick was not going to be as dramatic or flashy. Closing her eyes briefly she opened them again to reveal shining grey eyes. She whispered into the air and oozed a thousandth of her powers into the air so that her body was sprinkled with magical energy. "Come forth, blade of the sun and stars" whispered Silvia which only Maria

could hear. Instantly her blade appeared suddenly in her grasp as if it had been there all along. She then cleansed her body of the magical energy and watched as Maria did the same.

The six members looked at Maria and Silvia carefully. They were becoming serious and cautious as they just witnessed how Maria and Silvia had summoned their swords out of thin air. They knew now that Silvia and Maria would be able to use magic. Tory, Annette, Paige and Elizabeth unsheathed their swords from their scabbards. Mary and Helen held short crossbows with a bundle of arrows in their bags. The sword wielders slowly split up into two teams and commenced their attacks as soon Mila had stepped out of the area.

Arrows flew towards Maria first and she only had to lift her sword and reveal the flat side for them to be deflected before Maria drove her sword forward to knock Tory off balance. She took another step forward and flicked her sword at Paige to disarm her successfully. The sword ended up flying far away. Another step forward and she was within Tory's attacking range where she had to block. One more step and she used her physical strength to overpower Tory. She pushed the young woman back so hard that Tory left the ground and fell backwards onto her back, losing her sword in the process.

Silvia waited for Elizabeth to approach her first before she raised her blade with one hand. She twirled it using her wrist before she blocked the sword thrust that could have sliced her front. She didn't expect Elizabeth to recoil away and so she used the opportunity to kick her away before Annette could carve the both of them. Elizabeth ended up falling on her behind and her sword flew out of her hands but she never made a move to get her sword. She also noticed that Mary wasn't bothered to fire an arrow.

Maria then ran towards Helen as she was firing her arrows successively but once Maria was in range, she hit the girl across the arm with the flat of her sword which had enough force to knock the girl over. Helen fell on her side and could tell that her arm had become useless as it was broken. Paige quickly launched her sword at Maria by using magic but Maria easily deflected it and made it sink into the ground where it became useless. She rushed toward Paige with a low guard and leapt into the air to kick the girl across the face. Black eyes saw how Paige lost two of her front teeth. She landed back on the ground right next to Tory with the tip of her blade pointed at her neck.

Silvia narrowly dodged another strike from Annette. It looked as though Annette had taken this test to a whole different level. Annette looked really serious. Silvia quickly dodged again and could see the fury in Annette's eyes. Hastily dodging again she could sense that Annette was getting angry at her own inability to land a single blow. She jumped back a step and waited for Annette to charge once more. However this time, she raised her sword and watched as Annette tried to slash her through. The two swords clashed together causing sparks to spray.

Silvia smiled up into Annette's eyes as the strain that she was under was little more than a fly buzzing around. She could see that Annette was the top member of the Blaster organisation however she was not smart. Her fighting style was mainly brute strength. There was really no skill behind her strokes. It was now clear that the only reason why she was number one was because she overpowered them before they had a chance to do anything.

Grey eyes glanced at Maria who wasn't worried at all. She could see that Maria had already finished and everyone was watching intently at the fight. She was becoming tired of this very repetitive fight. It was boring. There was no more rush of adrenaline or anything. The only person who had been able to do that was Maria. She smiled at the memory but was not distracted from the fight.

With determination she waited for Annette to rush towards her. There were many ways in which she could disarm this brute with the flick of her sword. She could also rush ahead and attack first for a change. It would definitely throw off Annette and teach her who is superior. However Silvia chose to stab her blade into the ground to spare it from needing serious repair even though she knew that her magical sword would never need repairs but it was good to keep it clean and happy. Grey eyes looked up and could see the serious expression on Annette's face. Annette was going to attack no matter what. Silvia waited and the sword raced towards her. Swiftly she slapped her hands together and caught the sword between her hands which shocked everyone since they knew the force in which Annette had used to drive that sword.

Silvia plucked the sword out of Annette's grasp and moved away. She had taken it as if Annette had no control over herself. She saw how shocked Annette had become since she easily took it from her fierce grip. Silvia carefully handed the sword back and retrieved her own before turning around and walking away.

In a blur, Maria disappeared and reappeared in the nick of time behind Silvia. Her black eyes became shining blue as it shimmered with power. She had reacted to Annette's sudden attack towards Silvia's back. Her palm was facing the sharp edge of the sword and blood was seeping down her arm. Her face was a mask of anger. Her grip on Annette's sword kept her immobile as Silvia turned back around and everyone else were about to rush over.

Silvia walked back and gently placed her hand on Maria's shoulder. She was awarded with Maria's attention diverted away from Annette. Her head shook from side to side in the negative and Maria sighed. Maria released the sword which Annette had withdrawn. Her shining blue eyes turned back to Annette and slowly returned back to normal black. "Don't you ever do that again or I will make sure that you will suffer for all of eternity. Don't take me lightly because I can do it" warned Maria before Silvia began to steer her away.

Mila approached Annette before Michaela could and ripped the sword out of her hands. "I will be taking this. You have soiled your honour and pride. Your membership will be on suspension until you can show us that you can behave with the dignity of a member of the Blaster organisation. Now leave my sight" commanded Mila who watched angrily as Annette walked off. It had been obvious that she was about to protest but Mila's hard expression told everyone that no such thing would be tolerated.

"Should we go and see to the two of them for injuries?" asked Elizabeth.

"Let's see to Helen and Paige. I'm sure that the rest of you are fine" interrupted Mila as she walked over towards Paige to see if she was alright since she was lying on the ground and Mary was trying to wake her up. She had glanced over at Helen and knew that her arm was broken but

it was still fixable with time. She smiled as Laney ran to her side. She had not wanted anyone injured, least of all her old friends but she knew that they could take care of themselves. She had also seen Misty going around and picking up all of the arrows since it would be a waste to just leave them.

Michaela and Mum had disappeared but everyone knew where they were going. It had been those two that had brought Annette into the ranks of the members of the Blaster organisation. No one expected them to be back until before dinner since Mum was planning something spectacular to eat for this special day.

Tory approached Mila with a light jog to get to her before she had to concentrate on checking on Paige. Her voice was saturated with excitement. "Are we going to recruit those two?" asked Tory. Mila could see her hopeful eyes but knew that the charades were over.

"They can't be recruited again" replied Mila before she hurried off to see to Paige and then Helen. Tory and Elizabeth had stopped in their tracks with confused expressions. They were trying to make sense of that statement and wondered what it meant but they were soon rescued by Misty.

"They are already recruited. They have been away for more than sixty long years. Their names are Nester and Talia; number one and two of the Blaster organisation and will always remain as such" informed Misty.

"They don't look old like you. It's like they haven't aged at all by what you are saying" replied Tory who was more puzzled by the news. She looked at Elizabeth to see if she wanted to contribute but the girl remained quiet. Her eyes then flew back to Misty who continued to talk about the good old days.

"You see, they both joined the organisation when they were in their mid teens. They were the ones who founded the organisation with Mila and Mum. It is because they are special that they are here in the first place. If it wasn't our stroke of luck to recruit them then it can be said that the organisation's image wouldn't have been revered by the public. Nester was the one who could turn armies into specks of grovelling bodies while Talia had helped me with retrieving the princess. She could stop anything with her power. She has great physical and magical strength but she mainly uses her brain to overcome situations" explained Misty as she deposited the arrows into a pouch which would be sorted out later. "They are formidable."

Suddenly Maria and Silvia came back from their little walk off. They surveyed the area and could see that Paige and Helen would need their help should they want to be out of their misery. Maria had approached both injured women who had been brought closer to the house. Paige was still out cold having been kicked in the head while Helen was in extreme pain since they had yet to set her arm properly.

Mila looked up at them and could see that the both of them were going to use their magic to heal the two women. So she stepped aside and was almost pulled in front of the two injured women by the others since they were unsure whether to trust the two ladies. However Mila finally knew



she had to put their minds to rest. All of this worrying was not very productive for Silvia and Maria who seemed bored of playing the game that they had been playing.

"I believe the jig is up" said Maria as she walked to Helen first to ease her pain.

"Well you have made them understand that they need a lot more training. They now know that you two used to be members. So it is quite alright to show them who you are. I don't believe that they will go to everyone that they know and brag if they know what is good for them" explained Mila with a smile.

"What are you talking about?" asked the uninjured members together.

Maria extended her hand in front of Helen and poured her magic into the injured arm to set it before mending the break so that it looked as though it had not been broken in the first place. "We have been warriors a lot longer than you. We have been gifted with magic that is far beyond your means. It was only by a chance of luck that we were here in the first place. If I hadn't been sick, the organisation wouldn't have been formed to what it is today. The reason why the organisation is revered so much these days is because of two brothers by the names of Joshua and Steven. They informed the people that they knew that the god of sun and stars and the god of the moon were members" informed Maria.

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Later on that day after Maria had healed the members who she had injured, Maria and Silvia showed the new members including Annette exactly who they were and what they had meant. It was also the time that they had approached Mum and informed everyone that she was leaving the mortal realm. No one had expected that Mum had been chosen by the gods to become an immortal. It had been the last time that any of the old members got to see Silvia and Maria ever again.

Maria and Silvia returned to the immortal's realm and escorted Caitlyn Austere to the meeting hall of the higher beings. Once they were there, it was obvious that Caitlyn was going to have a surprise of her life. However Caitlyn knew that anything could happen and the future was yet to be decided since she had been the one to bring together the two love birds.

Unbeknownst to all of the immortals, Caitlyn still had a few things up her sleeves. Her blue eyes were glimmering in glee at the surprise that she was going to reveal to the higher beings and to her two friends. She was going to have so much fun.

