

WEEPING WILLOW

(PART TWO)

by

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EBOOK EDITION

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Weeping Willow

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NALIN:

I had awakened from a deep sleep, feeling a sense of dread that I haven't felt in a long time... Fidgeting with my human sleepwear, I glanced beside me, noticing the bed was empty.

“Willow?” I called, momentarily looking down at my arm to see that my wound had healed completely. Tracing my hand over that portion of my arm, the only thing that would have indicated that I had actually been injured was a sliver of darkened skin which would dissipate over time.

“Willow?” I called again, sitting up in bed.

When she didn't respond, I rose to my feet, feeling my strength renewed as this place was closer to my realm than the human Earth. I crossed the room and knocked on the bathroom door. When there was no response, I reached for the knob, pushing the door open and letting it hit the wall with a thump.

Empty.

I turned around, tracing every object in the room with my eyes. It took a second for me to register that she was gone...

My mind raced with all the possibilities of what could have happened. Could my revelations have been too much for her mind to take? Could she have only pretended to believe in my words?

Then my eyes drifted to my reflection in the standing mirror. My appearance had changed during my sleep to that of my true self. I had masked my appearance and constructed a facade that I felt would have been the most pleasing to Willow. However, during my slumber, I could barely hold onto such facades. My real form must have frightened her away...

I glared at my reflection, suddenly feeling anger rise within me. I hated my white hair and pale skin... I hated my gray eyes... I despised everything about myself.

Needing to expend my negative energy, I found myself looking for something to break. In the mists of my fury, I flipped over the mirror, shattering the glass and scattering the pieces at my feet. Feeling the rage build inside of me, I swept my arm over the table top, hurling all of my books onto the floor. Picking the table up as if it weighed nothing, I threw it across the room, breaking a leg off and cracking its flat surface down the middle.

No matter what I did or how many things I broke, the anger didn't leave me. Instead, it grew painfully into a large void in the middle of my chest. I couldn't help but feel as if this was the fate I was entitled to. I was alone as I was always meant to be...

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WILLOW:

"My name is Willow," I chanted, cradling myself. "Willow. Willow is my name."

There are few times in a person's life where an audible snap can be heard when the mind can no longer cope with reality. For me, this was one of those times...

Surrounded by darkness, I was trapped in a small room no bigger than a closet. The windowless, stone walls were closing in on me. My internal clock was thrown off because of the lack of daylight. I didn't know how many days had passed since my abduction, but I estimated it might have been as little as five days and as much as two weeks.

Running my hands through my hair roughly, I could feel tears run down my face. Crouched in a corner, I was going slowly insane... I prayed I didn't forget who I was. I prayed that I remembered every detail of my life, but life before this cage was getting harder to remember.

After bringing me to this place, Callan pushed me into a chamber and locked the metal door, leaving me alone in my despair. However, I wasn't exactly sure what this place was... It was carved into a mountain and contained many rooms like a fortress. It seems the Dökkalfar have carved out cities underneath the crust of the planet. Touching the walls, I could still feel the indentations of the masons' tools.

Sweat trickling down my brow, I wiped my forehead, feeling extremely warm. Being beneath the ground, the heat seemed to emanate from the rock.

My eyes darted to the door as my ears unexpectedly caught the sound of something in the distance...
Footsteps...

Hurried, booted footsteps... The sound vibrated off the stone walls, getting louder as they drew closer. Without warning, the cell door unlocked and I was blinded by light.

"Get up," a gruff voice ordered.

As my eyes adjusted to the sudden burst of light, I groped the walls, trying to support myself as I rose obediently to my feet. Standing erect, I was forcefully pulled out of the cell. Nearly falling over, a strong hand pushed me upward and balanced my stance. With my vision slowly returning, I tried to focus on the man who was standing before me. Although he was a blur, I could tell from the quality of his voice that it was not Callan. I speculated it was some sort of guard.

Just then, another figure entered the hall. I instantly recognized the woman. I should have since I thought she was my mother for the last seventeen years of my life. "Chloë—," Rosalyn choked out, appearing relieved to see me. She was dressed in a white, flowing gown similar to the one I had worn in a dream, making her appear ethereal.

As I regained my vision, I remember thinking how clean and rested she looked which was a stark contrast to my appearance. I hadn't showered in days. My clothes were filthy. "Willow," I corrected, conflicted over whether to embrace her or reject her completely. "My name is Willow."

The guard jerked my arms forward and shackled my wrists in front of me, using magic to fuse the metal. The red light that was emitted from his touch felt like lava on my skin, burning me.

With a tear escaping my eye, I winced in pain.

"Callan has summoned you to the throne room," Rosalyn told me anxiously.

"What is he going to do?" I asked, fearing the worst as the guard dragged me forward.

"Be gentle, Eberlein," she ordered the guard.

He obliged but not willingly.

“He will not see me,” she told me, her tone strained. “Everyone in the palace has been summoned to the throne room, but Callan will not divulge what the meeting is for.”

I nodded, continuing to walk forward in the direction I was guided. “Will he set me free?” I asked her.

Rosalyn shook her head. “You are a bargaining chip,” she told me, speculating. “He may make some kind of trade with Nalin... He knows how important you are to him. Maybe, the war can be ended...”

As we approached two large, double doors, Rosalyn turned to me. “Keep your head up,” she ordered, petting my head as she always used to. “Show no fear... I promise that this whole mess will be sorted out.”

I nodded, feeling her calming energies pass through me.

Without another word, the double doors were thrown open and we entered.

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NALIN:

“What is the matter, Brother,” Daphne asked, entering the library where I sat in silence. Wearing the burgundy robes of a queen, she walked across the room, sitting beside me.

“Is this visit for business or is this sisterly concern?” I asked, feeling the need to be alone in my thoughts and instantly resenting her company.

“A little of both,” she said with a grin, liking my candor. “You have been moping for a week. Can you blame me for being a tad bit curious?”

“It has never concerned you before,” I told her, continuing to sulk.

Placing her hand on my shoulder, she bore into me with her eyes. “Are you going to speak to me or do I have to beat it out of you?” she asked, appearing more concerned as her eyes traced my hands. “Where is your ring? I don’t think I have seen you without it on since...”

“Since before Willow’s creation,” I finished. Brooding, I cupped my head in my hands, leaning forward in my seat. “It’s somewhere in my bedchamber...”

Daphne appeared relieved. “You’ve taken it off? So... You have finally come around to my way of seeing things and given up your search—”

Shifting uncomfortably in my seated position, I glared at her. “I found her,” I said curtly, sensing the cold void rise in my chest.

Daphne silenced herself, her pale features twisting in confusion. “She lives?” she asked me, her voice steady and quiet. “What does she know?”

“I told her everything,” I told her bluntly, knowing she wouldn’t approve of my actions.

“Where is she?” my sister asked, her body tensing in her seat.

“She left me,” I said, my voice strained with anger. “She saw me as I was... My true appearance. She ran away as I slept.”

My sister leaned forward, her eyes as gray as storm clouds. “Is she still in this world?” she asked, her voice as taut as her muscles. “Who has been hiding her?”

Trying to control the negative emotions which were about to erupt, I rose to my feet and began to pace. “She was never in this world...”

My sister rose to her feet, piercing me with her gaze. “What have you done, Nalin?” she demanded, incensed. “Answer me this instant! Did you open a portal?”

“You knew there was a possibility she was in another realm. I told you that much,” I told her defensively, my voice deep and menacing. “Did you ever doubt that I wouldn’t search the nine realms for her?”

“I thought that you would have at least learned from your mistakes,” she told me flatly.

“Someone opened a doorway and took her from me,” I told her, seething. “It is against the universal order for an Elf to live in the world of humans. I was rectifying the situation.”

Daphne looked at me defiantly. “It is not your job to rectify the situation,” she told me, taking her seat once more. “It is mine and I should have been notified.”

My voice steeped in anger, I told her, “It was within my right to go.”

“You are breaking the laws of our kind,” she said gravely. “This type of magic can bring down severe punishment on your head.”

“What would you have done? Sent guards to recover her?” I demanded, motioning to her with my hands.

“Do you really want to know what I would have done?” she asked with her voice dangerously low as she cupped her hands on her lap.

Knowing that this conversation was approaching dangerous territory, I answered, “No, I don’t.”

She nodded, accepting my answer. “It is not a time for us to quarrel,” she said, regaining her calm demeanor. “Besides the topic of your temperament, I have come for a purpose...”

I scoffed. “I knew you would ask something of me.”

“This is not a request,” she said without humor. “We are to have honored guests at this evening’s dinner party and you are to be in attendance.”

“Who are these honored guests of yours?”

She smiled. “Jasmine and her family, of course,” she told me, her silky voice masking her true objectives.

“Of course,” I said, mimicking her. Folding my arms on my chest, I said, “I will try, Sister. I have received word of a convoy of Dökkalfar roaming about in the woods. I am leading a small group to examine the situation.”

“This is not a request, Nalin. I am ordering you to attend,” she said, rising from her seat. “The search party will have to go without you. Do not disobey me on this.”

I leaned towards her, eyeing her rebelliously. “As I said, I will try...”

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WILLOW:

I was pushed through the threshold by the guard Rosalyn called Eberlein. The room was built like an underground cathedral with tall ceilings and decorative columns which supported the subterranean structure. Torches of orange fire lit the room in a warm glow.

The gasps of the crowd upon seeing me echoed through the room. Holding my head up high, I walked through the center of the cavernous space, parting the large crowd of dark haired Elves. There were at least two hundred Elven men, women and children. Many snickered as I walked passed them. Some grimaced and others had no reaction at all. I was despised amongst this race for what I was... But mostly, I was hated because of who created me. I was apart of Nalin, Prince of the Ljosalfar, and their sworn enemy.

I momentarily bowed my head, thinking of him. Envisioning Nalin as I last saw him, I felt a tugging at my heart. Remembering him as he slept, I felt as if I had wronged him somehow. I left him, but he must know I had intended to return. Did he know I was in trouble? Did he care? Was he angered by the way I left? Had I burned bridges with him?

When I reached the front of the crowd, I was able to see Callan, sitting on his throne atop a wide staircase. He wore his usually battle armor and crown. He gazed down at me with a sober mixture of disdain and satisfaction. “Rosalyn,” he called out to my mother, remaining focused on me.

She glanced at me, casting a grim smile in my direction that was meant to be comforting. She ascended the stairs and took her place by her brother, standing regally beside his throne.

Eberlein pulled me towards the stairs, making me kneel at the base.

Dread seeped into my being as I looked up at Callan insolently. I refused to display my fear. Uncertain of the fate that awaited me, I swore that no matter the outcome I would not allow Callan to see me cry.

“My fellow Dökkalfar, a war has been ongoing for nearly a hundred years,” Callan began, his voice booming above the hush of the crowd. “A battle which has caused the untimely death of many of our kin.

Our blood was spilled needlessly... This war that we have fought so courageously has been based upon a lie.”

A low murmur filled room as the Elves took in Callan’s words.

“I have summoned every Elf in the castle with the intention of setting things right once more,” he said. “They accused us of murder while they defiled the Earth and broke the laws of nature before our eyes.” Callan motioned towards me. “The proof of our innocence is here, kneeling before us. This thing is also proof of the violation of natural law.”

Although I was shaking on the inside, I remained indifferent on the outside, trying my best to mask my emotions. I focused on Rosalyn who stood as still as a statue, seeming apathetic to the words of her brother. But I knew better. I knew that she was just as nervous as I was on the inside.

“I, Callan, King of the Dökkalfar, brought you here for one purpose,” he said, sneering at me. “My loyal constituents, the time has come to avenge the blood which has been spilled in battle.”

The roar of the crowd vibrated throughout the room. They were out for blood and I felt their looks of malice upon me. I closed my eyes and tried to envision the only face that could bring me comfort at this time... Nalin’s. Though his presence in my life had been short, I had felt more comfortable with him in those few moments than in all the years prior. Lost in my thoughts, I momentarily felt as if I had been plunged in a bath of ice water as fear passed through me in waves with the notion that I may never see Nalin again. I shivered.

“Here is Willow, creation of Nalin, and abomination of the Elven race,” Callan announced, bringing me out of my thoughts. “She was created using the darkest forms of magic for one Elf’s amusement. Nalin laughs at our ways... He spits on the natural order which we must all uphold... He has killed many of our kind single-handedly and most savagely. Now, it is time for us to deprive him of that which he holds most dear.”

Feeling my aching knees about to give out on me, I glared up at Callan. My body tensed, fearing his next words.

“Willow, creation of Nalin, I sentence you to be put to death,” he announced finally, his voice firm.

I let out an audible gasp, feeling as if I were about to faint. My hands shot to my face as tears erupted from my eyes.

Rosalyn’s mouth dropped open and she tried to reason with Callan under the hollers of the crowd. “You cannot stop bloodshed with more bloodshed, Callan. We should use this opportunity to make a gesture of peace that Nalin will accept.”

“Nalin is not the king,” Callan said sternly.

“But he can sway his sister,” my mother retorted.

“Have you forgotten who drew first blood? Nalin is a cold blooded murderer... He cannot be reasoned with. I will not show him mercy.”

Fearfully, Rosalyn begged, “Listen to me—”

Callan held up a hand, silencing his sister and the crowd without delay. “As per the laws of our kind, the sentence is death by stoning,” he said heartlessly, seeming to have received some sort of twisted satisfaction from my misery. Then he looked at Eberlein and ordered, “Take her away.”

“Wait!” Rosalyn cried, outraged. “You did not let her speak.”

“She doesn’t deserve to,” he retorted as Eberlein lifted me to my feet abruptly.

“It is not for you to decide. How can you say you are upholding our laws and not adhere to our policies,” Rosalyn argued, unashamed to do so in front of their constituents. “She must be allowed to speak.”

Callan glared at his sister. “She has wronged the kingdom, Rosalyn. Open your eyes. This war was her doing!”

“She was but an infant when the war erupted,” Rosalyn retorted. “The war was not her doing...”

“No more, Rosalyn,” Callan warned, ready to silence her at whatever cost.

I watched as the woman I regarded as my mother stepped forward and announced, “As per the laws of our kind, every Elf must visit the oracle at the age of transition. Willow is at such an age. We cannot serve out this sentence and consciously violate our most sacred law. Before Willow’s sentence is carried out, she must see the oracle to discover the meaning of her existence.”

A hush fell over the room and the Elves began to look at one another questioningly.

“She is not an Elf,” someone shouted within the crowd.

“She doesn’t deserve to live,” another yelled.

“She is an Elf! She is my daughter. I claim her as my own,” she shouted, shocking the Elves.

“Blasphemy,” Callan uttered, leaning forward in his seated position.

“It doesn’t matter the circumstances of her creation. She is one of us,” Rosalyn told them. “Her life is not ours to take before the oracle has a chance to reveal her true fate. This is our law.”

Enraged, Callan rose to his feet swiftly. Through gritted teeth, announced, “It will be done. To preserve our laws, Willow will be taken to the oracle... But regardless of what the prophecy states, the sentence will be carried out.”

With those words, I was taken out of the throne room and plunged into my darkened cell once more.

* * * * *

NALIN:

Ignoring my sister's command, I gathered a small group of four Elves with some combat experience. At my insistence, we traveled stealthily on foot into the forest. It was best not to ride horses because their hooves would cause enough noise to alert the enemy.

Since the initial bloody battle in which thousands of Elven lives were lost on both sides, territorial lines had been formed. The Ljosalfar had pushed the Dökkalfar deep into the boroughs they created in the earth. Ljosalfar claimed the upper region. However, there were times when Dökkalfar tested the Ljosalfar's hold on the land, sending small groups of soldiers to survey the area so that they can lay claim to the land. Smaller battles between convoys were common place since the Dökkalfar insisted on emerging from their rabbit holes into the land of their enemy.

"The forest is dense in this area. Stay alert," I ordered, whispering while I adjusted my breastplate. "Keep at least twenty paces apart. I want to form a line and flush them out."

Separating from my group, I scanned the snow-covered ground for footprints. After trekking for at least twenty minutes without incident, I didn't find any. I continued to walk, breathing the frigid air into my lungs. Something was amiss... I smelled the enemy.

Suddenly, I saw movement in a clearing up ahead. I crouched down behind a bush, clutching the handle of my sheathed sword.

"Nalin," someone called me in a low whisper. Without warning, the figure I had seen up ahead came out of its hiding place behind a tree.

I recognized the white robes which blended in with the snow that surrounded us. "Rosalyn," I called under my breath.

She removed her hood so that I could see her face, freeing her pin-straight, black hair. In that moment, she reminded me of Willow. Her dark hair and blue eyes were similar, but she could never be Willow... I felt all sorts of emotions when I was with Willow. Standing here, near Rosalyn, I felt nothing except the growing coldness in my chest which no woman's love had been able to dissolve. No one until Willow...

Rosalyn approached me cautiously. "Oh, Nalin, I have been trying to summon you discreetly..."

Standing up, I looked down at her, ready to wring her neck. "Your spells will not work on me," I told her coldly, my spirit on fire. With my sword in its sheath, I clutched the handle of my blade eager to use it. "Why have you come?"

"I have come to speak with you," she responded urgently, her blue eyes darting around the surrounding woods.

I hadn't seen her since before the war was waged. She was nothing but a lovesick Elfing back then. "You have wronged me," I said through gritted teeth. "Give me one good reason why I shouldn't end your life."

Rosalyn took one fearful step back. "I know where Willow is," she said nervously.

"Where?" I asked, instantly forgetting my anger.

"Callan has her," she told me, appearing on the verge of tears. "He sentenced her to death for starting the war, but I convinced him to take her to the oracle first."

Turning my back on her, I tried my best to hold back the darkness inside of me. Feeling rage grow inside my chest, my hands began to shake. "I will free her," I managed to say before facing her once again.

"Don't be foolish, Nalin," she said, placing her hand on my arm. "You cannot free her by yourself. Besides I have a plan."

I brushed her hand away. "This is your fault," I told her, refusing to mince words. "You think I don't know you took her from me to begin with. I saw you at the manor she lived in, pretending to be her mother."

Rosalyn averted her eyes. "I'm guilty," she admitted, appearing regretful. "You know how I felt—how I always felt about you."

Clutching my chest, I felt nothing. Numb, her words didn't move me. I felt nothing, but the anger I had harbored within me all of these years. "I cannot return those sentiments."

She nodded sadly. "You never could, Nalin. Not with me... Not with anyone."

"Except Willow," I said bluntly.

"How can you be so sure? How can you be sure that you can feel anything but the hatred which continues consumes you?"

"Because for a moment I had," I said, remembering my short time with Willow.

"I guess I've always known that you would," she told me unhappily. "I swear that I never meant to hurt you or Willow. I love her as if she were my child."

"Why did you take her, Rosalyn?" I asked, ignoring her babbling and trying to suppress the memories which her presence began stirring up.

"I used to follow you... I made sure you never saw me, but I saw the cabin you constructed from the willow tree," she started, her eyes trained on me. "I went to the cabin that night with the intention of seeing what had captivated your attention. I found Willow."

I nodded, silently urging her to go on.

"Things ran through my head... Things I wouldn't have even contemplated in my right mind," she told me, appearing horrified. "I was angry at her because I knew that you could never love me the way you

loved her. I was furious because I was a Dökkalfar and you were a Ljosalfar... I hated myself for being who I was and I hated you for not loving me... But when I held Willow in my arms, I knew I couldn't harm her. It did cross my mind to take her to spite you, but I didn't plan on opening a portal and hiding her in another realm."

"Then, why did you do it? Why did you take her from me?"

Rosalyn eyed me levelly. "Soldiers approached the cottage while I was inside," she said soberly. "I hid. They didn't get to see me, but they weren't planning on entering the cabin."

"What are you implying?" I inquired, my mind flooding with old memories.

"They set fire to the cottage, knowing Willow was inside. Your own people torched that cabin," she told me seriously. "I had no choice. I had to open a doorway to escape and I took Willow with me."

"Lies," I spat furiously. "Every word of it is a lie!"

"It is the truth," she said, her eyes pleading. "I thought you ordered Willow destroyed... I thought you wanted her dead, but then I heard your parents were murdered.... Then I considered the notion that they ordered Willow killed and you took their lives in an act of revenge."

"I would never harm my parents," I said in a low growl. "Your cowardly brother snuck into the castle and killed them in their beds."

"Callan didn't do it," she said adamantly. "Despite what you think, my brother would never kill someone unjustly."

"He sentenced Willow to death," I retorted.

"I know he didn't do it. We were in a truce then and I am sure he honored it. But now, he, like you, cannot see past his vengeance," she said somberly. "The two of you will kill off both races. Within a year's time, both sides will be dead because of a war that never had to be. End it today, Nalin."

"I can't," I muttered, the need to kill growing stronger within me.

Rosalyn's eyes went cold. "Then, you will be the death of us all."

A scream shattered the silence.

I realized Rosalyn had distracted me from my true mission and I didn't know where my convoy was. I ran blindly in the direction of the screams. I ran until I saw the snow stained red with the blood of my men. Then, I saw them. I counted four Dökkalfar. Their swords bloody with Ljosalfar blood.

"Nalin," the one they call Eberlein called. "So nice of you to join us."

Enraged, I pulled out two curved, machete-like blades from their holder on my back, swinging them in a circular motion and slicing the air around me. The metal of the blades hummed as if ready for contact. Hungry for revenge, I slowly walked towards the Elves ready to take on all four at once if I had to.

The Elf closest to me lunged at me clumsily with his sword.

I effortlessly blocked his sword with my machete. Thrusting his sword up with my weapon, I plunged the other one in his chest with one fluid motion. He choked out a scream before he collapsed on the ground at my feet.

I removed my blade from his chest cavity, feeling the hunger to kill more strongly.

The second and third Dökkalfar came towards me menacingly, encircling me while Eberlein eagerly awaited my demise. The second Elf leaped at me and I knocked him over the head with my machete. He fell to the ground as the third Elf tried to attack me from behind. I turned on my heel in time to block his sword with both of my machetes locked in a scissor like fashion. I kicked him in the shin, breaking it with the force of my boot. With his bone protruding from an open wound, he fell to the ground wailing in agony.

I left him there while the second Elf rose to his feet, raising his sword. I shot a look behind him at Eberlein, realizing he was about to bolt back into the woods. I ran toward the second Elf. Jumping up, before his sword could reach me, I raised my legs parallel to my body. My boot made contact with a tree trunk in mid-flight, bouncing off of it and catapulting myself over the Elf. Flipping over him, I landed squarely on the ground and ran towards Eberlein at full force.

Our swords clashed as Eberlein was a better swordsman. He pushed the blade I blocked with my machete towards my face. When he realized he couldn't decapitate me, he lunged at me with his sword, making our weapons clash again. I concentrated on blocking while he circled one of my machetes, slicing my hand and disarming me of a blade.

A chill ran up my spine as the blood that fell from my hand revitalized me. I lunged at Eberlein as the second Elf started to his way towards us. I moved my machete in a hacking motion around Eberlein's blade, breaking the metal in half and disarming him. Gaining momentum, I spun around him with my blade above my head. Standing behind him, I severed his head with a single swipe.

By the time the second Elf reached me, Eberlein was dead. I lifted my other machete from the snow, swinging it in the air. He rushed me with his sword with a war cry that echoed in the stillness. I blocked his blade with both of my machetes, kneeing him in the stomach. As the air rushed from his lungs, I brought my blades to his neck in a scissor-like motion, decapitating him where he stood.

The cries of the third Elf brought my attention back to him. I replaced my machetes to their sheaths and removed my sword, walking stealthily towards him.

"Have mercy," he cried, crawling on his belly across the snow. "I beg you, Nalin. Have mercy upon me."

"As you would have had for me," I growled, standing over him within a few strides. I raised my sword over my head, focusing on my target.

“Nalin, don’t!” Rosalyn yelled shrilly, appearing in the trees with an expression of panic.

I ignored her, plunging my long sword into the Elf’s back and impaling him into the ground. I watched as the life drained from his eyes with pleasure, feeling myself grow stronger.

Taking in the sight of the red stained snow that was splattered across the ground, tears began to fall from Rosalyn’s eyes as she watched me in shock. Hyperventilating, her eyes darted from me to the bodies that littered the clearing. Quivering, I watched as she began to sob. “How could you—,” she spat out, her mouth agape. “What have you become, Nalin? Have you no ounce of compassion? Have you no soul?”

I removed my sword from the back of the dead Elf. It exited him with a sickening pop. “I told you,” I said to her simply, raising an eyebrow. Breathing in the crisp air, I felt the hatred within me recede once more, leaving behind a wonderful numbness. “I gave it to Willow.”

* * * * *

WILLOW:

Glancing upward at the foreboding sky, I felt inwardly conflicted. What would the oracle say to me? Did I want to hear the message? What tactics would she use?

“I can’t believe this all started with a dream,” I muttered worriedly.

“Dreams are windows... Some into our own imaginations and others into other worlds,” my mother told me with her hand on my shoulder.

I scoffed. “I know that now... I wish I could have known that then.”

“It wouldn’t have changed anything. I realize that now,” my mother told me as we stood before the mouth of a cave. “You must go in alone.”

Silently, I nodded, looking at the entrance with trepidation. It was nothing, but a massive black hole. I could not see within its chambers and it made me sick. What was beyond that void?

Reluctantly, my eyes swept over my escorts. Callan had commanded six soldiers to accompany me. They wore armor and carried heavy swords, appearing similar to barbarians. They were waiting for me to try to escape so that they would have an excuse to kill me, but I didn’t fall for that trap. I knew my mother had a plan, but she couldn’t tell me about it yet...

I turned my attention back to the cave. Without further hesitation, I stepped into the entrance, feeling as if there were an invisible curtain between the outside world and the cave. The outside curtain rippled like water as I crossed the threshold. I instantly felt as if I had entered another dimension. I turned back and saw my mother standing outside the cave. I knew she could not see me. It seemed this invisible curtain had a two way mirror affect.

I turned around, taking in the scene before me. Inside the cave, torches were lit, casting an eerie glow which contrasted to the brightness outside. The ground beneath my feet contained small fissures within the rock in which steam rose into the damp atmosphere. At the center of the cavern, there was a woman clad in white garments seated atop a large wooden throne. Her head was bowed and covered in a white mantle.

I stepped closer cautiously, my footsteps echoing throughout the room. Inhaling, I smelled something sweet that hung in the air like vaporous nectar. I recognized the smell as ethylene; a sweet smelling gas that is used as an anesthetic. I had made ethylene gas as part of chemistry lab a few years back.

As I approached the woman, I noticed that the few strands of hair which peeked out from under her mantle were bright red. Her skin was a wonderful shade of deep caramel. She appeared young, no more than thirty or so human years.

Standing before the seated woman, I watched as her breathing quickened and she gripped the arms of the chair until her knuckles turned white. "I have been waiting for you for nearly a hundred Elven years," she said suddenly, her voice wispy and dry.

"Sorry," I muttered awkwardly, not knowing what else to say. I watched as she lifted her head, her gaze meeting my own. I gasped when I saw her eyes were completely white, lacking pupils and irises.

"I am blind," she told me calmly, her voice echoing slightly throughout the chamber. "But I can see far better with my mind's eye than you can see with both of yours."

I nodded, but then my brain registered that she couldn't see me. "Okay," I responded in a small voice, fidgeting. "Your hair... is red. I haven't seen an Elf which didn't have the dark hair of the Dökkalfar or the white hair of the Ljosalfar."

Ignoring me, she reached for a small, blue velvet bag at her side. She loosened the taut strings which held the bag closed. "Pick a ruin," she ordered, holding the bag out to me.

I reached into the bag, feeling smooth wooden pieces inside that were about the size of dominoes. I pulled out the first one my fingertips grazed. I gazed at the etching on the piece of wood which looked like two triangles that met at their peaks like a flattened number eight. Without further delay, I handed it to the oracle.

"Dagaz," she whispered, her eyes growing wide as she held the ruin in her hand firmly.

"What does it mean?" I asked in a tiny whisper with some trepidation.

"Breakthrough. Awakening. Awareness. Balance," she said, her voice bouncing off the walls. "Dagaz is the place where... opposites meet. It is the time to embark on that for which you have been born."

I shook my head. "I was not born," I told her, not wanting to offend her by doubting her prophetic abilities. "They say I have no mother. They say I was created."

She noisily breathed in the fumes, letting her eyes roll back further into their sockets. Her lips quivered as she said, "Willow, creation of Nalin, rightful King of the Ljosalfar, and daughter of Rosalyn, princess of the Dökkalfar... We are all designed by a higher power which doesn't distinguish us by title or race. As I am neither, Ljosalfar or Dökkalfar, so shall you be..."

I nodded, forgetting again that the oracle could not see me.

"Your construction was no accident... Nothing which occurs in the larger scheme of life is ever an accident, but merely a part of a bigger plan which only I can foresee in glimpses," she said with certainty in her voice. "Nalin knew pieces which he needed in order to drive him toward his ultimate destiny... Rosalyn knew pieces which pertain to her, but no one is to know it all."

With an arched brow, I asked, "What did you tell Nalin?"

"A prophecy is for one person and that person alone," she said sternly. "Since you are flesh of his flesh and spirit of his spirit, you may know but a piece."

I leaned closer with interest.

"Nalin, son of the brave King Agenor and rightful King of the Ljosalfar," she said, pausing to take a deep breath. She shivered as if she was high on the vapors which were emitted from the fissures. "Greatness cannot be achieved without sacrifice. A sacrifice cannot be made without heartache. You must choose. Become a great king, dying at the end of a long existence loveless and childless. Or sacrifice your crown for the greater glory of uniting the races."

The fumes that I inhaled made it harder to comprehend the oracle's message. "How is he supposed to do that?" I asked.

The oracle remained silent.

Sweeping my hair out of my face, I knew she wouldn't answer anymore questions concerning Nalin. I struggled to search my brain for a question I could ask. "Why did Nalin create me? What is my destiny?"

"Nalin created you to fill a void which the prophecy had left him with. However, he managed to fulfill his destiny although he was ignorant of its true meaning," she said slowly, swaying in her seat as she reached the peak of her trance-like state. "You, Willow, will not die today. Your destiny is to continue on your journey."

Confused, I asked, "What journey would that be?"

"You must unite with your mirror... your twin soul and fuse the two fallen kingdoms," she said, slumping in her seat once more.

"Is Nalin to form another truce?" I inquired, but the oracle was done with her prophecy and was seemingly unconscious.

Eager to breath in fresh air once more, I walked towards the mouth of the cave, wondering how I was to survive a sentence of death... I didn't have powers. I didn't even know spells. As I walked out of the mouth of the cave, rippling the invisible curtain once more, I was met by my mother with a strong hug.

My eyes swept over the area. "Where are the soldiers?" I asked, my voice shaking.

"They were going to kill you as soon as you left the cave," she told me, pulling away so our eyes could meet.

For the first time, I saw the blood that was smeared across her cheek and the small red stains on her white cape. "What did you do?" I asked, trembling.

"Fulfill my end of the prophecy," she answered steadily.

"You killed them?" I asked, my eyes looking around for signs of a struggle in our surroundings.

"I used a spell to put them to sleep first," she said, taking my hand in hers.

Suddenly, there was a commotion in the surrounding woods as voices echoed in the stillness. "What is going on?"

"Callan was to arrive for the stoning," she said fearfully, tugging my arm and starting to sprint for cover. After running about twenty yards in the opposite direction, my mother stopped and ducked behind trees. "We won't be able to run far enough. We have to open a door here."

Although we were out of the line of sight, I knew they would be quick to search the woods and we would be found. "Hurry."

Shaking, I watched as she removed red powder from a pouch she carried. She began sprinkling a line of the red dust on the ground as she whispered words in a foreign tongue. Within seconds a door began to manifest.

I turned looking behind us as cries echoed though the air. "I think they found the bodies," I whispered, my voice quivering with anxiety.

"Almost done," she whispered back, wringing her hands nervously. "It takes longer when you don't make the door on a wall."

"Stop!" someone yelled a few yards away, spotting us.

My breath caught in my throat as I spun around to see Callan running towards us at full speed.

* * * * *

NALIN:

Bursting into the great hall in the mist of a dinner party, I screamed my sister's name. My voice echoed through the chamber and all chattering ceased as guests turned to look at me.

Jasmine appeared in the front of the crowd with her flowing blond hair swept away from her face and her eyes as wide as saucers. Appearing horrified, she asked “Are you alright, Nalin?”

I ignored her, scanning the crowd for my sister.

Spotting Daphne at the center of the room, I walked towards her. She was flanked by a small group of soldiers. She looked up to see me, taking my appearance in with a gasp. “What happened?”

I looked down at myself, realizing I was still covered in Dökkalfar blood. “It’s not my blood,” I explained.

She nodded in silent understanding. “Where are the bodies?”

“I burned them,” I answered, walking until I stood before her.

“And the rest of your convoy?”

“Dead,” I told her coolly. “I need another group of soldiers.”

With her face grim, she stated, “For what exactly? Another suicide mission?”

“Willow has been captured by King Callan,” I told her, my voice as hard as steel. “I need a small convoy to free her.”

The room came alive with the murmuring of Daphne’s guests.

Jasmine appeared exasperated at the mention of her competition. “You can’t go,” she said in a huff, forgetting her place.

I shot her an angry look, silencing her. “It is not for you to decide.”

Frustrated, Jasmine burst into tears, hiding her face in her father’s shoulder like the spoiled Elfling she was. He rubbed her back, looking at me with daggers in his eyes.

I rolled my eyes at her over dramatic behavior.

“You will do no such thing,” Daphne told me adamantly. “Get cleaned up and join us for dinner.”

“I wasn’t asking.”

“Was I not clear when I requested your attendance?” she said, raising an arched eyebrow as if challenging me.

With my jaw set, I decided to jab her back verbally. “I am not your subordinate. I intend to take back my crown.”

“For now, you are,” she stated, her voice rich with venom. “It will be a long while before you will be mature enough to possess this kind of power.”

I smiled insincerely. “I heard some very interesting news today,” I mentioned, capturing the attention of everyone in the room. “It seems a witness has come forward about the night the cottage was set on fire... They saw the most curious thing.”

The guards began to stir and the crowd turned to one another in confusion.

My sister's proud expression drained from her face. "What did they see?"

"They saw our own men torch the willow tree," I said, feeling the heat of my anger stir.

"They—They're mistaken," she said, unconvincingly.

I bridged the gap between us until I was close enough to exhale on her. "That is what I told them," I said, my voice cold. "But they insisted."

"I know nothing of it," she said shrilly, her eyes darting around the room for someone to shield her from my inquiries. No one came to her rescue.

"I know you wouldn't lie to me, Sister," I told her, looking into her fearful eyes. "But your eyes betray you..."

Daphne backed away, fighting to regain her regal demeanor. "I am your queen, Nalin."

"That is precisely what has divided us," I told her, seething. "Your willingness to take my crown... Your greed for power... I know that you are capable of much, but would you betray your own brother?"

"Yes," she yelled, the darker side of her nature showing through. "I sent the guards! Willow's creation was against the laws of nature. The fact that she still lives is an atrocity!"

Soldier crept closer until they stood between me and my sister.

"I hope Callan kills her," she said shrilly, starting to walk towards a doorway that led to her private chambers.

"As a princess, you didn't have the power to send soldiers to the cabin," I yelled after her, guards barring my path towards her. "What else did you do?"

"Take him to his bed chamber and lock him in there," Daphne ordered, screaming at the top of her lungs.

"What did you do?" I continued to ask before a shocked audience. "Did you murder our parents?"

She ran into her private quarters, shutting the door behind her with a slam.

"You killed them!" I accused, knowing she could hear me through the closed door. "You killed them in their beds for the power you have now. But it's over! Over!"

The guests looked at me horrified and conflicted as to whether the accusation was true.

Ready to escort me to my quarters, guards flanked me. One was so brazen as to put his arm on my shoulder. That act sent waves of anger through my body and I withdrew my sword, feeling a deep urge to kill them all.

* * * * *

WILLOW:

“Willow!” my mother yelled as she gripped my arm like a vice. She opened the door swiftly, pushing me inside and jumping in after me. She quickly locked it, but within two seconds Callan was pounding on it from the other side.

I rose to my feet, having landed bottom first in marshland. “Where are we?” I asked, as my mother took me by my wrist.

“The realm of the Trolls,” she said, her voice taut with tension as she started backing away from the door which had only begun to fade.

Callan’s fists pounded harder on the other side and the door began to splinter.

“He is going to break through the door! Run!”

We began to run further into the marshland, knee deep in murky water. We heard the door begin to give way in the distance as my mother opened another door, headed for the realm of the Fairies. Once in the realm of the Fairies, we opened another door to the realm of Giants.

Always one step behind us, Callan followed us through the dimensions.

Finally, we opened another door to the realm of the humans, landing squarely in the upstairs hallway of our house. I collapsed on the floor, feeling as if my heart was about to beat out of my chest.

Mother closed the door quickly, latching it shut. “Get the salt,” she ordered, throwing her body against the door for added effect.

Without question, I raced downstairs although my muscles protested all the way down. With my legs wobbling, I retrieved the salt and ran as fast as I could back to my mother, handing her the salt. She threw the salt on the door-frame, instantly closing it.

“Salt can form a line of protection,” she told me, looking relieved. “It can also close portals quickly, but Callan will just open another one when he figures out where we are.”

“Then lets get out of here,” I told her, pulling her downstairs.

“We need money first,” she said, pulling me to the backyard.

With haste, my mother dashed across the yard. Her hands landed on the tree trunk of a large oak. She began chanting words that were just out of earshot. The tree began to shake its leaves off. Before the leaves touched the ground, my mother’s magic turned them into money.

I realized that in my mom’s world money could grow on trees... I also knew that money probably paid for the manor we lived in and the acres that surrounded it.

She feverishly began stuffing the money into her pockets and I helped her with a shaky hand, looking around me for the enemy. We grabbed enough hundred dollar bills to have us living in the lap of luxury for a few months. In my greed, I tried to grab every dollar, but my mother insisted we didn’t have time and pushed me towards our driveway.

After reaching the minivan, we heard a commotion inside the house. It seemed Callan had finally made his own door into this realm.

We jumped in the car and started to drive.

* * * * *

NALIN:

I killed them...

Twenty or so of my own soldiers met their end by my blade, but I could not kill them all...

My blood lust was strong, but I was out numbered. I knew it, but I didn't care. All I could think about was how my beloved parents were slaughtered in their bed as they slept. Had they seen it coming? Did my father know that by bequeathing the crown to my sister upon his passing he would be signing his own death warrant?

I think not.

I think she played her part well—the part of a loving and loyal daughter. She was neither. She coveted the crown and stole it right out from under me. Perhaps, she planned it all along. I had confided the oracle's prophecy to her and, as if by magic, a spell presented itself to me that could change my circumstances... A spell that would cost me my crown. Did she place it there for me to find? I wouldn't put it passed her.

Feeling as if I were going to claw at the walls, I paced my bedchamber anxiously. Now that her treachery had been revealed, would she smite all of those who stood between her and the power she sought to hold onto? Would she kill her own brother to keep the crown? I believed she would... I am sure the idea had already occurred to her and she was devising a plan that would make my death seem less obvious.

Once someone had committed the act of murder, it seemed easier the second and third time around. It gets easier until you feel nothing at all. I should know, but part of that was the void that creating Willow left me with. Such darkness could only be quieted when in her presence. Where was she now? Was she awaiting her own death? Perhaps, we were both doomed...

* * * * *

WILLOW:

I slumped in my seat. "How long are we going to drive for?"

My mother shot me a glance. “We can’t stop. We can’t ever stop.”

“Eventually, we are going to have to. We are going to need gas. We are going to need more supplies,” I told her. “We need to stretch and relax.”

“I don’t mean that... We can stop for a few moments to do all of those things, but we can’t stop for more than a few hours,” she said with a smile that didn’t quite reach her eyes, solidifying how worried she was. “I am going to have to return to the Elven Earth to recharge my magical batteries, but, other than that, we are on the run.”

Running my thin fingers through my hair, I shook my head, remembering how Nalin had told me that his magic depletes the further he is from the source. It was the same for my mother. She had to keep one foot in the Elven world and the other in the human world just to survive. It must have been so hard for her all of these years, living a double life. “We can’t live like this,” I told her adamantly. “We can’t have a life living on the run! We haven’t slept in two days... I need to sleep.”

Even as I said it, I knew my words were only half truths. I missed Nalin... My heart ached within my chest with each beat. I had a horrible feeling and I needed to know if he was alright. I just needed to gaze upon his face...

“He can sense us. If I use my magic, he can pick up on that. I need to cast spells to make money and that kind of thing,” she said, focusing on the road. “If we stopped, it would only be a matter of time before he found us. I mean, he already knows we are in this realm.”

“Why can’t we go to another realm?” I asked, looking out the window at the surrounding corn fields.

“Opening portals is a serious offense,” she told me. “We can mask our appearance with spells, but if we are caught... We could be killed. No magical being can live in another's realm.”

“So, each realm is a territory that you enter at your own risk,” I surmised.

“Yes,” she replied.

“How is it that we haven’t run out of gas for two days?” I asked absentmindedly as my thoughts began to shift towards Nalin once more.

“I cast a spell,” she said.

“You did what?” I asked, my voice taut with tension.

Suddenly, both of our front tires blew out. Rosalyn fought to regain control of the car as it spun off the road. The minivan swerved roughly, leaning on the right side wheels before toppling over on its side. Metal twisted and contorted with a horrible groan. Glass shattered everywhere, splintering like a cobweb before breaking off in jagged shards. With its passenger side door shrieking along the road, the van came to a screeching halt after a few yards.

My mother had hit her head on the steering wheel, leaving a gash on her forehead nearly three inches long. “Are you okay?” she asked weakly, hanging by her seat belt.

I nodded, rubbing my neck which was stiff from the whiplash I received. “I’m okay,” I said, giving myself a once over before unbuckling my seat belt. Since my side of the car was touching the asphalt, my shoulder was leaning on a pile of glass that had once been my window. Each shard punctured my skin, causing me to bleed. Moaning in pain, I climbed to my feet in the tight space, helping my mother out of her seat. Once she was loose, I began to pound on the driver’s side door which was now our sunroof.

“I think the road had those mats of metal spikes that the cops use,” she told me, blood dripping down her face as her wound began to heal. “You know those things they use to stop speeding cars.”

Without warning, the door opened as if blown off its hinges.

I began to climb out of the car, but, before I could take in my surroundings, I was grabbed from behind and thrown on the road forcefully. Pain shot up my body in an instant as I landed on the asphalt with a hard thud. The air I had stored in my lungs rush out, leaving me unable to catch my breath. Tears began streaming down my face before I could stop them.

“I am going to enjoy watching the life drain from you,” Callan said with venom in his voice, standing over me.

“Callan, stop!” my mother screamed as she struggled to get out of the minivan.

With my sneakers sliding on the asphalt, I tried to crawl away from him, but my body couldn’t move fast enough. I screamed with fear as he turned me over to face him before gripping my throat with his huge hands. As he squeezed my wind pipe closed, my hands flew to my throat, trying to pry him off me.

My lungs burned, thirsting for air.

The pressure in my head began to build quickly as oxygen deprivation set in.

With my eyes nearly bulging out of their sockets, I began to gag as my limbs flailed. I scratched at his hands while trying to land a kick on him. I inwardly cried out for help as he crushed my throat with his vice like grip.

As my vision began to fade, I lifted one hand from his and pushed Callan’s face with my palm. As if by magic, red light shot out of my hand, burning his face.

He screamed, letting me go instantly and cupping his face in his hands.

Choking, I gulped in as much air as I could although my neck was tender. I flinched in pain with each intake of oxygen. I held my neck, protecting it from further attack.

When he finally did look up, his once handsome face turned shades of red and black as his skin was singed. The top layer of his skin began to peel and his mouth formed a menacing sneer.

“I am going to killing you!” Callan screamed, lounging at me again.

Before he could get his hands on me again, he let out a piercing cry, collapsing on the ground. His body was still...

For the first time, I saw my mother, standing over him with a bloody dagger in her hands. She was shaking. Her eyes were wide as if in shock. "The oracle told me I would have to make a choice one day," she whimpered, her whole body ready to collapse.

With a lot of effort, I rose to my feet, removing the blade from her grasp. "You made the right one," I told her, my voice hoarse from my near fatal strangulation. I hugged her hard and we both began to cry.

* * * * *

WILLOW:

"I don't want you to go," Rosalyn told me, clothed in the golden garbs of a queen. With the death of their oppressive king, the Dökkalfar welcomed the gentler rule of his sister with open arms. However, my mother made it clear she would not be crossed. As she had proven, she had it in her to be just as vicious as her brother.

They had no choice but to accept me as Rosalyn's daughter. I was granted the title of princess after showing I had the ability to summon red fire in my palm which seems to be a rare gift among the Dökkalfar. The gift managed to seal my acceptance, but secretly I knew that I was neither Dökkalfar nor Ljosalfar. The oracle had told me that much...

"They are going to kill him," I told her, draping a black cape over my shoulders. It seemed an odd combination to wear a cape over my t-shirt and jeans, but it would take a long while for me to get used to the flowing white garments used by Elven women.

"You don't know that."

"I do," I told her, meeting her eyes. "I can't stand by and wait for them to do it."

She reached out and embraced me. "Nalin is not who you think he is," she said, whispering in my ear. "He is cold... Heartless. He kills for sport. He doesn't have a soul."

"He has me," I told her. "I am his soul. With me, he is kinder and gentler... I need to save him."

"If you must go, then take a convoy with you," she said worriedly, pulling away.

I shook my head. "Soldiers would call too much attention to me," I told her, holding a small pouch up for her to see. "I have another plan."

"You cannot form a door into the castle of the Ljosalfar," she told me matter-of-factly. "They have enchantments to block our race from entering."

I smiled at her knowingly. "I think I could be the exception."

* * * * *

NALIN:

I heard a commotion in the hallway.

At first, I thought they were coming for me... I thought my time in captivity was over and, now, I was going to meet my end. But when I heard the guard posted in front of my door shriek out in pain and collapse onto the floor, I knew this wasn't a murder attempt.

"Stand back, Nalin," a muffled voice ordered me through the door. "I am going to open it."

"It's enchanted," I told my rescuer. "It will not open except by my sister's hand."

"Well... I can do this two ways," the voice said with a humorous tone. "I can cut off your sister's hand and open the door... Or I can make a new entrance. Stand back."

Backing up, I stood in the middle of the room, waiting for something to happen.

It didn't take long... The wall next to the door began to glow, pulsating with a red light. Without warning, the thick, wooden walls began to splinter. I threw myself behind my bed before the wall exploded, sending large, wooden shards flying across the room like stakes.

When the smoke cleared, I peeked out from behind my mattress in time to see a figure enter from the gaping hole in the middle of my wall.

"Nalin," I heard Willow's voice call me.

In disbelief, I instantly rose to my feet. "Willow?"

She ran to me, throwing her hands around me. "Are you hurt?"

As the shock of her sudden appearance wore off, I held her close. "No," I answered, feeling my voice falter with new found emotion. The force her body emitted sent waves of calming waves throughout my body, forcing out the dark from my soul. "I thought they were going to kill you."

She pulled away, smiling up at me. "So much has happened," she said, her eyes sparkling with elation as she placed a hand on my cheek. "I will tell you everything, but we have to leave here."

Running my hand through a few strands of her long hair, I said, "Tell me now."

"Callan is dead. My mother killed him," she told me as my eyes glanced over the bruises on her neck which had begun to lighten. "Rosalyn is queen and I have a title."

"And the bruises?" I asked, trying to calm the sudden surge of hatred within me. "Did Callan hurt you?"

"It doesn't matter now," she said brightly, seeming unable to hide her happiness. "He is dead and we must leave."

I leaned down and kissed her forehead before caressing her cheek with mine. Guiding my hand down to the small of her back, I pressed her against me. She stretched her long body, meeting my eyes before planting my lips with a long, gentle kiss.

“I can’t go,” I told her sadly, pulling away. “I can’t run away. This is my kingdom.”

She nodded as her expression changed to one of anxiety. “Then, let’s take your crown back.”

* * * * *

WILLOW:

I forced the doors to the queen’s bedchamber open with a swift kick. Nalin entered behind me, holding two curved machetes in his hands. We had left several bodies in our wake. I was prepared to burn down the entire castle, killing every Elf that defied Nalin.

Daphne was standing defiantly at the far end of the room, flanked by six guards.

“Are you going to renounce the crown?” Nalin asked, stepping forward as agile as a dancer.

“Never,” Daphne replied through gritted teeth.

Nalin’s eyes met mine.

Without a single word, I knew this would be a bloody fight. I nodded towards him and he began to swing his blades in a circular motion. Holding out my palm in front of me, I summoned the red fire which seemed easier to evoke with Nalin beside me.

With their swords ready, four guards rushed at Nalin at the same time.

I shot a fireball at the first soldier, landing it on his face and blinding him. He screamed in agony as the other three rushed passed him, meeting Nalin’s blades.

Nalin killed the next two easily, piercing their bodies with his machetes at the same time. The fourth managed to slice Nalin across his chest. A pained expression crossed his face as his hand felt his wound. He held a blood stained hand to his face as if to confirm his injury.

Angry, my eyes glowed neon blue as I rushed towards the soldier, kicking him swiftly in his groin and batting away his sword as if it were a trinket. In an instant, I grabbed both his wrists with one hand, crushing them as his knees buckled. With my other hand position in front of his anguished face, sparks flew at him, burning red and then changing to blue. As he collapsed to the floor at my feet, I knew I had killed him, realizing that no one could survive their face being burned off.

“Can you heal?” I promptly asked Nalin over my shoulder.

“It has already begun,” he answered, sounding revitalized as the final two guards rushed him.

The clanging of swords filled my ears as I started towards Daphne who was now unguarded. “Do you renounce the thrown?” I asked in a sinister voice that was unrecognizable to my ears.

She shook her head, pulling out a dagger from her robes. She ran towards me trying to stab me with a broad stroke. Without thought, I grabbed the blade with my bare hand. I winced as pain shot up my arm.

Daphne held the handle of the dagger with both hands, trying to force it towards my face.

Ignoring my injury, I focused on melting the dagger with the heat of my palm. The blade that was once sharp was now dull and useless. I flung the piece of molten metal across the room as I punched her in her face, breaking her nose.

As blood trickled down her face, she grabbed at my hair, twisting it in her fingers.

I tackled her to the floor, trying to straddle her body to get a better angle to land a few punches, but she continued to fight me. With some effort, I pinned her down, grabbing her by both ears and banging her head on the floor viciously.

A sharp cry filled my ears and I realized Nalin had killed one of the soldiers he was fighting. The other one whimpered for mercy.

Daphne shrieked in pain and shot a fist out, landing on my chin.

Instantly, I let her go, cradling my face. Feeling a dangerous surge of energy enter me, I produced a blade out of thin air with magic I didn’t know I had. “Do you relinquish your crown?”

“No,” Daphne told me, appearing bloody and exhausted.

I held the blade over my head, preparing to plunge it into her heart when two strong hands prevented me. I struggled to bring down the blade on her while being pulled to my feet by strong arms.

“Enough,” Nalin pleaded when I realized he was the one trying to pull the dagger from my hands. He held me closely, trying to quench the fire within me. After a few long moments, I felt my body relax and my taut muscles settle. “Its over.” he whispered in my ear soothingly.

I slumped against him, finding myself unrecognizable. I couldn’t understand the need to kill... But I knew that if anyone else attempted to hurt Nalin, I would kill without mercy.

Confused, Nalin looked down at me. “What are you?” he asked. “I have never seen... You have so much power.”

I shook my head. “I don’t know. I didn’t know I had powers,” I told him honestly. “But I know that I am not Ljosalfar.”

Silent, he nodded in understanding.

“I am not Dökkalfar either,” I told him. “I am some kind of hybrid.”

Nalin reached down, taking the crown from Daphne’s head.

Panting from exhaustion, she didn't struggle as she lay motionless on the floor. She seemed to be in shock. Her eyes stared up at the ceiling blankly as if her mental faculties had failed her.

I took the crown from his hands and placed it upon his head. "This is where it belongs," I told him, starting to feel more like myself. "So, what's next?"

"I have to clean house and cut the weeds within my own court," he told me, glancing down at his sister. "Then, I was thinking of unifying the races..."

"How do you intend to do that?" I inquired, arching a brow.

"By marrying a certain Dökkalfar princess," he said with a slow smile playing on his lips. "It is the only way to blend the races and prevent conflict in the future."

I nodded in acceptance. "And I suppose there is nothing in it for you?" I asked teasingly.

"Absolutely nothing," he said with mock disinterest.

I wrapped my arms around his neck, holding him close and meeting his supple lips with my own.

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Message to the Reader:

I hope you enjoyed reading the second and final installment of *Weeping Willow*. I encourage you to write a review. Your feedback is helpful to the writing process. Be sure to check out *Sangre Falls*, another FREE short story about a vampire's search for a murderous werewolf. To stay posted on other FREE short stories and my upcoming novel, click on the links below.

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