

# WEEPING WILLOW

(PART ONE)

by

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EBOOK EDITION

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Weeping Willow

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## **CHLOË:**

“This is it,” Rosalyn Dennis announced as she pulled into the driveway of a large manor. “Do you like it?”

“Sure, Mom,” I muttered as I brushed a few strands of my silky, black hair away from my face. “I like haunted houses.”

“It's not haunted,” she said matter-of-factly. “This house is our new beginning. Can you see its potential, Chloë?”

“You say that every time we move,” I told her with a smile.

My mom smiled back. She wasn't like other mothers I have met. She appeared young. Her skin was smooth and free of wrinkles or blemishes. Her eyes were large and sparkled like bright, blue gems. She had long, black hair that was silky and straight, reaching her delicate waist. She was tall and thin, but she wasn't awkward like I was. Her movements were graceful.

Opening the passenger's side door, I got out of my mom's minivan. I looked up at the massive, stone facade. The house was almost inhabitable, but it seemed to have nice bones. It had large windows... Some of which were broken, but I could look past that. The windows were sure to let in lots of light. It had a heavy wood door with a stain glass window. Taking a better look at the glass, I realized it depicted a large oak tree.

“I like it,” I said sincerely, more for my own ears than anyone else's.

“Chloë,” my mom called from the rear of the van.

I turned to her.

She motioned with her hands. “Your ears, darling.”

“Oh,” I gasped, brushing my hair to my face. “Sorry.”

“Why don't you go inside and make yourself at home,” she said, taking a box from the back of the van. “Your room is up the stairs. The first door to the right.”

“Okay,” I said, feeling embarrassed.

I ran inside and flew up the stairs. I couldn't wait to see my new room. I hoped it was everything I dreamed it to be. We never lived in such a big house before. It made me wonder where mom got the money to buy this place...

When I reached the door, I gently slide it open. I couldn't believe my eyes. The room was twice as big as my old one. It had a large bay window with a window seat. I envisioned myself reading many books on that window seat.

My furniture had already arrived and I jumped on my bed. Excitement washed over me and I started to giggle. This house was a new start. No more being teased.

I stood up from my bed and walked over to the mirror on the opposite side of my room. My appearance was shocking to most people my age. I was tall with a wiry frame. People said I was all limbs like one of those daddy-long-legs spiders. As a matter-of-fact, kids use to call me daddy-long legs in school. We moved a lot, but I was teased no matter where we went. I used to cry about it, but, now, I understand them a bit more. Even at a young age, I towered over everyone in my class. Over the years, I have come to terms with my five foot ten inch frame and have been more comfortable in my skin than I was then.

Looking at my reflection, I took notice of my long, black hair that hung down to my waist limply. My skin was so pale it was almost translucent. My cheeks were roses and my lips were red. My eyes were like large aqua marbles and my ears...

My ears were pointy! It was a deformity that I shared with my mother. We always covered our ears with our long hair, but sometimes they poked out. It was hard to keep them covered. I was always insecure about them, because I was called Spock in school. My mom promised that when we had enough money she would pay for me to have surgery. I looked forward to the day I would look like everyone else.

Today is a new day, I thought, shaking the negative thoughts from my head.

“Are you okay, sweetie?”

I turned and saw my mother standing in the doorway. She wore a look of concern that I knew well. “Sure,” I responded with a weak smile, grasping the amethyst amulet around my neck. I've had it for as long as I remember. I wore it all the time. I felt naked without it. Whenever I felt embarrassed or uncomfortable, I found that when I held it in my hands I felt better. It was my security blanket.

“Well, hurry up and come downstairs. I thought we could order pizza and watch a movie,” she said, making her way down the staircase.

“What about unpacking?” I called after her.

“It can wait until tomorrow,” she yelled back. “Summer is almost over and I want to spend as much time together as possible.”

It made me sad to think that this would be our last year together before I went off to college. I tried to clear my mind of the thought of having to leave home. Instead, I adjusted my t-shirt in the mirror and ran downstairs.

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## **CHLOË:**

I walked leisurely in the woods.

The branches were covered in frost and the ground was white with fresh snow. I walked down a snow covered path that extended as far as the eye could see and was flanked by large oak trees. There were no signs of human life and I was solely surrounded by nature. All of a sudden, there was a light gust of wind and fresh snow flakes fell from above much to my own delight.

Looking down at myself, I saw that I wore a beautiful gown that was light and airy. I was guarded against the cold by a thick, white cape and matching gloves. I wore fur booties on my feet and my amethyst amulet hung from around my neck.

Walking through the field of oaks, I couldn't describe the sense of freedom I felt. I was in an isolated place. I was surrounded by nature and all its beauty. I felt at home... I couldn't help but smile, feeling warm despite the weather.

I watched as squirrels ran up and down the trees. I heard hawks squawking as they circled above the trees.

I began to run, leaving tracks in the snow in my wake. Giggling with delight, I made snowballs and threw them at trees. When I was done with my play, I trekked forward. Oblivious to my final destination, I knew I wanted to see as much as possible before I got there.

Suddenly, my attention was sparked as I heard a noise up ahead, igniting both fear and excitement within me. It sounded like a voice of some sort. It seemed to be angry... Maybe even in the mist of a fight...

Silently, I moved towards the sound, feeling a bit curious. My long coat dragging behind me, I stopped at a clearing in the forest. Every instinct within me told me to hide and I obeyed, concealing myself behind a snow-covered bush. It took time for my eyes to adjust to the scene before me. My vision grazed the figure that was causing the commotion...

It was a young man of seemed to be in his twenties. When I looked a little closer, I realized he was unlike any man I have ever seen. He was tall with a thin, muscular frame. His skin was pale and smooth. His hair was as white as the snow that covered the earth. It was straight and long, hanging nearly to his waist. His loose hair framed his face which possessed sharp features that were intriguing to the eye.

Impervious to the cold, his bare chest was exposed to the elements. He wore black boots that went up to his knees and loose fitting burgundy breeches. There wore a black scarf around his waist that was tied as if it were a belt.

Wielding two large, curved swords in his hands, he practiced swordplay like a soldier heading to war. He made violence look as if it was an art form. I watched in awe as he gathered momentum, running up a tree and flipping over in a back flip. He landed gracefully on his feet. The blades he held in his hands pierced the air as if slicing through an unworthy adversary.

I wanted to lean in to get a closer look. Without thinking, I shifted my weight forward; unaware of the presence of a horse strapped to the tree beside me, I gasped, drawing unwanted attention to myself.

Spooked, the horse broke the silence with a high pitched cry, signaling my presence.

I ducked further behind the bush, praying the stranger did not find me.

"What is it, Arion?" the man asked concerned. His voice was rich and warm, steeped in an accent that was unexpected and charming.

As I heard the man approach, my heart began to pound within my chest.

I looked around for a way out of this situation. I knew it would only take him seconds to find me. My first instinct was to run and I did... I ran as fast as I could, knowing there was really no place for me to hide.

“Stop!” the stranger screamed behind me.

I could hear his boots hitting the snow behind me as he gave chase.

Out of breath, I realized my limbs were about to give out on me as my thin body was not built for strenuous exercise. I made my best effort to run faster, but it was no use...

Feeling a distinct tug on my forearm, I gasped in pain. I felt like my arm was being pulled out of its socket as his grip tightened around me. Before I knew it, I was being swung around and pushed up forcefully against a tree.

With a dagger placed to my throat, he towered over me and was as solid as the trees that surrounded us. Seething with power, he asked, “Who are you?” He was afire as he spoke through gritted teeth. His mouth was curled in a grimace as if he couldn’t wait to inflict pain upon me. His gray irises were frighteningly penetrating and almost white in color.

He was strong. He may not have even realized his strength.

Trembling with fear, I could feel his warm breath on my cheek. “Please, I meant no harm,” I managed to spit out, my heart pounding in my chest. I knew he was not a man to be toyed with.

Glancing down at my amulet, his eyes connected with it as if it were familiar to him. Immediately, his eyes shifted to my face. Holding the dagger firmly in place, he yanked the chain from my neck with his free hand, holding it up for me to see. “Where did you get this?” he asked forcefully.

“I cannot remember,” I answered honestly.

“Speak! Or I will cut the tongue from your mouth,” he said menacingly.

Staring into his frightening eyes, I believed him. I could feel hot tears escaping my eyes, but I was powerless to stop them. “I swear to you that I do not remember,” I cried, growing increasingly hysterical. “I have had it all of my life!”

His eyes opened wide as if coming to some kind of realization. “Willow?” he questioned, his voice cracking as he searched my eyes.

With my voice caught in my throat, I suddenly couldn’t breathe.

“You live? How?” he asked puzzled, running his hand tenderly alongside my face while withdrawing his sword.

Still pressed against a tree, I clutched my chest unable to stop my heart from palpitating.

Jumping up in bed as if struck with a bolt of electricity, I anxiously took in my surroundings, desperately trying to find something familiar. My heart was beating at an accelerated rate. Hyperventilating,

I wiped my sticky forehead that was mopped with sweat. It took me a minute to realize that I was safe in my bedroom and not in the woods with someone who was ready to cut my tongue off. I was safe and was all a dream...

A faint glow caught my eye and I looked down at my sheets to get a better look. Still groggy, it took me a few seconds to realize the object my eyes had locked onto. It was my amulet. It had fallen off of my neck. The amethyst crystal seemed to glow as if it had a light source inside of its structure. Upon inspection, I realized that it had not fallen off... A link had been broken on the chain as if it had been torn off of my neck.

I began to quiver with the possibility that my dream could actually real.

I heard my bedroom door open with a click and my mother rushed inside. "What is the matter?" she asked, her eyes growing wide when she saw the glowing amulet. Throwing her arms around me, she held me in an embrace. I could feel her shaking as she said, "What have you done?"

I didn't know what to say as my voice was still trapped inside my throat.

"You've summoned him," she cried.

I didn't know what to do. I didn't know what I had done. Or, how to fix it...

Before I could react, she began to cry hysterically, "Why did you do it?"

Puzzled, I shook my head at a loss as to what she was referring to. "I don't know," I managed to say in a wispy voice. "I don't know."

\* \* \* \* \*

## **NALIN:**

I awoke with a jolt.

I had seen her. In that moment, she was real. She wore the amulet I had gifted her and had the same blue eyes that I admired so many years ago. Could it be? Could she still be alive?

Revitalized with a new sense of optimism, I jumped up from my bed, putting on my robe. I walked out into the long hallway that led to the stairs. The noise of my hurried footsteps bounced off the walls, echoing through the long corridor.

The palace was massive. The entire building was carved inside an ancient oak which was a hundred yards wide and reached as tall as the heavens. Each extended branch was converted into a turret. The castle had over a thousand windows and hundreds of doors which lead to countless rooms. Each exterior wall was at least three feet deep, making it impenetrable to the devices of an opposing army. The corridors were

lit with torches that were scattered throughout the structure and burned with an enchanted, blue fire. Such an enchantment was necessary, because ordinary fire might scorch the walls.

Descending the staircase, I made my way to the library. Bursting through the doorway, I encountered my sister whom was seated before a grand fireplace, reading over documents. "She lives, Daphne," I said excitedly, standing before her. "She lives! I have seen her!"

"Who are you referring to, Brother?" she asked, moving her long, white hair away from her face.

"Willow," I answered, my heart bursting within my chest. "I feel her presence. She is alive."

Daphne appeared skeptical. "Where have you seen her?"

My sister was beautiful. She was only older than me by a century but appeared more youthful. Her hair was long and straight, reaching passed her hips. Her skin was pale. Her eyes were gray like my own and her features were delicate and kind. She wore a red and gold robe that reflected softly over the light of the fire.

"Within a dream," I answered.

She laughed, throwing her head back. "Nalin, dreams are merely illusions of the mind. They depict that which we want most ourselves to see," she said matter-of-factly. "Do not get your hopes up for a dream."

Suddenly feeling unsure, I shifted my weight nervously. "I have proof," I said, desperate to prove to her what I already knew in my being.

She stood up from her seated position. "Show me," she said, her eyes reflecting the light of the fire.

I held up my hand, exposing the ring which I wore on my small finger. "It is aglow," I explained her.

"That proves nothing," she scoffed, but her eyes flickered with something that contradicted her words.

"This ring is linked to the necklace I gifted her when she was born," I replied, stunned that she could dismiss my claim. "I placed a spell over the stones when I created them that will manifest our life force. It would not glow if she didn't have life."

"Has it glowed before this night?"

I shook my head. "No," I answered truthfully.

"How could that be if she had life all this time?" she questioned skeptically.

"I don't know," I answered, conflicted. "Perhaps, if she were in another realm..."

Daphne placed a hand on my shoulder. "Is this because of the engagement?" she asked, concerned. "Are you scared to wed?"

"There will be no wedding. I will not marry for obligation," I answered forcefully.

"You must get over these old fashioned beliefs of the elders."

"Father believed in them. Mother did as well," I retorted. "The prophecies do not lie."

"Look at where it has got them. They are dead! Casualties of this horrid war," she replied angrily.

"There is no one love that unites us to another. Willow was not your other half. She was a mistake."

“Enough!” I shouted menacingly, balling my hands into fists.

“Why do you live your life by the prediction of an oracle?” she asked sternly. “Jasmine is a girl worthy of your affection. I dare say you will be quite happy together.”

“Jasmine’s worth is in that she is pure blood,” I admitted. “But the oracle was clear that I could unite both heaven and earth... Now, I realize Willow’s significance in—”

“I will not have you dirtying our blood,” Daphne countered, cutting him off. “One day all of this will be yours... I cannot hand over the empire to a brother who wishes to destroy all that we stand for.”

“The realm is in your hands for now, Sister. I would rather be on the front lines than dealing in politics,” I told her honestly. “But when the time comes, no one can deny me my birthright.”

“It is your birthright, but I wonder if you have made the transition from Elfling to Elf,” she said. “You continue to chase after an illusion! You lack the maturity needed for such a position. Someone in such a position puts their obligations first.”

I looked down at the floor. I knew she was right, but I did not want to hear her words. “Can’t you see what this could mean for me? For our kingdom?”

Daphne said nothing.

“It would mean that we have entered into a war for nothing. That I fought on the front lines, risking my life, for nothing... Perhaps, there could be peace. Isn’t it worth the effort to look for her?”

“I can sense your concern... I am not without heart,” she said, taking her seat. “We have already scoured the earth in search of your precious Willow. I will send a small search party to look for her once again. If nothing, it will prove to you that she is gone and you can move on with your life.”

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## **CHLOË:**

I woke up the next morning and headed downstairs. All sorts of wonderful smells were wafting from the back of the house. When I walked into the kitchen, I saw Mom was busy preparing breakfast. “Good morning,” I said, taking a seat at the table.

“Good morning,” she replied, not looking up from the eggs she was frying.

I took in my mother’s appearance. It looked as if she hadn’t slept all night. She was wearing an apron over her pajamas. Her hair was a mess. Her eyes seemed puffy.

“Did you sleep well?” I asked as if I didn’t already know the answer.

She moved the frying pan from the stove and placed some eggs on a plate. “No, I didn’t,” she responded, walking towards me and placing the plate in front of me.



Avoiding eye contact, I didn't have the courage to ask her what happened last night. I didn't know how to start the conversation. I was terribly embarrassed by what I had done and, yet, I didn't even understand the ramifications of my actions. As far as I knew, I didn't do anything unusual. Yet, my mother had said that I "summoned" someone.

My mom stuffed her hand in the pocket of her apron and pulled out my necklace. She held it out to me and said, "What are we going to do about this?"

"Did you fixed it?" I inquired, reaching out and attempting to grab it.

"No," she answered, moving it away from my reach.

Raising an eyebrow, I asked, "Can I have my necklace back?"

She took a seat next to me. "I wanted to talk to you," she said with a look of concern on her face.

"About last night?" I asked, watching her mannerisms closely.

"Yes," she replied.

I could feel my heart begin to quicken. "Did I do something bad?"

Placing my necklace on the table, she looked down at it, appearing anxious.

With some trepidation, I questioned, "Did I do something wrong?"

"I don't want to feel guilty," she said, petting my head. "I didn't realize what I was saying last night."

"It was glowing," I said, motioning towards the necklace.

My mother's eyes were drawn back to the table. "You can't keep it, Chloë," she said, out of nowhere.

"What?" I asked, outraged. "I've had it all my life. It is my only piece of jewelry!"

"It is not jewelry," she said, taking the necklace into her hands and walking over to the counter with it.

Stumbling out of my seat, I chased after her. "What are you going to do?"

I watched in horror as she placed the necklace on the counter. In one swift movement, she lifted the frying pan from the stove and brought it down on the crystal pendant, shattering it into a million pieces.

"No!" I screamed, feeling tears spring forth from my eyes.

"It is for your own good, darling," she said calmly and walked out of the kitchen.

I picked up the dust of my pulverized amethyst pendant. Tears streaming down my face, I silently wondered, who was this woman I was living with and where did my mother go?

\* \* \* \* \*

**NALIN:**

As soon as dawn broke, I rode Arion through the woods to the old cottage. I hadn't been back there since it had been set ablaze... Not since the night the war was rekindled between the sons of heaven and the sons of the earth.

I lowered myself to the ground, looking up at the cottage.

The small building was in ruins. It had been almost a hundred years since the fire had ravaged its timbers. It was a beautiful structure once. I created it with a form of sorcery I knew well; the power to manipulate nature. The limbs of the willow tree were lengthened and twisted until they formed the frame of the structure. Its draping leaves formed the roof above, spreading open only on starry nights. Although contorted, the tree was still alive until the night of the fire...

"Stay here, Arion," I told the horse, removing my gloves and walking towards the threshold.

When I entered, I looked around, trying to remember it as I had seen it last, but its current state of ruin made such a task difficult. Fresh snow covered every surface. The roof was gone as if the lid had been taken off a trinket box and the walls had crumbled in the inferno. Mother Nature was reclaiming her creation, but I could still smell the stench of burned wood, assaulting my nostrils.

I knew what I had come to find. Without further hesitation, I walked to the center of the one room structure, removing debris until I reached what would have been the floor. Tirelessly, I uncovered as much as I could until I found it... A large, rectangular scorch mark.

Kneeling down, I traced over it with my hand. My muscles tensed. I could still feel the energy evoked in order to make such a marking. Such sorcery was forbidden... How could Willow have escaped? A door had been opened, but by who?

Anger rose within me as I realized that I had been tricked. Someone took her away from me... Perhaps, this person lit the cottage on fire to cover their sorcery.

I decided then that I would tell no one of my findings. Instead, I would open another door and find Willow in secret. I vowed that I would not stop until I had found her and brought her home.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **CHLOË:**

A month had passed since my mother smashed my amulet and I caught myself numerous times feeling for it around my neck. I had to repeat the obvious to myself daily... It was not there and it wouldn't be there ever again. I rarely cared for material things, but this necklace was special. It was apart of me somehow. I felt lost without it.

Curled up on the couch, I flipped through the channels on the television, hoping to find something good enough to watch. My mother had been gone for about an hour and I was expecting her to walk through the door at any minute.

Suddenly, I heard a noise upstairs. It sounded like normal house sounds so it didn't raise any suspicions.

"It's just a noisy floorboard, Chloë," I told myself, continuing to flip through the channels.

The second time I heard the sound it was more distinct and solid like something large dropping on the floor above my head. I looked up at the ceiling instantly, feeling my insides begin to shake.

Switching off the television, I carefully stood up. It might have been nothing, but I wasn't going to take any chances. I glanced at the umbrella stand by the front door. I put my wooden baseball bat there the day before. Stealthily, I walked over and grabbed the bat. I slowly ascended the stairs with my bat in hand. The landing was clear of intruders so I peeked around the corner.

The hallway was empty. However, I could distinctly hear someone rummaging through our things, but I couldn't determine exactly where the intruder was. I treaded lightly, sticking close to the wall.

When I reached the end of the first part of the corridor, I peeked around another corner of the 'L' shaped hall that led to unused bedrooms. With a large window at the end of the corridor illuminating the darkness, I cautiously looked down the hall.

Along the far wall, I was startled to see a large, rectangular door I had never seen before. It was unlike all the others that filled the house. Large boulders framed the doorframe like molding. The door was made of metal and was at least eight feet tall. There were two frosted glass windows that were covered with sturdy iron bars. The light that escaped from the windows and the bottom of the door was orange like fire, shimmering as if sprinkled with specks of gold.

Leaning towards it, I touched the metal knob. Within seconds, the signal of excruciating pain shot through my nervous system as the metal knob was burned the top layer of my flesh, branding my palm. I jumped back, cradling my hand close to my torso.

I couldn't explain the new door. Perhaps, I just never noticed it before. But, then, why was the handle so hot?

I decided to explore it later...

Avoiding the new door, I walked slowly to the room at the end of the hall. I realized quickly that the noises I had heard originated from that room. Ready to inflict the first blow, I held the bat in a swinging position, despite of my injured hand.

Ignoring my pain, I took my first step inside the room, adrenaline pumping through my veins. It was bright as the sunlight beamed through the grimy windows, unobstructed by curtains. Old furniture was stuffed into the small storage room and covered with white sheets, appearing like ghosts.

I fearfully stepped further into the room. I could hear something at the other end so I took another step. Then another step and then another until I was at the close to an adjacent wall. Something was covered with a sheet. It was tall and thin. It could have been a man...

My heart began to race as I noticed the sheet was moving slowly. In one fluid motion, I uncovered it while holding the bat firmly. A large mouse squealed at the discovery of its hiding place and ran across the room.

Holding my chest, I looked at what I had uncovered. I got all worked up over an old, wooden coat rack. Slowly, I let out the breath that I had been holding in my lungs. "It is just a coat rack, Chloë," I told myself. "Such an idiot."

Without warning, the floor creaked behind me and I could feel the wooden boards bend to accommodate a heavy mass. Nearly dropping the bat, I spun around and gasped.

A large, man towered over me, standing at roughly six foot seven. Although his face was twisted in a grimace, he was quite handsome. His waist length, black hair fell limply across his back, framing angular jaw and deep-set, green eyes. His skin was a light shade of caramel and free of blemishes. Starting at his brow and covering most of his forehead, the figure wore a crown which was like a thick, metal band with a red, oval jewel at its center. He wore metal breastplate that seemed to have been beaten and molded to his form. It was coupled with baggy, brown breeches and black riding boots that reached his kneecaps.

"Don't come near me," I shouted at him, shaking. "I have a bat!"

He laughed.

"Who—What are you?" I asked, ready to swing.

"You are such a little thing," he said menacingly, his voice deep and musical. "A little thing that started a big war..."

"Get out of my house," I yelled as my heart leaped into my mouth. "I won't ask you again!"

"You cannot even wield a weapon," he stated smugly, inching closer to me.

I did not lower the bat although I could see that it was shaking in my unsteady grasp. Cursing myself, I just could not keep my hands from trembling. "Don't think for one minute that I won't use this on you."

Without warning, he stepped forward, grabbing the bat from me and flinging it against the wall.

Like a spooked animal, I gasped and, instantly, started running.

The stranger made no attempt to run after me. Instead, he trailed behind me, using his large gate to the fullest extent and bridging the gap between us with at a steady pace. His face filled with excitement as if he wanted to play with me before crushing me with his boot.

Before I even grasped the situation fully, I had already reached the stairs and flung myself down, landing at the base. I exploded out the front door as if I had been propelled by a canon and ran for my life.

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## **CHLOË:**

I ran until I reached town. I didn't know what I was going to do. My first instinct was to find my mom. Rushing through the streets, I glanced through the windows of the shops anxiously. Bumping into a few shoppers, I decreased my pace, trying to get a grip on my beating heart.

"Can I help you?" a strong voice asked behind me.

I turned and saw a uniformed police officer. Before I could beat myself up for my erratic behavior, my eyes met the officer's green eyes and my heart stopped.

It was the intruder, disguised as a police officer!

Before I could scream, I was pushed into an alley between two shops. I tried to run, but his body blocked mine. I backed into the alley and he took steps closer to me. Suddenly mute, I lifted my hand to my throat, willing a scream to escape my lips. Hyperventilating, I couldn't get enough air in my lungs to scream. Frantic, my eyes darted behind him to the street, but it seemed that all the shoppers that filled the streets were gone.

Without warning, he lounged at me, grabbing my arm roughly.

Struggling to break free from his iron grip, I dug my heels in the ground and tried to twist free. But he wouldn't let go! The more I resisted him the tighter his grip on my arm became.

While restraining me, he removed red powder from his pocket. I watched as he threw it at the foot of an adjacent brick wall.

Almost instantly, the air around me grew warm...

Stunned, I glanced at the wall and watched as a door began to form before my eyes. I momentarily stopped struggling. I watched in awe as the same metal door that had suddenly appeared in my house formed in the alley. My mind couldn't grapple with what my eyes had seen. It was as if all the laws of physics had been bended by a force I couldn't quite understand.

As if in a trance, my body went slack. I reawakened when my would-be-abductor reached for the knob. I began to resist his grip again, throwing kicks at him and landing a few.

Without warning, the roar of a motor shattered the silence around us. Feeling some semblance of relief pour through me, I glanced down the alley to see a motorcycle coming towards us at full speed.

I watched as the helmeted biker jumped off the motorcycle, landing on his feet and letting the bike flip over with its motor still running. By the time the bike stopped sliding across the pavement, it was dented and probably unusable.

Removing his helmet in a swift motion, the biker pulled out a metallic stick and held it in front of him. It was the size of a ruler and etched with ancient symbols. As if by magic, two blades as long as swords appeared at both ends.

Stunned, I look in the biker's appearance in awe of him. He was quite tall, standing at around six foot five. He was clad in leather from head to toe, but didn't appear to be a typical biker. He was agile on his feet. His skin was like porcelain and as smooth as glass. His sparkling, blue eyes were deep set. Cropped, black hair framed his light features well. He looked more like a model than a biker or a ninja for that matter...

The officer threw me on the ground and withdrew his own weapon. As if created by the air, a curved sword appeared in his hands...

My heart leaped into my throat as they began circling one another. Within seconds, they collided. As weapons clashed, I screamed, finding my voice once again.

Trying to avoid becoming decapitated, I crawled out of the alley on my hands and knees. As I reached the end of the alley, I climbed to my feet swiftly, finding the streets empty around me. Hearing the clashing of metal in my ears, I glanced back to see the fight was evenly matched as both seemed to know how to wield a sword. I watched as the biker blocked his opponent's sword with his blade, taking advantage of his position and kneeling his adversary in the stomach.

The officer went with the momentum of his falling body... Once he was on the ground, he swept his legs through the biker's, tripping him and bringing him down.

My heart jumped. It dawned on me that the biker was somehow protecting me. If he were to fail at his mission, I would be open to attack. Fear trickling back into my numb body, I ran in the direction of home, hoping my mother was there so that I could warn her.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **CHLOË:**

"Mom!" I shouted, flinging the front door open and running into the house.

Frantic, my mother appeared in the front hall. "Where have you been, Chloë?"

I dashed across the space that separated us and hugged her tightly. “We have to leave here! We’re not safe,” I cried, trembling.

“What is going on?” she asked, her voice strained. She pulled me away from her. With her hands clenched around me shoulders, she questioned me with her eyes.

“There was a man in the house! He was in one of the rooms upstairs and there was this... door. I don’t know where it came from,” I said without breathing.

I watched my mother as her eyes seemed to spark with life. “A door?” she asked, her voice steady.

I shook my head. “I went to look for you and he found me! He was dress like a police officer,” I said, unable to contain my fear. “We have to go! I don’t know how much longer the biker can hold him back!”

My mother embraced me. “Shhh. It is going to be alright.”

I felt myself burst into tears. “He is going to come back for us.”

“How do you know?”

“I just know,” I told her firmly.

“I don’t think so...”

“How can you say that?” I asked, trying to pull away from her, but she held me tightly.

Rubbing my back, my mother told me, “No one is after you... It’s alright.”

Suddenly, I felt warmth emanate from her touch. The tension in my body dissipated slowly and I felt my limbs go slack. Leaning against her for support, my mind began to cloud over as if I had been drugged. “Mom?” I whispered, feeling my body grow numb.

She eased my body to the wooden floor. “You’re just tired, darling. Rest and when you wake up everything will be fine,” she said soothingly, petting my head.

My eyes closed and I was instantly surrounded by darkness.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **NALIN:**

I saw her as she ran out of the gate; a gate that lead to a manor on a hill. She appeared frighten and I had to follow her. I had no idea that she was being pursued by Callan.

Seeing her again, even for a few fleeting moments, made my heart stop. I was overwhelmed with a feeling although I couldn’t comprehend which one. I had found my twin soul and we were at the cusp of meeting once again.

Glancing up at the setting sky, I clutched my arm tightly, willing the bleeding to stop. My leather jacket was ruined. It had been slashed by Callan’s sword.

I should have known better than to fight in this world, being away from the source of magic made it harder for me to heal. My spells took longer the more time I spent in this realm.

Anger rippling through me, I swore, cursing Callan and spitting on his name. He had gotten away from me, but I knew we'd meet again... And I'd have my revenge.

Walking towards the manor on the hill, I had visions of how Willow would react when we laid eyes on each other once again. Would she scream or run? Would she accept who she was? Would she accept me?

I couldn't remember how I felt before her... Since her disappearance, I have been numb to anything but anger. She was the best of me... I knew it!

I knew such magic would have consequences... I accepted them without full comprehension, but if I had the choice again, I would change nothing.

She was my other half. Where my soul was cold, hers was filled with warmth. Where my heart was filled with darkness and hatred, hers was filled with beauty and love. It would be wonderful to feel those feelings again... My cold heart couldn't comprehend the meaning of such a union. I had been overcome with hatred when she was taken from me and, now, something sparked within me that hadn't been there all these years... Hope.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **CHLOË:**

I awoke in my bedroom sometime during the night. Looking down at myself, I noticed that my mother hadn't bothered to undress me before placing me on the bed. Still wearing my sneakers, I was thrown on top of my sheets haphazardly with my ankles hanging off the mattress.

Sitting up, I felt light. My shoulders were lax and my movements felt effortless. Smiling, I buried my head in my hands, feeling somewhat euphoric. I knew I should have been worried... I knew I should have been scared. Someone was after me; yet, against my better judgment, I could hardly acknowledge such feelings.

How had she done it? How had my mother put me to sleep when I was on the verge of hysterics? Was I just exhausted?

Glancing up, I noticed my window was ajar. Feeling the chill of the night on my skin, I quickly rose to my feet, stretching my limbs as I made my way to the window. Closing the window forcefully and locking it shut, I momentarily stared out into the moonlit night.



Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a shadow shift to my left, huddling in a dark corner of my room. Surprised, I jumped back, forgetting my former state of euphoria, curving my back like an angry cat. “Who is there?” I asked shrilly.

With my eyes straining in the darkness, I watched as a figure came forward from the shadows and into the moonlight that filtered in from my windows.

Awareness shifted into my consciousness as I recognized my intruder. It was the biker I had seen in the alley... His jacket was torn. He gripped his left arm as blood dripped down, landing on the wood floor with a splat. His porcelain skin appeared gray in the moonlight, lending to his unearthly appearance.

I gasped, ready to scream for my mother.

Without warning, he shot forward at me, pushing me up against the wall with one hand and covering my mouth with the other. “Don’t scream,” he ordered hoarsely, his lips close to my ears.

I nodded, remembering that this man had risked his life for me a few hours earlier.

With his breathing haggard, he removed his hand, moving to lean his sleek body against the wall for support.

Glancing momentarily at my bedroom door, I wondered if my mother had heard the commotion inside my bedroom. When she didn’t knock, I knew she must have been sleeping deeply. “You’re bleeding all over my floor,” I whispered to him, stating the obvious.

His deep, blue eyes were trained on me; he slid down the wall slowly until he was sitting on my floor. “Sorry,” he said with a humorless laugh. “I’m trying to heal...”

Without thinking, I stepped towards my bed, grabbing my sheet and ripping it apart. Returning to him, I spun the torn piece of cloth over his wound, using it like a tourniquet. “What can I do?” I asked, unafraid. Despite the strangeness of our initial encounter and the awkwardness of this meeting, I felt indefinably comfortable in the stranger’s presence...

As I crouched by him, he lifted his hand and touched a few strands of my silky, black hair. “You are already doing it,” he replied, seeming to drink in every detail of my appearance as if trying to etch my image in his memory.

“I haven’t done anything yet,” I told him, wondering if he was in the first stages of shock. “I have a first-aid kit somewhere... I will be right back.”

I began to rise, but he pulled me back to him. “Don’t go,” he said, appearing drained.

Nervous under the weight of his stare, I averted my eyes. “The tourniquet will stop most of the blood, but not all... I can’t have you bleeding to death on my floor.”

“I can heal,” he told me adamantly, his gaze intense and unwavering. “But it will take longer in this world...”

Worried, I cast him a sidelong glance. Don't people start to talk gibberish before they lose consciousness?

"I will explain everything to you, Willow," he said, as if he could read exactly what I was thinking from the expression on my face. "But you must come with me."

I shook my head. "My name is Chloë," I told him silently. "I can't go with you. I don't even know you."

"You know me better than you think... All will be revealed, but it is not safe for us to talk here," he said, taking my hand into his and using the other to remove blue powder from the pocket of his jacket.

I resisted, glancing back at my bedroom door as if expecting my mother to burst in. "But—"

"You can stay here and I will bleed to death on your floor... Or you can come with me and find out who you really are," he told me seriously, holding my hand firmly in his. "The choice is yours. We can stay here or we can go, but I am not leaving you."

\* \* \* \* \*

#### **NALIN:**

"How long will this take?" she asked me after a long moment of silence.

"Time is relative," I answered, starting to sprinkle the blue dust I had removed from my jacket along the edge of the wall. "One year here can be hundreds over there or a month over here. Or no time may pass at all."

"Are you trying to confuse me?" she asked, sounding a bit annoyed with me.

I glanced at her. "I am trying to answer your questions to the best of my ability," I said matter-of-factly.

I could feel the energy change around her and anger seeping into her soul. "I just want straight talk. Who are you? Why was the other guy after me? And, what do my mother and I have to do with it? Until I get answers, I am not going anywhere."

Angered by her defiance, I swiftly turned on my heel to face her. Within seconds my anger dissipated and I was swimming in the depths of her stare, running my blood stained hand across the line of her jaw. She didn't flinch. Her wide, blue eyes continued to stare up at me questioningly. "All will make sense soon, but it is not something I can just tell you. I have to show you as well," I told her, sending calming energies though my touch. I was aware that such energy shifts were possible when we were in close proximity to one another, but I knew they could be controlled. She could learn to control the angry feelings I emitted as I could channel the peaceful energies she transmitted. "I promise that you will always be free to return."

She nodded, appearing a bit more serene than she had a few seconds earlier.

“Lock your bedroom door,” I ordered, not wanting to face a confrontation with her caretaker.

I whispered the sacred words and, before long, the doorway I had summoned appeared in the wall. I stared at it recognizing the rounded, double doors that shun with the magic of my kind. It was constructed from rich wood and iron. Its frosted windows were covered with swirled iron work that appeared like vines. Sparkling, blue light emerged from beneath the door, offering a glimpse of the magic on the other side.

Willow let out an audible gasp.

I held out my hand for her. “Do not fear, my love,” I told her. “This is how we must travel.”

She took my hand without question and we entered the doorway, closing the portal behind us with the slamming of the door.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **CHLOË:**

In awe of everything around me, I walked into the room which was lit by beautiful torches of blue fire, casting the room in a dim glow that was utterly magical. The room had twelve foot cathedral ceilings and wood wall panels constructed of rich mahogany. Beneath my beat-up sneakers were white marble floors. Two stately chairs flanked a carved mahogany table. My hands ran along table top which was covered with ancient books, scrolls, and other knick knacks.

At the edge of the table stood an hourglass that was constructed solely from sculpted glass and seemed to magically remain level on its rounded bottom. I bent my body forward toward it, leveling my line of vision. Filled with purple sand, I noticed that the sand fell continually, but the top of the hourglass never emptied... It seemed to have enough sand to go on forever.

Glancing back at the door, I realized it had vanished. Feeling betrayed, I faced my captor who already had his hands up in submission. “Where is the door?” I demanded.

“There is a door in this room, but it masks itself as an ordinary object,” he explained calmly. “I just want to make sure that you don’t leave before I can tell you everything.”

I nodded, continuing to explore.

I took note of a restroom to my left, but it didn’t interest me. Glancing back at the table, I noticed that to the right of the table stood a rounded, floor length mirror which was encased in an oak frame. There were intricate carvings of vines encircling its frame. I stared at my reflection, surprised by the vivid color of my eyes. Instantly, my hands reached my face as if checking to see if I was seeing my true reflection.

“That is how your eyes appear in our world,” I heard my companion tell me.

I continued into the room and saw a four-poster bed. Each column of the bed frame was carved like vines reaching upward to the sky. There must have been thirty pillows on the bed that were covered with fabrics of every color and trimmed in gold thread. The nightstand contained an unlit, silver candelabra and at the foot of the candelabra was a small, round compass. I watched as the needle zipped around the dial, looking for north and never settling on a clear direction.

I turned to him, watching him as he perched himself on the edge of the wood table. “So, what world are we in where compasses can’t find north and hourglasses never run out?” I asked, folding my arms as I joined him at the table. Leaning my bottom against the table, I felt my heart speed up within my chest. I was inwardly conflicted between wanting to be near him and wanting to flee. I shook my thoughts out of my head, knowing I needed to hear everything he had to say with a clear mind.

“We are in the in-between,” he answered, his voice appearing to resume its original richness. He had a charming accent I hadn’t recognized earlier. It reminded me of something... Continuing to take in his appearance, I noticed his complexion seemed improved as his color was slowly returning to him. “I didn’t want to take you to my world without an orientation.”

Feeling a hint of elation, I knew I was on the cusp of something big. “What is your name?” I asked innocently.

He smiled, seeming to be surprised that I cared to ask.

“It is just that I don’t remembering you mentioning your name before...”

“Nalin,” he answered, the hint of a smile playing on his full lips.

I repeated his name softly. “I like that... Does it have a meaning?”

He nodded. “Among my people the names you give the young have a great importance. A name must summarize their connection with nature or a quality of significance,” he told me, looking at me admiringly. “Nalin means lotus flower.”

“Lotus flower?” I questioned, laughing a bit. “You don’t seem to be the lotus flower type.”

He averted his eyes shyly before they returned to mine with increased intensity. “The lotus flower is considered one of the most beautiful flowers in our world. Besides that it holds a hidden meaning. A type of symbolism for my people,” he said, glancing down at his arm and removing his leather jacket.

I was shocked to see the whole left side of his white T-shirt was saturated with red fluid I recognized as blood. His skin was stained with it. It made me sick that I hadn’t realized how much fluid he had lost. Feeling on the verge of tears, I throw my arms around him, breathing in his natural sweet scent mixed with the metallic stench of bodily fluids.

For the first time, I noticed that he removed the makeshift tourniquet I had made. Without thinking, I ran my fingers softly across his wound which had already clotted and was almost completely healed. I was in shock and, perhaps, a bit scared. In that moment, I knew that everything Nalin was about to share with me was real. Whether I wanted to hear it or not, I knew it was going to be the truth.

“I want to know about you, Nalin. Where do you come from?” I asked, pulling away finally. I didn’t fully understand my behavior. I had never felt so drawn to someone before... I was so used to rejection by my peers and here was someone who wanted to share a bit of himself with me. Suddenly, for the first time, I felt a warm sense of comfort as if someone cared. “Tell me about your world.”

“It would be less of a shock if I showed you what I can do,” he told me.

I nodded in response.

His eyes shifted to my neck. “You are not wearing the necklace,” he said, his finger gently grazing the nape of my neck.

Electricity traced through me. “My mother destroyed it,” I told him, suddenly embarrassed that I melted under his touch. “I don’t really know why she would do such a thing...”

“I can fix that,” he said smoothly, taking the hourglass from the table into his hands and admiring it. He rose from his perched position and turned around to face me, “This hourglass is filled with small pieces of amethyst.” He held it up to the light, watching its contents sparkle like fairy dust. Without warning, his body tensed and he struck the hourglass on the edge of the table, shattering the top half.

I jumped at the force of his actions. For the first time since the alleyway fight, I could see the swiftness of his power. “What are you doing?”

Ignoring me, he poured the contents of the hourglass onto his hand and cupped it with the other. “*Veneficus est in mihi quod per mihi,*” he whispered under his breath.

Blue light emanated from his hands as he made a mashing motion with them. Within seconds, the light evaporated and he lifted his hands up toward me. He removed his top hand and uncovered an amethyst crystal similar to my original one.

“How did you—” I started, reaching for the crystal out of his palm and held it out into the light. “It looks just like the one I had...”

He nodded. “I know,” he said, watching my reaction with some joy. “I made the original one.”

My head swung upwards, meeting his eyes. “What do you mean?”

He dove in his pocket and retrieved a ring with a matching crystal stone. It glowed as my necklace had the night of the dream. “My ring and your necklace are connected as we are,” he said, slipping the ring onto his pinky finger. “I made them both the night of your creation. My ring glows with your life force as your pendant glows with mine.”

Looking at him, I told him, "I believe you."

He took the crystal from my hands and found a metal chain on the desk. With magic, he fused the two, creating a necklace. He placed it around my neck with little effort.

I felt the necklace just below the nape of my neck and smiled up at him, filled instantly with happiness.

"I am so glad," he said, cupping my face with his hands. "I want to tell you everything... All I ask is that you hear me."

Feeling tingles under his touch, I shivered.

"Our kind has always been able to emit feelings through physical contact," he said with a teasing smile. "I can make you feel as I do with a single touch."

I nodded, remembering how he had calmed me earlier with the touch of his hand. "Our kind? What are you, Nalin?" I inquired, feeling butterflies in my stomach. "What do you believe I am?"

He turned away from me on his heel, walking towards a chair and pulling it in my direction. When he reached me, he extended his hand offering me a seat. I sat in the chair and he leaned on the table once again. "We are Elven," he responded without hesitation. "We belong to the seventh realm... The realm of magic."

"What is your world called?" I asked like the gullible little girl I was. I had seen too much already to question Nalin's words. I knew with every fiber of my being that what Nalin told me was true.

"Earth," he laughed. "It is just another dimension which exists simultaneously to the Earth you live on... The reason I can make you that amulet and open doors to other dimension lies in the fact that I am a magical being by nature. However, as I spend more time away from the Earth of my dimension, I lose a bit of magic with every passing hour, because I am away from the source."

"What is the source?"

"It is in the air... It is in the water and ground. It is the essence of my planet," he responded.

"What do I have to do with a war?" I asked, without thought. "The man in the alley mentioned that it was my fault... That I started a war, but, as far as I remember, I've never been to your Earth."

His eyes darkened with emotion as he slouched in his perched position on the table. "There has always been conflict between the two races, but your disappearance changed everything..." he said regretfully. "In many ways, I must take blame for what occurred..."

As a show of my understanding, I nodded for him to go on.

"It all started with a prophecy," he started, pausing as if searching for the right words to say. "Before the current war, there was a period of peace. My father was a great king that designed a treaty that granted peace for the Elves of the sky, the Ljosalfar, and those of the earth, the Dökkalfar."

"Which kind are you?"

“I am a Ljosalfar.”

I took in his appearance once more. “But you look just like a man. An impressive man, but there is nothing Elven about you...”

“I can take many forms that may fool the eye. I needed to appear human in order not to bring attention to myself,” he told me. “But I can take on whatever form pleases you.”

I felt my face grow hot. I thought he looked fine just the way he was...

Feeling a draft, I suddenly realized that my ears were exposed and quickly brought my hands to them. I tried to fix my hair to cover them up, but Nalin grabbed my wrists.

“Do not hide from me behind your hair. Never be ashamed of who you are, Willow,” he told me firmly, letting go of my wrists. “You are perfection.”

Staring at him, I was completely enthralled by his every mannerism. I watched his lips as he spoke with fascination and heard every word like an attentive student. “Please, I want to hear more.”

He nodded and continued, “As per the beliefs of my people, every Elfling receives a prophecy at the time of their transition from Elfling to Elf. I went to an oracle,” he said, then paused.

“What did the oracle say?”

“She foresaw that I would grow to become the great king,” he said sadly. “But she also said that great power would come at a high price for me. The oracle made it clear that I would never have a satisfying union with any woman from my kingdom. I was doomed to live a life without love... without offspring.”

I watched as his face changed to one of unfathomable sadness.

“I couldn’t let that happen... I was going to be a king. What is a king without an heir? What is life without true love?” he asked me, not really wanting a response. “My parents were heartbroken... They believed in the oracle, but they still had hope that she was wrong... But I knew she wasn’t. In the height of my despair, I started to comb through ancient books—Books filled with forbidden magic. I learned how to do things that were beyond the laws of magic. See, it is normal for Elves to manipulate nature... That kind of magic is apart of our being, but making doors into other dimensions is strictly forbidden. That is manipulation of the universe and may alter the natural order of things. As you know, I can enter realms beyond my own...”

I nodded, sitting on the edge of my seat.

“One night, I had fallen asleep on the books I was looking through and when I awoke, there was a spell... A spell that held the answers I had been searching for. After all of my searching, I found out how to create another being. Not just another Elf, but my other half. Spirit of my spirit. Flesh of my flesh,” Nalin told me, keeping his dazzling eyes trained on the floor. “I learned how to split my soul and sacrifice a piece of my flesh to create a twin soul of sorts.” His eyes shifted upwards until they met mine. “I created you.”

I felt my heart race within my chest. My breathing became labored and my thoughts were a jumble. “What are you talking about? You couldn’t have created me... I have a mother!” I told him, bursting with sudden emotion.

“You don’t have a mother,” he said adamantly, shaking his head slightly. “I created you and I named you Willow.”

I was visibly shaking. It was a tremendous shock to find out the life I had been living was a lie. I wasn’t who I thought I was... Why couldn’t Nalin just let me continue to live that lie? Why did he have to find me and tell me this truth I didn’t want to hear?

“Please, just let me finish...” Nalin told me, grasping my hand and holding it firmly. “I didn’t fully understand what severing a piece of my soul would do. It created a yin-yang effect. I gave the best parts of my being to you and I was left with the darkest parts of my personality. I only felt complete when I was in your presence and you in mine. That is why in my presence, you have been quick to anger. I, on the other hand, have been more understanding of your feelings... When we are around one another our qualities seem to rub off on each other. Your personality may turn angry and mine may turn more peaceful,” he said with the wide eyes of awareness. “I also didn’t understand that you would be the complete opposite of me in that you do not have the appearance of my race. You took on the appearance of the Dökkalfar.”

“What do you mean?” I asked, glancing at his black hair and blue eyes. “Do I look that different from you?”

“I appear to you in the form that is most pleasing to the human race,” he said. “I did this in order not to draw unwanted attention with my true appearance.”

I understood. My ears drew unwanted attention and I would have given anything just to appear normal.

“My parents were furious with me when they learned of your existence. They said you were an abomination and they stripped me of my birthright. My sister was to become queen and I was to remain a prince until a probation period of two hundred Elven years or forty human years... Almost a hundred have passed so far.

“They wanted me to end your life, but I refused. I hid you in a small cottage I created from a willow tree... I forged a necklace for you and fashioned a ring for myself so that our life forces would always be linked,” he said, squeezing my hand. “I thought my parents would get over your unconventional creation and even your appearance, but everything change one night. Someone set fire to the cottage I made for you... That same night my parents were murdered in their beds... I believed the Dökkalfar were responsible and, in my grief, I waged war upon their kind.”

I cupped his hand with mine. Feeling his grief, I wanted to comfort him, but I didn’t know how.



“I lost my parents and you in one night,” he told me, his face grim. “All these years I thought you were dead, but it turns out you were stolen from me.”

“This is all so much for me to take in, Nalin,” I told him honestly, clutching his hand for stability in my confusion.

“I understand,” Nalin said, nodding his head in agreement. “You must rest. When you awake, everything will make more sense.” He looked down at his blood stained shirt. “I have to wash up and then I am going to rest... It has been a long day for the both of us.”

I nodded as he let go of my hand and moved away from me, making his way towards the bathroom. “Nalin,” I called, his name rolling off of my lips deliciously. “You forgot to mention something.”

He turned to me momentarily at the threshold. “What is that?” he asked, sounding exhausted.

I smiled at him, not feeling the smile reach my soul. “What does the lotus flower symbolize?”

Glancing at me across the room, he smiled tiredly. “Peace.”

\* \* \* \* \*

## **CHLOË:**

I awoke feeling troubled. Who was I? Was I Willow? Or was I Chloë?

My mother was not my mother. She was actually my abductor. Was she a Dökkalfar? Did she find me somewhere abandoned by my real abductors? What was the truth?

I glanced over at the opposite side of the bed and gasped. The man sleeping beside me was not the Nalin I had seen all evening. His appearance had changed... His hair was long and nearly white. His skin was pale and as smooth as porcelain. His ears were elongated like mine...

Suddenly, the realization of what I was seeing dawned on me. It was the man I had dreamed with a month earlier. This was the true Nalin. Now, I could see what he meant when he said I had an appearance of a being outside of his race.

As he lay beside me, I watched as his abdomen rose and fell with each breath. He was as wondrous as an angel and as handsome as a devil... What could he ever see in me? Even if I was his other half, the pairing would be disproportionate. I was ordinary and he was something magical...

He slept soundly as I climbed to my feet, throwing the sheets off of myself.

All I could think about was talking to my mother. I needed to see her. I remembered Nalin had told me the room had a doorway back to my dimension, but that it was masked as an object. I paced the room, looking for something that seemed like a doorway to another world. I thought that if I found it I could go

talk to my mother and be back before Nalin awoke. There was still so much I wanted to understand and I had not yet seen his world.

On my third turn around the room, I touched the walls, trying to feel for a door. My eyes drifted to the compass across the room and then the books on the desk. Then, I caught a glimpse at my own reflection and something clicked within me. I walked to the mirror cautiously.

I thought if eyes are the windows to the soul, what is a reflection considered?

Tense, I brought my fingertip to the cool glass. With little effort, my finger went through the glass, rippling the reflective surface as if it were liquid mercury and breaking up my image. I glanced back at Nalin briefly and, without further hesitation, plunged myself through the mirror.

I landed awkwardly with a hard thud on my bedroom floor. Looking back at the wall, I realized the portal was closed. Feeling the wall, I knew the search was pointless. The doorway had been sealed and I wouldn't be able to get back to Nalin.

Instantly, I felt like I had made a huge mistake. Feeling tears well up in my eyes, I wondered if I should have waited to tell Nalin of my plans to return.

Without warning, my bedroom door burst open and my mother hurled herself inside. "Where have you been?" she demanded. "Do you know how worried I have been?"

I shook my head unable to register anything, but the inability to open a doorway back to Nalin.

"You have been missing for two days!"

My eyes met hers instantaneously. "Two days?" I questioned, confused.

She nodded angrily. "Where were you?"

Without warning, another figure entered my bedroom. A figure I recognized...

My body quivered and my heart began thudding in my chest with realization of a deep rooted fear.

It was him... My intruder... The police officer from the alleyway... Nalin's adversary. He was dressed in the same armor he wore when he invaded my home a few days earlier. His appearance was unmistakable. He was not of this realm. He was not Ljosalfar... He was Dökkalfar!

I felt myself back away from my mother and her companion. I stepped backwards until I reached a wall and could move no more.

He came forward, reaching me in three strides. Grabbing my arm forcefully, he glanced at my mother. "Surely, you know you cannot trust a teenage Elfling, Sister," he spat, his voice free of charm. "Especially a Ljosalfar!"

"Brother, don't hurt her," my mother begged.

"She is not our kind, Rosalyn," he told her firmly. "You shouldn't have formed such an attachment to this thing!"

He dragged me against my will into the hallway, towards the mysterious metal door I had remembered seeing the last time he appeared. I recognized it for what it was now. It was a portal to another realm...

Shaking with fear, I looked over my shoulder at my mother, sobbing. "Mommy, what is he going to do?"

"She is not your mother," my abductor screamed at me, his eyes afire. "You don't have a mother! You are an abomination and you are about to be exterminated."

"Callan," my mother cried, clutching her brother's arm, but he threw it off.

He dragged me through the magical doorway, tossing me on the ground.

Landing hard on my hands and knees, my flesh felt instantly cold as my skin came in contact with snow... When I looked up, I saw a world that I had only seen in my dreams. Every inch of ground was covered with freshly, fallen snow. I recognized every tree and every bush... It was the same valley of oaks I had seen through my mind's eye. But this time there were no feelings of elation. I was not here for a visit. I was being taken against my will and Nalin wouldn't ever know... He would think I abandoned him. He would hate me. There was no way for him to know the truth...

Callan lifted me up by my arm roughly, bringing me to my feet. His eyes drifted to the pendant that hung from my neck. With one swift movement, his hand latched onto it and he yanked it off, snapping the chain and throwing it on the ground as if it were nothing. "You won't be needing this little tracking device," he said heartlessly, dragging me further into the realm of the Elves.

**TO BE CONTINUED...**

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#### **Message to the Reader:**

I hope you enjoyed reading part one of *Weeping Willow*. I encourage you to write a review. Your feedback is helpful to the writing process. Don't forget to look out for the second installment, coming soon to Smashwords.com and 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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