

THE  QUEST FOR THE
MAGIC SEALS

THE PROPHECY OF THE CHOSEN ONE

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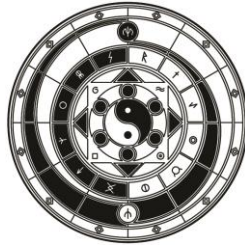
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CHAPTER I

The Guardian of the Temple

I don't remember well how it started. The one thing that comes to mind is feeling the sudden and intense smell of pines. I was cold. It was dark. I was afraid.

Someone ran exasperated.

The silence broke by his agitated breathing, the sound of his long clothes waving and the creaking of the leaves breaking under his footsteps.

Suddenly, a bright and compact sphere of purple light pierced the air with a hum, destroying the base of a tree; a powerful explosion lighted the forest as well as the figure of two hooded men who fell because of the shock wave.

"We must get to the Moon Temple; time is running out!" one of them shouted, helping his partner to get up. "Hurry!"

Watching their backs, they kept running into the darkness.

Reached by the light of the fire consuming the tree, a third hooded person appeared; part of a long and abundant white hair came out of his clothes neck. In the shadow covering his face, a symbol shone in the shape of a letter M crossed by a line from top to bottom.

The two men soon arrived at a cave opening in a rock formation inside the roots of a group of pines. At the entrance,

someone else was waiting for them.

“It’s almost midnight!” they were rushed.

Once they crossed the threshold, the third one made three quick moves with his hands and a white light barrier appeared covering the entrance.

Inside the round and humid cave, wide carved columns decorated the solid rock walls; at the back, a huge door made of stone with a Yin Yang symbol engraved in the center rose to the high ceiling full of stalactites.

The footsteps of the newcomers resonated in the cave, who joined three others that were already there. Now there were six of them.

“Did you find him?”

“He’s coming right behind us.”

“I conjured an energy barrier at the entrance. It will not last.”

“Let’s finish this.”

Outside, the white-haired person finally reached the cave’s entrance. Stopping at the forest clearing, he stared at the energy barrier before him.

“What is it?” he murmured in a deep voice, without looking away.

There was a flash of green light beside him. A short being with reptile features appeared; he wore long shabby black robes.

“My Lord,” the creature said in a soft wheezing voice, just like snakes would if they could speak, “there is an energy barrier blocking the access.”

“I know,” the man replied with disdain. He raised his right arm and made a gentle circular move with his wrist; a luminous light bolt surrounded his forearm with purple rays, rising up to his hand to create a light sphere floating on his open palm. Throwing it, he attacked the energy barrier making it tremble. Then, prepared a second attack.

Inside, the six gathered around a second and blurred Yin Yang painted at the center of the cave’s floor. One of them looked up and started reciting words in an incomprehensible

language.

On the great painting, a creature appeared in a white glow: it was small, winged and pink with darker stripes framing its face; it had blue eyes, large ears and a long tail with a bright blue gem on the tip. Half a Yin Yang pattern stood out on its chest.

“The time has come:” the same man said. “We must do it now.”

“He is outside the temple,” the one at his right continued. “We have to perform the Divesting Spell.”

“No!” the frightened creature exclaimed in a sharp voice. “There has to be another way!”

“There is no other way,” another muttered, “only by sacrificing our powers we’ll be able to stop him until the Chosen One appears.”

There was a loud explosion coming from the entrance of the cave and a cloud of dust entered the place.

“There is no way he is getting away with it,” the small creature murmured furiously, seeing the man they feared entering triumphantly.

“It’s time to go back,” the man said coldly, looking at the stone door.

He grabbed the hood covering his head with both of his hands and slowly took it off. His eyes were so clear they almost seemed white; his skin, pale and slightly purple, matched his hair. Two fangs peeked from his lips as he smiled, while the burning peculiar mark on his cheek deformed.

Creating a light sphere with an agile move, he attacked the six hooded persons.

Drawing an arc in the air with the edge of his hand, one of them repelled the attack; however, the sphere hit the rocky ceiling and a large amount of debris fell. They barely dodged them. The creature screamed in terror, escaping the path of a sharp stalactite.

The elegant and cold character walked to the door seizing the moment, but just as he touched the surface with his thin fingers of sharp yellowish nails, a white glow covered the door repelling him with a light bolt.

Being thrown on his back, he fell to the ground.

“What... have you done?” he snapped furiously as he stood up.

“You can only pass through during a full moon,” one of the six said coldly, helping another to stand up. “That is the rule.”

Looking at each other, they resumed their formation around the painting on the floor.

“What are you doing?”

“We cannot let you out from here, Caradoc,” one of them sentenced quietly. “Not after all the atrocities you have committed.”

The six raised their hands and started reciting a new verse.

“No!” the man shouted, throwing a new light sphere at them.

But it was the little creature who now repelled the attack with a whip of its tail.

“Stop!”

The man attacked again and again, but the creature was as fast as he was. And before he could do anything else, a gust of wind surrounded them all, while the songs of the six rumbled in the cave.

Six pairs of eyes glowed in white under their hoods.

A column of light rose from the center of the formation colliding with the ceiling and flooding the entire room. A light explosion shook the cave and came out of it, reaching every corner of that gigantic forest with an expansive wave...

With a start, I opened my eyes.

My heart was pounding.

I was breathing fast; as if I had been running.

On my sloping ceiling, full of thick wooden beams, the shadows of the branches of my tree were casted by the light of the sidewalk luminaires. It was still dark and the silence told me that no one else had woken up yet.

I looked at the alarm clock next to my bed. It was four in the morning.

Anxious for that weird and very vivid dream, I sat up.

My new bedroom was huge, and during my childhood I was

sure it was haunted. But seeing it completely empty that morning made me feel there was something special about it; that's why I didn't think twice before putting the first of my boxes in there, to give my old bedroom to my younger brother.

Since it was the attic of the house, the place was immense; with only sloping ceilings it had the shape of a cross:

On one side I put the bed on a platform that was actually a double height space in my parent's bedroom on the level below mine; on the opposite side, a huge window that adorned the main façade of the house lit my desk with the moonlight. On my right, two wardrobes framed a circular window facing the neighboring house; the narrow wooden stairs leading to the room door on the lower level were at my left side. At the center, filling a large space, I placed some furniture the old tenant left behind. Of course, the entire place was adorned by a large number of unpacked boxes and bags.

I lowered my feet from the bed and put them on a soft warm mat.

In the dim light, I saw my reflection in an old floor mirror that belonged to my mother; it was standing next to my bed. My wavy ruffled black hair itched my eyes and covered my ears. Fixing it a couple of times with my hand, I stood up dragging the hems of my baggy sleeping pants; adjusting my cotton sleeveless shirt I walked down the four steps separating my bed from the rest of the room.

My nose started itching; I instantly rubbed it with my index finger. I could still feel the strong smell of pines. What kind of bizarre dream had that been?

I walked around the living furniture and approached the large window facing the street in front of my house. From that height I saw almost the entire neighborhood. There wasn't a single soul outside and all the lights were off. On the rooftops, the crescent moon dazzled me for a moment.

"At least there is a Moon," I stammered hoarsely, unable to get that dream off my mind. I had sensed the smell of the forest, the smoke of that burning tree and even the humidity of the cave. But what impressed me the most was the inexplicable

fear I felt when I saw the face of that man with the tattoo and the white hair.

It had been a nightmare. A very realistic one, but a nightmare after all.

“Won’t have frozen pizza for dinner again,” I muttered, walking back to my bed.

It had been a long day. Three long endless days, actually. Moving with my mother and brother from another country hadn’t been an easy thing to do.

I stopped when I reached the lounge and looked to my left. A new glow that hadn’t been there slightly lighted the circular window.

Frowning, I walked to it and peered outside. Looking down, between the branches of the tree, I realized the light was coming from the neighbor’s second floor window; through the white silk curtains, I saw the silhouette of a long-haired girl combing her hair.

Helplessly, I smiled.



In the south of the city, Domum was known for being the most exclusive school in Little Road; the children of rich businessmen, high government officials and one or another celebrity, attended there. If you attended Domum, your admission at any prestigious college was almost guaranteed. At least that’s what I read on the Internet when I learned I would go there.

Within its facilities, extensive sports areas and large gardens dressed its buildings of modern architecture; another of its main attractions. Its lands were part of an immense forest that still surrounded it.

That cloudy morning of January, I saw many people come and go in their elegant navy jacket, white shirt, gray pants — skirts for girls— and black tie uniforms. Laughing and talking, making plans for lunch and checking their social media on their cell phones, they arrived one after another in luxurious cars

driven by drivers.

A normal school day for them.

A completely and absolutely abnormal day for me.

On one of the upper levels of the main high school building, from a long window in a deserted corridor, I stared at some delayed students getting out from their limos even after the bell rang; they didn't seem to care about the time. That's why I couldn't help but notice a girl who, unlike the rest, ran with a heavy bunch of books in her arms; unable to see her way, she tried not to trip over the entrance steps.

A single and annoying idea passed through my mind: I hated being the new guy.

Thanks to my mother, who was transferred, we left everything behind to "start over". Her words. Although, in my opinion, it wasn't the proper phrase to say.

You see, I was born in Little Road, far north of the continent; and I spent the first eleven years of my life there until we moved to Mexico. The rest is history.

Now, we were back. My mother had been transferred... one – more – time.

I was glad that her scientific contributions were recognized worldwide, but... come on!

The girl, who had thrown her books by tripping over the very last step, had already disappeared behind the metallic doors of the next building.

"Mr. Bennett?"

Forgetting my thoughts I turned to a red-haired woman, who wore an elegant gray business suit and glasses before her brown eyes. She had to be in her twenties.

"My name is Marianne," she said smiling, shaking my hand. "We'll be seeing each other very often here."

Smiling back, I nodded in greeting.

"This will be your schedule" —she handed me a sheet of paper— "your locker number, student ID, library card and some forms for your parents."

"Thank you."

"I must say that... I checked your file and I found some

very interesting things about you, Mr. Bennett” —she smiled again— “I think you’ll fit very well here. Welcome to Domum.”

“Thanks.”

“I hope there won’t be a problem with the language.”

“None.”

“There’s still an hour left before your first class,” she commented, checking her wrist watch. “Feel free to explore. We assigned you a guide but he’s not here yet.”

“A guide?” I repeated, confused.

“Domum can be a maze for the inexperienced eye; you’ll need someone to show you the way. Oh, there he comes” — she looked behind my back— “Mr. Taylor, you are late.”

“Sorry,” a deep voice said, “there was a stampede in the cafeteria.”

Turning around I saw a brown-eyed blond guy walking to us with his hands in his pockets; he wore an untied tie, an untucked shirt and a black bandana keeping his slightly long hair on its place.

“Could you please fix your uniform?”

“Sorry,” he said again, starting to tie his tie, distractedly. He was a bit taller than me; thin of fine sharp features.

“Mr. Bennett, this is Alexander Taylor. He’ll be one of your classmates.”

When I heard his name, I couldn’t help but frown.

“Wait...” I said hesitantly. “Alex?”

For the first time his eyes looked at me; it amused me that he examined me with the very same expression I must certainly had.

“Wait...” he said now. “I know you.”

“I’d be offended if you didn’t,” I snapped.

“Ryan?” he asked smiling.

“Do you know each other?” the teacher asked.

“You could say— hey!” I replied as, suddenly, he hugged me tight and lifted me up in the air. “We used to be good friends. ¡Hey! ¡Tranquilo, amigo!”

“Good” —Ms. Marianne smiled at the last phrase I spoke in

Spanish— “I just hope your old *amigo* won’t drag you down with him. Mr. Taylor, I’ll be watching you.”

The teacher said her goodbyes smiling and returned to the office she came out from.

“What are you doing here?” Alex asked me, completely ignoring the teacher’s last comment. “I thought you left to never come back.”

“So did I,” I replied, adjusting my jacket. “Life takes many turns, I guess.”

Pressing his lips, smiling with a much exaggerated nostalgia, he hugged me again.

“*Ya, cálmate,*” I said in Spanish, helplessly laughing.

“You’ve grown,” he said, punching my arm.

“And so did you. Although, I see you haven’t changed much else.”

“Never” —he made me a sign so I would follow him— “what happened?”

“Mom was transferred again,” I replied, pulling the strap of my slipping backpack. “And my old house turned out to be available almost at the same time, so—”

“Your house,” he said with his eyes wide open. “We have to find her. Come on!”

“Find her?”

“Your neighbor! Sam!”

Stopping, I couldn’t help but smile to myself.

“She has to be here, somewhere” —he made me another sign to hurry up.

When we turned in a corner, we entered a crowded corridor full of classrooms and lockers in both sides.

“At this time she’s already a full dictator.”

“She’s also here?” I asked, confused.

“Of course she is. Oh, right on time. Don’t tell her it’s you. This will be epic.”

Alex sped up the pace and I couldn’t help but stop when I saw him approaching a girl who was looking for something in her locker. Her hair was light brown, long and wavy; layered hair framed her pale thin face. When Alex called her, she

looked at him with two beautiful hazel eyes. It was her. Definitely her.

“So... I’m showing everything to the new kid,” I heard Alex saying, leaning on the locker next to her and pretending to be bored.

“I’m sorry for him,” the girl told him, raising her eyebrows; her voice was soft and sweet. “Where is he? Did you lose him already? You’ll be back on detention this afternoon.”

“No, I won’t,” Alex complained, scowling. “Anyways, he seems to be a book eater, just like you. Well behaved and all that.”

“You mean normal?”

Alex winked at me in the distance making me a sign, so I walked to them.

“He’s Evan.”

The girl turned and smiled to me.

“Hi,” I greeted, hesitantly.

“Samantha Adams,” she said, shaking my hand, staring into my eyes.

“He’s coming from Mexico; he speaks Spanish and all that,” Alex commented; he scowled again and took out his cell phone to start checking something on it.

“Mexico,” Samantha repeated, raising her eyebrows. “Pyramids, *mariachis*...”

“That’s a stereotype, but yes,” I replied, smiling amused.

“How did you get here? Little Road is not even in a map.”

“My mother was transferred,” I explained for the second time, noticing that, discreetly, Alex started recording the girl.

“What is she?” the girl asked, resuming her search inside her locker.

“She’s... a paleontologist.”

“A paleontologist,” she repeated, impressed. “I must say she wouldn’t be the first one I met. The Natural History Museum is the one interesting thing here.”

Beside me, Alex started laughing out loud.

Helplessly, I smiled widely.

“What?” the girl asked looking at Alex, who was about to

fall to the floor laughing uncontrollably. “What?!”

“Come on,” he said, finally catching his breath, still recording; standing behind me, he grabbed my shoulders with his free arm, “look at him well, Sam. Doesn’t he remind you of someone? Look at his pretty blue eyes under those bushy eyebrows... his sharp jaw...”

I scowled by the weird description. But then...

“No,” the girl stammered.

“Yes,” Alex said, excited.

“Ryan?”

“The one and only,” Alex laughed again. “Ryan Bennett is back.”

Samantha started laughing and, looking confused, examined me from head to toe.

“I can’t believe it’s you,” she said excited. “I mean, of course it’s you; it all makes sense. Your second name is Evan, Mexico, your paleontologist mother. I don’t get it. What are you doing here? You’ve changed a lot; I didn’t recognize you.”

“That’s what he said,” I muttered, pointing at Alex.

“When did you get here?”

“Yesterday.”

“I – can’t – believe – you – didn’t – tell – me!” Samantha shouted, hitting Alex with one of her thick notebooks once and again.

“I just found out!” he complained.

“You didn’t have to make a fool of me like that!”

“And miss your face?” Alex said, raising his cell phone, still recording. “This is gold. It’ll have hundreds of views in no time.”

“Stop recording me; give me that! Alex! Alex!!”

Samantha slammed her locker door and ran after him; dodging those in his way, he wouldn’t stop recording.

“Alexander!!”

“Mr. Taylor, I told you I’d be watching you,” a firm voice said.

Without looking where he was going, Alex almost bumped into Ms. Marianne, who made him a sign to give up his cell

phone.

“Detention. Don’t be late. I’ll give it back once you’re done.”

“Well deserved.” Samantha said, turning her back on him. “Is that your schedule?”

Confused, I gave the girl the sheet of paper I was still holding.

“We have the same classes, good,” she said, ignoring Alex, who returned to us making a face. “Let’s go. He knows the way.”



It was... extremely... weird.

As if time hadn’t past at all. As if I’d been gone for five days and not five years.

Samantha and Alex explained me a little of everything. They helped me find my locker during a break, introduced me to some classmates, and showed me places like the cafeteria building and the library. The school was huge, the teacher hadn’t lied.

That afternoon as we walked through one of the gardens before going home, I realized time had flown; quite the opposite of what I thought that same morning. I didn’t even care when Ms. Marianne gave me the amount of homework equivalent to one month for just one week. Apparently, I had a lot to do if I wanted to catch up with the rest of the class. It turned out that she was in charge of our class; that explained her comment about seeing each other very often.

“So, Ryan,” Alex said, once Samantha finished explaining to me the hours when the cafeteria was open, “you look less... scrawny than before. What’s your secret?”

“Scrawny?” I repeated, scowling.

“Samantha was taller than you when we were eleven,” he explained himself.

“I was,” the girl said proudly.

“No, you weren’t,” I complained, still knowing they were

right.

“Are you one of those guys addicted to the gym?”

“No,” I replied, embarrassed, crossing my arms. “And... I don’t look like that.”

Samantha smiled.

“I’m just more... active than before,” I said vaguely.

“Are you being evasive?” Alex asked, looking at me perplexed. “Did you learn that there? What did they do to you?”

“What about you?” I said smiling, punching his shoulder. “Years treated you well. Girlfriend?”

Beside me, Samantha chuckled.

Alex looked at her scowling.

“So... boyfriend?”

Samantha laughed out loud.

“Because I wouldn’t mind,” I said quickly.

“Alexander isn’t cool enough for that,” Samantha said, when she finally caught her breath.

“Ryan, you were saying something about your old house before we bumped into this annoying person,” Alex told me, outraged.

“Wait, are we neighbors again?” Samantha asked, looking at me suddenly confused. “Why hadn’t I noticed?”

“He got here yesterday, woman. Didn’t you hear?”

Pressing my lips, I raised my eyebrows, shaking my head.

In fact, I had been aware of her.

From the moment my mother’s car entered our old street the morning before, I couldn’t take my eyes off the house next door. I hadn’t even been sure that Samantha was still living there, but that didn’t stop me from looking out the window every time I could hoping to see her.

“I’ve been very busy lately. Yesterday, I got home late after school and today, I woke up very early. I didn’t realize there was someone else in the house next door.”

“Four o’clock in the morning is a very early hour to notice something different in your neighbors,” I commented.

Confused, the girl looked at me questioningly.

“If... that’s the kind of hour you were referring to,” I stammered, nervously.

“I must say I’m glad I no longer have that weird gray-haired man who lived in your house as a neighbor” —the girl sighted— “he listened to loud music and his dog was a monster; it barked all night, wouldn’t let me sleep and destroyed my dad’s roses. The man wasn’t even nice and he almost never answered a greeting from my dad. Also, I must say that I didn’t like the fact that every morning he went out to throw his garbage in the containers of my house, even having his own. I always had to empty them to—”

“Samantha, Samantha, Samantha,” Alex said quickly. “You’re getting all ultrasonic again, would you stop now? Headache.”

The girl hit Alex for the second time in the day.

“I’m really glad to have you back. Now we can share Alex’s custody.”

I just smiled... and smiled. And smiled.

Now; I’d better come clean now before we pretend to ignore the big pink elephant in the room: I lived immersed in the story of the boy in love with the girl next door, but... you can’t choose in those things, right?

Since we were kids, when Samantha moved in and I introduced Alex to her, the three of us became inseparable. It’s what I remembered the most about living in Little Road as a kid. Seeing them again was perhaps the only exciting thing about coming back. And to do so on the very first day, in the least expected place... What were the chances?

Regardless of the good friendship Alex and I had, I always felt that Samantha and I had something special. What does an eleven year old kid know about love? Perhaps nothing. Maybe it was an innocent platonic crush. But the heart knows what the reason ignores. And coming back five years later to find out she had also changed to look... like that, was overwhelming.

“Fossil? Is that you?”

I suddenly stopped and helplessly pressed my lips.

I hated that nickname. And there was only one person in the

world who used it.

Turning behind my back, I saw a guy approaching us: he was swarthy, tall and fit; his brown eyes and hair, and his quite disoriented looks, immediately reminded me of bad moments from my childhood. He had also changed a lot.

“I heard you were back,” he told me, smiling, shaking my hand tightly. “It’s good to see you, man. Remember me?”

“Hello, Kyle,” I greeted, forcing a smile.

I would never forget the person who gave me that nickname when my mother first visited our kindergarten to talk about her job.

“Hi, Kyle,” Alex said smiling; although not in a very enthusiastic tone.

“What brings you here?” the newcomer asked me, ignoring him.

“My... mother; she got—”

“Hey, stranger! I thought we’d meet at the Dispatch after school,” Kyle said suddenly, ignoring my answer; he hugged Samantha from behind and kissed her neck.

“The Dispatch!” —the girl laughed and slapped her forehead with her hand— “I totally forgot about that. I’m sorry guys. I’m supposed to stay here late today as well; there’s a meeting with the editors and I can’t miss it.”

“Dis...patch?” I repeated in confusion. A terrible hole appeared in my stomach and not necessarily because of not knowing what she was talking about.

“The school paper,” Samantha replied. “I work there as a writer.”

“We both do,” Kyle corrected her.

“Yes, we both do,” the girl said, laughing.

“That’s... great,” I murmured, faking another smile.

“I guess I’ll see you guys tomorrow,” Samantha said, looking mortified; the guy was almost pulling her from the waist. “Welcome home, Ryan.”

“Yes, welcome, Ryan,” Kyle said laughing, before turning around and walking away from us, still holding the girl.

“Bye, Kyle,” Alex said waving. “Nice to see you too. My

gram's good; thanks for asking.”

Sighing, I watched them leave.

“When did that happen?” I asked.

“Last year. After homecoming. They went together and... that's how it's been since then.”

“I see the two of you get along,” I said, resuming our way slowly.

“Of course; we are best friends. Didn't you see?” Alex snapped. “He's in another class; so, at least, he's not all over her in the classroom.”

“Why Kyle Edwards?” I wondered regretfully.

“I assume you didn't leave a girlfriend in Mexico City.”

“Well... I suppose it can't be that bad. I mean, people change, right? Especially in five years.”

“In any other part of the world, yes... in Little Road...”

Helplessly, I sighed again.

“Welcome home, my friend.”

Alex and I walked a few blocks together, until we had to part because our houses were in different directions. After saying goodbye to him, I passed the bus stop and kept walking; in fact, I wanted to see the old neighborhood.

It felt so weird to be back...

Everything looked the same but, at the same time, different. Smaller, perhaps.

In the suburbs, my street was wide with almost no traffic. It had large houses in both sides; all with extensive gardens and Victorian designs on their façades. Some had fences while others only had open gardens from the sidewalk; such was the case of my house: in the side garden, a large tree with long thick branches rose, covering a big part of the rooftop.

Inside, a small lobby linked the dining room on the left with the living room on the right; at the center, a large staircase was the heart of the house.

“I'm home!” I announced, leaving my backpack at the foot of the stairs, half an hour later.

The first thing I did was peer into the living room... if you could call it that.

In a regular house, you would find a comfortable space with some sofas, a TV and maybe a fireplace; in my own, there were four walls covered with books, a glass desk and a couch next to the entrance.

Seeing no one, I walked to the dining room to find my mother and brother; unlike me, they were both blond with brown eyes. I inherited my dark hair and blue eyes from my father, you see.

“*¿Cómo estuvo tu primer día?*” my mother asked in Spanish; she was unpacking a box of glasses.

Seeing that she was wearing sports clothes and that the library was already completely unpacked, I knew she hadn't gone to work yet.

“*Estuvo bien*” I replied vaguely, answering her question about my day.

“*¿Solo bien?*”

“*Solo bien*” I repeated.

I grabbed an apple from a basket on the table and took a bite.

“Hey,” I said, noticing that my ten-year-old brother was still wearing his pajamas. “Why didn't he go to school?”

“Because we were up until late unpacking.”

“I was up until late unpacking.”

“And your reward will be staying in the attic as long as you follow your part of the deal,” my mother said smiling.

“I'll unpack everything, keep my room clean, and you'll stay away from it,” I recited, turning my eyes. That was the agreement we made the day before.

“Rights come with responsibilities. *Y, habla en español.*”

“Please,” I complained, “I'm not ten. Save those lectures for Max. And, why do we have to speak in Spanish? We are no longer in *México.*”

“Because I don't want Max to forget his Spanish.”

“We've only been here a day and a half,” I blurted.

“I'm done unpacking my room,” the small one said carefree, playing with our cat under the table.

“Traitor,” I mumbled. “By the way, I found them.”

“Who?” my mother asked.

“Sam and Alex.”

“Oh” —she smiled— “that explains why you didn’t get here complaining about everything.”

“I don’t complain about everything,” I complained.

“Who are they?” my brother asked.

“Ryan’s oldest friends.”

“How was your day?” I asked the little guy.

“It was alright.”

“Just alright?”

“Just alright.”

“Imagine living with two of those” —my mother turned her eyes— “you are both just like your father. By the way, don’t forget he’ll be calling tonight after dinner.”

“I won’t,” I said walking to the lobby with the rest of my apple.

“And don’t leave your backpack at the foot of the stairs.”

“I won’t,” I repeated, picking it up on my way up.

“And I hope you’ve already unpacked at least four boxes before dinner time! You don’t want that attic to become an attic again!”

I peeked into the dining room once more and smiled at my mother.

“I will.”

“*En español.*”

“When we were back in *la Roma* we didn’t have to speak in English.”

“*En español,*” my mother repeated.

“You know what, I’m leaving now. *Adiós.*”



Later that night in my bedroom, the first thing I did was plug in the TV and unpack my three video game consoles; and I’m talking about the classics, not those complex things you play online these days. Improvising a low table with some shelves I found in the basement, I used the stairs railing to hang my

screen facing my lounge. I also found my home theater speakers, my DVD movies collection and some old CD's I refused to throw away for sentimental reasons. Yes, I had CD's.

In one of the boxes, my collectible action figures appeared, which I displayed in a bookcase; I also pulled out some posters of my favorite movies and animes, which I stuck on the wooden walls.

Soon, the entire place started to take form. I still didn't understand how I'd managed to fit all those things in my tiny old bedroom.

Satisfied by fulfilling and exceeding the quote of boxes indicated by my mother, I put on my sleeping clothes and prepared to bed, but not before opening my window to look outside the garden. Samantha's light was still off.

I felt a cool breeze and left it open; I dropped onto my bed and grabbed my cell phone from the nightstand.

I wasn't surprised to find friendship requests from Alex in all my social media. Thinking that maybe it was time to update my status, I friended him and changed my place of residence in each of them.

Alex's penultimate post was that video he'd recorded of Samantha at school. The first comment was hers. Quite pissed.

The last post was a picture we took of the three of us during the second break; at the bottom of the photo, Alex wrote 'Reunited at last'.

Helplessly smiling, I checked his previous posts... which turned out to be a lot of them. Too many, perhaps.

Since I was very tired, it didn't take long before my eyes started closing against my will.

I guess I fell asleep with my cell phone in my hand because the next thing I knew, I was... dreaming:

Before my eyes, a starry sky contrasted with the branches of dense trees.

Then, the powerful scent of pines came to my nose.

Confused, I sat up in the dark. I was on the ground, in the middle of the forest.

I was wearing my sleeping clothes, but no shoes. In my

hand, my cell phone.

I stood up shaking leaves from my cloth and explored around me.

It was dark, and had it not been for the half moon over me, I wouldn't have been able to see anything at all. The place seemed familiar.

I turned my phone on and checked the time. It was almost ten.

A gust of wind surrounded me and I shivered.

My heart stopped as I noticed it.

Was I... not dreaming?

I opened my cell phone's GPS and Little Road's map appeared in an instant.

And I was just right... next to the school.

Confused, looking around me again, I started breathing heavily.

Now I was sure I wasn't dreaming.

How on earth had I gotten there? Why did I wake up in the middle of nowhere? Less than an hour had passed since I was checking my phone in bed.

Alarmed, I took a few steps to orient myself on the phone's map and started walking quickly on the humid ground towards the school.

My toes were freezing. I saw my breath because of the cold.

I entered then a clearing in the forest... and I stopped.

With my eyes wide open and my heart pounding, I saw in front of me a cave opening under some trees.

"No manches."

It was the place I had dreamed the night before.

I tried to control my breathing and approached the cave to see it closely. My instinct, and every bone, told me to run away... but my curiosity was stronger.

Was it possible to dream of something before seeing it?

I got to the entrance to peek inside but it was too dark. I couldn't see a thing. And all the hanging plants didn't quite help; there were a lot more than in my dream.

Uneasy, turning my cell phone's flashlight on, I took a

step... and then another.

And so, I entered the cave.

At first glance it was a narrow turning tunnel, so I couldn't see the end of it.

I had barely taken a few more steps when I stopped hesitantly.

What would happen if I found myself with a wild animal, like a wolf or a bear? I didn't know the local fauna, but a cave like that one had to house something.

Concluding that I had to be crazy for wanting to get inside, I started backing out.

Suddenly, I heard a loud hollow sound followed by its echo.

Nervous, I stood still.

It'd come from the end of the tunnel.

A second sound... and a third one.

Then, a slight warm glow shone ahead.

Next, a heartbreaking scream.

Terrified, I looked at the forest at my back... and then, at the end of the tunnel again.

I wasn't alone. Something was going on inside.

I'd heard the scream of a woman.

I heard a fourth blow, and a fleeting glow like an intense purple flash, lighted the bottom of the cave.

I wanted to run from there, but... what if someone was in trouble?

I turned my cell phone's flashlight off and turned the camera on. I might need some proof of what was happening there. I just hoped to be able to record something without the camera's flash.

I started moving forward cautiously and stuck to the wall to stay hidden.

Just when I thought I saw the end of the tunnel, I heard a strong masculine voice.

I froze again.

I didn't understand what he had said, but...

Now there was a feminine voice.

They seemed pissed; they were arguing.

Trying not to make a noise, I took a few more steps and stretched my arm to record with the phone what was happening inside; anxiously, I watched the screen from my hiding.

The tunnel reached an immense circular cave; wide columns held the ceiling. A large stone door rose at the bottom. The warm glow was produced by torches in the walls.

“*No manches*,” I snapped again.

There was no doubt; that was the place.

“This is the last time I ask you, creature!”

Almost dropping the phone because of the strong and sudden yelling, I looked for the people talking with the device. I felt a hole in my stomach when the camera reached a tall white-haired man giving me his back; before him, a tiny pink creature was being cornered.

“How much time has passed?”

“I told you, I don’t know! The spell affected me too!”

Unconsciously, I pinched my cheek; scowling, I kept recording from my hiding. Those were the two characters I had dreamed with the night before.

The man took the creature by the neck and lifted it.

“I can sense most of my powers gone. Where?”

“I... don’t know...”

Spell? Powers? They were definitively no ordinary people; and that creature was something I would have never imagined could exist.

I had to get out of there.

But... although I didn’t understand a thing, the conversation was turning quite dangerous; and the little one seemed helpless... he was choking her. I couldn’t keep looking.

“Very well then,” the man said coldly. “In that case... you are no longer useful.”

The guy raised his free hand and, after a light bolt surrounded his forearm, a shining sphere appeared floating over his palm.

If what I had dreamed the night before made some crazy sense, I knew what followed that light...

And then, I couldn't resist it anymore...

A rock hit the man's neck causing him to lose concentration. The floating light sphere disappeared with a crack.

Yes, I did it.

When he turned to me, I saw his face as clearly as the night before; because of his horrible appearance, he couldn't be a regular person.

"Who are you?"

"My name is Ryan Bennett," I shouted, surprising even myself for the sudden wave of bravery that made me leave my hiding place with a stick in my hand; "and I don't know who you are, but I won't let you keep hurting that... that... thing."

The guy smiled and threw the creature against a wall.

"You chose the wrong opponent, kid," he murmured, walking towards me.

Alarmed, I held the stick with both hands.

I knew better than going around looking for a fight, but I couldn't keep my arms crossed. I had never been into a real combat outside a gym, so I was absolutely terrified. And I didn't know what the guy was capable of.

The man created a new sphere of light before reaching me and he threw it at me:

It was the most terrible feeling I had felt in my life; as if a violent electric shock ran through my body. At the impact, I was expelled backwards until I hit a wall of the cave; out of breath, I fell face down.

"Mess with someone of your own size!"

Stunned, in pain, barely understanding what was happening, I managed to lift my face to see the creature aiming at the guy: crossing the air with the help of two tiny wings coming from her back, she created a light sphere on her own to attack him. Her enemy responded in the same way and both attacks collided midway; an explosion was created in the air filling the cave with dust. The little one was shot back towards a wall, while his attacker just trembled.

What the hell was going on? What had I gotten into?

Gradually, I felt my senses coming back; like when the sense

of a limb returns after a cramp. As I could, I stood up when I saw the little one wasn't moving. Decisively, I grabbed the stick I had dropped as I fell.

"You are still here?" the man said, looking at me.

"I hope you have something more besides your special effects," I snapped, wielding the stick, spreading my legs to improve my posture.

"It'll be as you want."

My new enemy extended his arm without taking his eyes off me; surrounded by a black smoke cloud, a long sword appeared in his hand. With the other one, he took off the robes he wore and threw them to the ground; underneath, he wore an impressive black armor.

How the hell had he done that? Didn't he run out of tricks?

"Let's see what you can do with that, kid," he said, walking to me.

It wasn't fair; an old stick against a real sword. I had all odds against me.

I had spent the last five years learning that no combat is decided from the beginning, so, breathing deeply, I waited for him.

From his back, I saw the little creature coming back from her senses; she was hurt.

The man rushed towards me, wielding his sword to attack me, but thanks to a quick reflex, I managed to intercept it stopping him with my stick; it'd turned out to be made of stronger wood than I had thought. Fortunately.

A second wave of courage took over me and with determination, I took the turn to attack; however, my rival jumped backwards and dodged my offensive. His body stood still, suspended in the air.

"Wow!" I exclaimed, astonished.

The man was floating!

Distracted by it, I received a blow in the jaw that knocked me down.

Feeling a metallic taste, I got up.

"This just became personal," I said, spitting blood.

I attacked, and then again. One by the left, one by the right; up, left again... but they were all stopped.

I hated seeing his stupid smile mocking me.

I started attacking him faster, and soon I noticed his smile disappeared.

In seconds, I became his equal; I saw him losing that petulant attitude he had shown from the beginning.

With a precise blow of my improvised weapon on his wrist, I got him to drop his sword; with the tip of the stick, I threatened his neck.

“It’s over,” I snapped.

To my surprise, he smiled.

“Watch out!!”

The creature’s warning came quite too late: my enemy attacked me with a quick light bolt and I fell to the ground, feeling my whole body numb.

“You will regret entering this cave,” the man sentenced, walking towards me, raising his hand; but just after he created a new light sphere... it disappeared with a snap.

Confused, he tried the move once more. But he failed again.

Behind him, the little one started laughing. A thread of blood dripped down her temple.

“Looks like your energy reserves ran out, Long.”

When I heard the guy’s name, I looked up from the ground.

Failing for the third time, he shouted in fury.

The creature stood up and took a breath as if she was preparing to scream; then, she spat a violent gust of fire in Long’s direction, surrounding him completely, giving him no time to even react.

Feeling the scorching heat on my face, I saw the man writhing in pain through the flames; then... he disappeared in a purple light.

The fire extinguished and nothing was left. Nothing.

“What?” I snapped alarmed; increasing my confusion to extraordinary levels. “Where did he go? What just happened?”

“He disappeared,” the creature said, walking to me.

“I think that’s obvious,” I said out of breath, still looking for

the man who couldn't just have vanished in the midair. "How did he do that? Who was that? And what the hell are you?"

"The Six Sorsers were supposed to strip him from all his powers, but, apparently, he still has some of them" —the creature seemed to talk to herself— "I wonder what went wrong."

"Who?" I asked, still breathing hard.

The creature looked at me and frowned.

"The Six Sorsers" —she sighed and looked around— "they were the most powerful sorcerers... a long time ago, judging by all those plants. My name is Kanna. Why are you still on the ground?"

"Have you ever been hit by one of those lights?" I replied, without being able to get up.

Kanna winced, limping a little while walking, and approached me.

"No, no; wait," I said alarmed. "Don't come any closer."

"Oh, shut up!"

Kanna put one of her tiny hands on my forehead and a white light surrounded her from head to toe; the next thing I knew, was my fatigue disappearing.

"What did you do? What was that?" I said, standing up.

"I cannot heal your wounds, but I can give you some of my energy," she replied, wobbling. Looking dizzy, she sat on the ground.

Still holding the stick with both hands, I stared at her.

"You can stop strangling your fabulous sword, boy," Kanna told me, sighing. "Long is gone now and I will not do anything to you. If I were going to hurt you, I wouldn't have helped you recover."

Without saying another word, I pressed my lips and threw away the stick.

"You are... a mortal... right?"

"A what?" I repeated.

"Yes, you are," she mumbled; "although... you are brave. Are you some kind of mortal warrior? Do you command an army?"

“A warrior?” I repeated. “No. I’m just a regular guy.”

“A regular guy wouldn’t face Long just like you did.”

Taking a deep breath, I pressed my lips again.

“I don’t understand,” I said anxiously, “I’m talking to a thing that is not human. Who did you tell me you are?”

“I am the Guardian of the Moon Temple,” she responded proudly.

“You mean... this place?”

“Yes. And my mission is to protect that door until the Chosen One appears.”

“The Chosen One.”

“A courageous sorcerer who is destined to defeat Long.”

“But... you said no one could.”

“That is why my mission is so important. I need to find the Chosen One. He has a very important task and I must guide him.”

“I still don’t get it.”

“I have news for you, boy: magic is real,” she announced. “And I would cast a spell on you to forget everything you just saw, but, I think I’m going to need your help. The Chosen One is near this forest and, as a mortal, you have to know it well.”

“I’ve never been on this forest until tonight” —I took a deep breath— “wait... did you just say magic is real?”

“Didn’t you figure it out with everything you saw? You are slow.”

I was overwhelmed. It was too much.

But she had a point: I had witnessed a bunch of weird things that couldn’t have a rational explanation. Starting with how I had dreamed about them before meeting, and how I had awakened in that forest without knowing why.

I needed to keep an open mind if I didn’t want to go completely crazy.

“Is there any village nearby?”

“Village?” I repeated confused. “Are you from the past or something like that?”

“The last thing I remember was falling asleep; and we both woke up tonight. For now, there is no way of knowing how

much time passed.”

“Well... I know nothing of any village, but outside this forest there’s a whole city.”

“Perfect!” Kanna exclaimed excited. “The Chosen One must live there.”

The creature tried to stand up, but, wobbling, she fell again.

“Wow... everything alright down there?”

“I just... need to recover my energies,” she murmured; “I need to rest.”

“Didn’t you rest for centuries?”

“You think it’s been centuries?” she asked, alarmed.

Helplessly, I smiled.

“I’m... messing with you.”

Nervous, she smiled too.

“Listen,” I said, hoping not to regret what I was about to say, “you helped me back there; twice. I think it’s my turn to do so. We’ll go to my house, you’ll rest a little, and tomorrow you’ll go out there looking for your Chosen One. Are you OK with that?”

“You saved me first,” she commented, nodding. “Thank you.”

“Can you walk?”

Scowling, she shook her head.

“Fine. Let’s go. Before that Long person decides to come back.”

I grabbed the creature and held her in my arms, trying not to hurt her more than she already was. She was very light and her fur was soft. It was like carrying my cat.”

“We’ll take care of these wounds too,” I added, grabbing my cell phone. I had left it over a rock at the entrance of the cave; it was still recording.

“Can I ask you something?”

“Yes.”

“Are mortals always barefoot?”



I followed the GPS on my cell phone and we managed to leave the forest.

Walking home, from school, barefoot, was not easy.

Along the way I told the creature a little about me; she wouldn't stop asking questions. Especially when we walked by something unknown for her.

"You've never seen a car?"

"That metal wagon had no horse!"

"You know? Every time you say something like that, I think you spent more and more years sleeping."

"Can you explain me again, how that tower with the energy balls works?"

"It's a traffic light," I explained, starting to lose patience. "The colors tell people when to go on in their cars, wagons. It's a way to put order on the streets."

"Mortals are very ingenious."

"Was there electricity at all when you were awake? That could help us know what time you're coming from."

"What's electricity?"

"*Rayos.*"

"Is this where you live?" Kanna asked when I stopped in front of my house.

"Yes, this is it."

"It's small."

"Small?" I repeated, offended, walking to the garden. It was true that my house wasn't a mansion, but it wasn't something you could consider as a small house.

"I've seen better."

"Where did you live? A palace?"

But what Kanna was about to answer me, I didn't know anymore; the sound of wheels caught my attention immediately. I didn't even have time to hide her.

A few feet from me, a black convertible car parked.

Samantha got out the car, from which Kyle Edwards greeted me with a gesture. The girl said goodbye to her boyfriend as she crossed my garden; the car drove away at high speed.

"We were coming back from school when I saw you

crossing the street,” she told me when she came closer; “where were you?”

“Took out the trash,” I replied fast.

“To where?” —the girl laughed— “you were coming from across the street.”

“We don’t have a trash can yet,” I said vaguely. “I was borrowing that one. I didn’t want to fill up yours. Won’t say a thing if you don’t.”

“Your secret is safe with me,” she said, noticing Kanna. “What’s with the stuffed doll? It’s cute.”

“Stuffed doll,” I repeated anxiously. The creature had stood still. “It’s... my brother’s.”

“Did you take it out for a stroll?” she asked laughing.

“That would be crazy,” I said, laughing as well. “He... left it on the garden; I was picking it up. So, tell me, what were you doing at school this late?”

“The Dispatch meeting.”

“Still?”

“Yes... it took us hours to decide the order of the articles for the next number; some were very extensive, others didn’t have the idea properly grounded, and don’t make me start on the senior’s writing errors. Seriously, are they planning to graduate? Because... I think that... I’m sorry... I’m talking too much.

“It’s alright,” I said smiling.

“Alex says I must talk even in my sleep,” she said, crossing her arms.

Smiling to herself, she stared at me from head to toe.

“What is it?” I asked confused.

“Is just that... it’s so weird, you being here.”

“I can leave if you want,” I said pointing at my house. “Although, technically, you are standing in my garden.”

“You know what I mean” —she smiled.

“It’s strange for me too.”

“And... you grew up.”

“People have got to stop saying that using that tone,” I complained.

“You know...” Samantha murmured, looking at her house, “when you left, I used to sit for hours in my room, staring at your window across the garden.”

Pressing my lips, I looked at her house too.

Had the girl thought about me all these years? Just like I thought about her?

“I waited for the moment you’d come out of your window, climb down that tree, and meet Alex and me at the sidewalk to go visit The Hill all together,” she said, looking at me again. “Remember The Hill?”

“The highest place in the city” —I nodded— “we used to escape from our parents all the time to go there”.

“Soon, it wasn’t the same” —Samantha sighed— “and, what about Mexico? Is it as picturesque as it sounds?”

“Well... it’s very different from Little Road.”

“I can assume that,” she said, smiling.

“Lots of traffic, wonderful architecture; there are all kinds of people, music, food, art. We used to travel through the country all the time, but the city is always cold and sunny, regardless the pollution, which is somehow perfect. Actually, it wasn’t bad at all.”

“That explains why you need a tan, my friend,” she joked. “It sounds great. Alex said you spoke in Spanish. I took a few classes... *Tal vez podamos abrazar algún día.*”

I smiled embarrassed and shrugged at her attempt.

“What? What did I say?”

“You said, ‘maybe we can hug one day.’”

“Oh, God. I’m sorry” —she laughed— “I wanted to say ‘practice.’”

“It’s OK; I’ll teach you a few things.”

Samantha shook her head.

“So... what did you do to have fun there?”

“Well, my street was quite different from this one; restaurants, libraries, museums, stores... it was quite crowded. There was always something to do.”

“¿And apart from that?”

“This might sound strange,” I said hesitantly, “but I started

practicing kendo.”

“Kendo?” she repeated, raising her eyebrows. “That answers Alex’s question from this afternoon, but... you hated sports.”

“My dad took me for a couple of lessons when we got there and I just couldn’t leave it after that,” I explained.

“Sounds interesting... There’s no kendo at Domum, but we have a fencing club; maybe you can join.”

“I don’t know...” I said smiling. “They’re very different. Kendo is not just about a combat between two warriors, and it’s not practiced to win or lose; it’s a discipline that fosters self-control. It’s a lifestyle. A combat always start and ends with a bow; showing respect for the adversary and for oneself. From day one, even when I was technically a kid, I understood that the goal is to improve oneself. That’s why I decided to go back until it became a part of me.”

“Wow,” the girl said impressed, “that explains a lot.”

“Like what?” I asked confused.

Samantha looked at me and smiled.

“I’ll tell you later,” she finally answered. “I suppose you’ll have to find some place to practice; your room is too small for something like that.”

“Actually, I gave my old room to Max. Now I’m in the attic. I have more space.”

“Oh,” —she looked at my house again— “so, we are no longer window neighbors? That’s a shame.”

“You’ll just have to look a little higher.”

Samantha smiled and we both looked into each other’s eyes; but a terrible thought crossed my mind, forcing me to put back my feet on the ground.

“So... Kyle Edwards, huh?” I muttered.

“Listen, Ryan... I know Kyle and you weren’t the best friends before you left,” Samantha said softly, “but, he has changed... and—”

“Hey, it’s been five years,” I said nodding, “the past is in the past, right?”

“Right... right,” the girl said, smiling even more, seeming curiously relieved. “Well, I think... I have to go now. Your feet

must be freezing.”

Remembering that tiny little detail, I looked down.

“Sure, uhm... see you tomorrow?”

“You can bet,” she said as she walked away. “*Buenas noches.*”

“Good night,” I replied smiling.

I said goodbye waving my hand, but before she crossed the fence dividing our houses, the girl stopped and turned back.

“You know, something tells me you changed more than the eye can see.”

I didn’t reply.

“And I’m not just saying it because of that smooth Latin accent you brought with you.”

Smiling to me again, Samantha left.

“I presume she is not your girlfriend.”

“No,” I replied hesitant.

“But, you would like her to be.”

“Let’s get inside, alright?” I said scowling at Kanna, resuming our way. “By the way, why did you stood still? She thought you were a toy.”

“Would you rather she saw me talking?”

“Good point,” I murmured, stopping before my door. “Not even because I’m talking to you I can believe you’re real.”

“Anyway, mortals cannot know about the existence of magic; it’s a rule. Remember it. What is going on? Why are we not coming inside?”

“I don’t have a key,” I said, turning pale. “My mother hasn’t given me one yet.”

“So?”

I left the porch and walked around the house to check if the kitchen door was open... but it wasn’t.

“Why don’t you ask your mother to open the door?”

“Because she doesn’t know I’m outside. She thinks I’m upstairs, sleeping.”

“Oh, you’re a naughty boy,” Kanna said smiling. “I like that.”

“I didn’t run away,” I complained.

It was then when I had the crazy thought: before lying down

to check on my cell phone, I had left the attic window open.

Walking towards the base of the tree, I examined its highest branches. It'd be tricky but not impossible. Putting the little one over my shoulder, I waited for the best.

“Hold on tight.”

Remembering a lot of moments from my childhood, I climbed the tree hoping Samantha wouldn't see me from her window; or my brother. Fortunately, a branch thick enough to hold me came very close to my new window.

That's how we managed to get into the attic.

“It's like if you lived in a tower,” Kanna said as I laid her down over one of the sofas of my lounge, still in the dark.

“Almost,” I replied. “Stay here. I'll be back.”

Leaving the creature alone, I went down to the bathroom I shared with my brother downstairs. After washing my feet, I took some things to heal Kanna and came back upstairs.

“Kanna?”

I scanned the room until my eyes fell on the large window. There she was: lighted by the moonlight, she was staring at the street.

“I told you not to move,” I said, reaching her with a couple of ointments and some bandages, “I have to heal you.”

“Long is out there,” she murmured. “Somewhere.”

Kneeling next to her, I stared the dark view with a thousand of questions in mind. But at that moment I just asked one:

“What is it that he wants?”

“There is only one essence capable of defeating him... but in his hands... it would be his greatest weapon,” she answered, still looking outside. “The Great Power was guarded with the help of twelve Magic Seals that were hidden so that only the Chosen One could find them; but I am sure that Long will find a way to get them. I need the Chosen One to achieve that first; he must obtain the Great Power to stop Long with it.

“You think he knows who the Chosen One is?”

“No. But he will look for him too. He will use all his ways to remove the only menace capable of stopping him.”

“How do you know all of this?”

“The Prophecy of the Chosen One,” she replied, looking at me. “It was made before we fell asleep. And if we woke up after... who knows how much time... is because that awaited sorcerer is nearby.”

“Who made that... prophecy?”

“A very powerful witch. The best of them all.”

“And, why doesn’t she look for him?”

“She died. Just as the Six Sorsers,” she said, looking outside again.

“You mentioned them before. Who were they?”

“My creators. They gave their lives to cast a spell on Long so he would be stopped at the Moon Temple. That was when everything froze.”

My heart pounded.

I had dreamed that too. Now it all made sense. It was just as my dream had ended the night before. Those Six Sorsers were the hooded persons who...

“Thousands have died because of him,” she added, making a soft move with her hand.

In the dark, she created a sort of white mist that crossed the glass and rose to the sky. With a soft flash, it became a square mantle that surrounded my whole house. Right after taking shape, it completely disappeared.

“What did you do?” I asked.

“Sooner or later, Long will sense my presence and that will bring him to you. This energy barrier will repel the Darkness and he won’t be able to get inside that easily.”

“He’ll come here?” I asked alarmed. “What about my family?”

“I will do everything I can to protect you all,” she said, looking at me again. “I know I’m putting you in danger just by being here, but... without you, I won’t make it.”

Was everything really happening? Was magic real?

I had seen it; I felt it helping me, and... hurting me, too. But that didn’t stop my common sense from saying it all was a trick. Magic was something that only existed in fairy tales; the one magicians used at children’s birthday parties.

And, if that Long person had killed so many, how was that unknown? How do you hide the death of thousands? Do you disguise it as an accident, or some sort of epidemic?

I couldn't help but shiver. That guy had to be stopped.

"How are you planning on finding this Chosen One? Do you know anything about him?" I asked.

"His family is from these surroundings."

"That's it?"

"He might be blond... brown eyes."

"Blond? —I repeated, raising my eyebrows.

"And... an orphan."

My pocket vibrated and I pulled out my cell phone. In the screen, a short message:

'Did you see Sam's post on the video? Such a dictator! Night.
—Alex.'