

THE  QUEST FOR THE
MAGIC SEALS

THE WAR OF TREASON

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The Quest for the Magic Seals, The War of Treason

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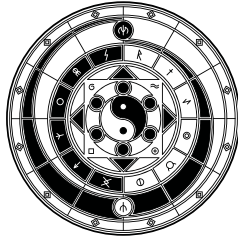
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*To you, who seek
something to fight for*



CHAPTER I

The Council's Call

Little Road was a small city located in the heart of a valley surrounded by green wooded mountains. Nice weather, nice people. It had a huge mall, an exclusive avenue downtown full of luxurious buildings and stores, a couple of movie theaters and lots of parks and green areas. It was famous by its food, for being near a large city in the west, at the other side of the mountains, and by its modern and important Museum of Natural History. Clean streets, quiet suburbs. A nice place to live in. To the north of the urban area stood out a high cliff known to all its inhabitants as The Hill, a place where a viewpoint had been created to watch the city... or to have hot dates... according to what someone told me.

The picturesque city was full of ordinary people living their ordinary lives from home to work; or school, in my case. You could say it was a relatively calmed town, since even crime was almost zero; nothing never happened... at the eyes of most people. What the 'normal' inhabitants didn't know, was that this place was home to more supernatural events than any horror movie saga.

Opposite The Hill, deep in the forest to the south of the city, there was a hidden an unexplored cave known only by a few as the Moon Temple; a place that had a secret door that

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communicated two different worlds.

So far, the ‘quiet normal city’ came to be.

For years, that magical access was kept closed; however, the appearance of a brave and long-awaited sorcerer made it necessary for the door to open, and that caused dark creatures and demons to constantly cross from their world, threatening the safety of the city that started being tirelessly protected by this young man with dedication and courage... me.

My name is Ryan Bennett, and I lived in that quiet normal city with my mom and little brother, in a residential area somewhere between downtown and that temple. That’s the place where I was born seventeen years back then, and where I returned after my mother was transferred to Mexico for five years. When I came back, I thought I would continue with my normal life, and that I would luckily run into my two best friends from my childhood; but what I never imagined was that I would also meet a little creature named Kanna, who, just the night after my arrival, would reveal to me the adventures the destiny had in store for me.

The ‘short version’, as I like to call it, is that I had turned out to be a sorcerer. With the help of my new powers, which consisted mainly of moving objects with my mind, and with an amazing magic sword, I had to fight my way through a dangerous journey full of other sorcerers and dark creatures, to gather twelve Magic Seals that kept a Great Power locked at the top of a mountain, which would help me destroy the evil that had threatened that other world for so many years... The very very short version.

The new secret life I got seemed quite attractive and exciting at first; come on, I had powers. Powers! Any... anyone’s dream, period. But as many things in life, the dream soon became a nightmare. As the months went by, becoming a sorcerer who risked his life every other day after school, completing missions from here to there, facing unimaginable enemies and hideous creatures, fearing for the life of others... It stopped being attractive and exciting.

Fortunately, I wasn’t alone; I had the help and guidance

of Kanna at the hardest moments... but what really gave me the courage and confidence to face the challenges that came my way, was that my best friend, Alexander Taylor, was always with me. Together, we managed to get two of the Magic Seals, even though the enemy got two as well. We visited that other world called the Magic Realm, and went to three of its six kingdoms, where we met a lot of people that soon became our allies. But we also made many enemies, such as the self-proclaimed King of Darkness; that man who, since the night I met Kanna, became the face of each and every one of my nightmares... Long.

I heard many stories about him and what he did five years before, during his attempt to conquer the Magic Realm, but it didn't take long for me to have a reason of my own to embrace my destiny as the Chosen One and make a firm resolve to defeat him with my very own hands.

Before my eyes, unexpectedly, after constantly threatening my family and friends, Long kept his promise and murdered my best friend, Samantha Adams. I never had such dark moments as those; somehow, I think I started to understand how the Darkness worked. I unrecognised myself. But, fortunately as well, with the help of a Magic Seal, we were able to bring her back to life.

From that incident, almost a month passed. Strange events continued occurring near the Moon Temple, but there were only dark creatures that came through the door to do their old tricks; naturally, I took care of them. However, Long was worryingly calm and we didn't hear from him during that time. Kanna insisted over and over that we should investigate what was going on, but having Samantha back made me want to enjoy every moment I spent with her... and Alex. Temporarily, that was my highest priority.

"Hey guys!"

Samantha, who was sitting to my left in our classroom, screamed and jumped up from her seat. Alex, to my right, chuckled.

"Miss Adams?" Ms. Marianne, our teacher, murmured,

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turning from the front to her. “Did something happen to make you scream like that?”

“No,” she said quickly, sitting up again, glaring at me.

The teacher gave Samantha one last look and continued with whatever she was doing.

“*Lo siento*,” I murmured in Spanish. You should remember that I was kind of bilingual, and, sometimes, when the occasion warranted it or the feeling won me over, I would blurt some phrase in the language that none of my friends spoke; advantages of living in a Spanish-speaking country for five long years.

“I told you not to do that without a warning, Ryan.”

“Sam, get over it,” Alex said carelessly.

“Get over it?” she repeated, lowering her voice. “I am trying to solve this equation, and suddenly, I hear a voice screaming inside my head.”

“Sorry,” I said with honesty.

“Fine, fine,” Alex insisted. “The man already apologized; let him be.”

My friends and I always occupied a large desk with three chairs at the end of the classroom by a window; however, it seemed the teacher had the sharpest ears ever, as she always caught us talking and doubled our load of homework. That is why I decided to ‘practice’ with my new magical ability; and to not interrupt the class every time I had to tell them something.

You see, since my last battle at Dawn Village, an abandoned place, very close to Greatville, I discovered I had the ability to speak or communicate with anyone through my mind. Cool, huh? Kanna explained to me that it was something derivative of my main power and that I had to use it wisely... but, in my opinion, it was something that would save me a lot of extra schoolwork.

“What I was about to say, is that Audrey finally called last night,” I said, trying to avoid a discussion between my friends.

“What did she say?” Samantha asked, returning to her notes with resignation.

I looked to the front and noticed that the teacher was still looking at us, so, I decided to continue with the conversation through my new communication medium.

“Since she went back, her teachers have left her twice as much work for all the classes she missed while she was here; that’s why she hadn’t called.”

“I know the feeling,” Samantha murmured impatiently, still writing.

“You know, this power of Ryan to make telepathic conferences is quite useful,” Alex’s voice said in my head.

“Yes, but he must not use it with bad intentions,” Samantha’s voice interrupted, as the girl glared at me again. “Right, Ryan?”

“Bad intentions?” Alex repeated, raising his eyebrows. “As which?”

“As making psychic conversation in the middle of math,” Samantha said in an annoyed tone that I still noticed.

“We’re in math?” Alex’s voice asked, followed by an echo.

It was quite curious.

Anyone who didn’t know, and no one did, that we conversed through thoughts, would have believed that we were just looking at each other, over and over again.

“Miss Adams? Solve that equation, please.”

Samantha grabbed her book and walked to the whiteboard slowly; however, that didn’t stop her from listening to the last thought of my blond friend.

“Next time, don’t include her in the conversation.”

“I heard that!”

When classes were over, later that day, my friends and I left the classroom to put our books in our lockers before going home, but just as we turned into the first corridor...

“*Hola, amigo,*” said a beautiful girl in Spanish, smiling at me; she walked to me with some books in her arms and a purple backpack hanging from her shoulder. Her hair was black, long, straight and streaked with pink, but that day, she wore it in a side braid.

“Hi,” I replied, smiling back and kissing her.

I told you about my new girlfriend, Melissa, right?

I didn’t? Well, now you know.

Melissa Minamoto was the most beautiful, popular and

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smart girl in school; reasons of why we topped the gossip blogs for days when word got out that our relationship was official. Of course, a lot of the rich guys in Domum started to hate me for it, but... to tell the truth, it didn't bother me at all.

"What are you guys doing this beautiful afternoon?" she asked as we walked down the corridor.

"We have something to show Ryan," Alex responded, exchanging a complicity smile with Samantha.

"Oh... I remember now" —Melissa nodded— "The great mystery of the week."

A couple of days before, right after the end of Universal History class at the second period, Samantha and Alex had told me that they had to show me something at The Hill on Thursday afternoon. I couldn't get a bit of information out of them after constantly insisting, apparently it was a surprise. Of course, I had to give up after being scolded by Samantha.

"Care to join us?" Samantha asked Melissa.

"I'm stuck with the sports committee," the girl said with a grimace.

"Again?" I asked.

"It's a long story that I will tell you tonight" —she smiled at me again— "Same time?"

"Same way," I replied, kissing her once more.

"Oh, you guys are gross sometimes," Alex grimaced.

"Not that it's any of your business, but we are just talking at the phone," I blurted.

"I know all about your long late-night phone sessions. I am a victim of them."

"How?" I asked. "How is that affecting you?"

"When I want to call you, you are not available."

"I see you all day," I complained.

"Still, sometimes, there are urgent things I want to tell you."

"Your UFO conspiracy theories are not urgent."

"You don't know that."

"Did you know that dating Ryan implied sharing him with someone else?" Melissa asked Samantha, who laughed, nodding once and again."

"Hey, fossil."

I looked up and saw a smiling Kyle Edwards approaching us; effusively, he shook my hand.

“All well?”

“All well,” I repeated.

“Hello, stranger,” the guy said, kissing Samantha.

“I cannot explain the level of grossness,” Alex added.

“Apparently, someone’s feeling lonely,” Melissa said; Kyle started laughing.

“It’s a shame that Audrey had to go,” Samantha commented.

“I’m glad to be the center of attention,” Alex snapped. “I live for moments like this one.”

“Did you see it?” Kyle asked me, changing the subject.

“I did,” I replied, immediately understanding what he was talking about. “It’s really good.”

“What’s good?” Alex wanted to know.

“A new videogame. ‘Deities of the Underworld,’” Kyle answered.

“You played ‘Deities of the Underworld’ without me?” Alex snapped alarmed, staring at me.

“No,” I said quickly. “I just saw a video.”

“Since when is Kyle Edwards sending you videos?” he asked me quietly when the rest got distracted with the news that Kyle would have a big game the next day.

Without knowing what to say, I shrugged.

Kyle and I always had a relationship quite... complicated; specially after I came back. However, since he understood that I didn’t have the intention of taking Samantha away from him, his attitude towards me changed radically.

And, actually, I even started liking the guy.

“You’re all coming, right?”

“I hate soccer, but, yes. We’re coming,” I replied nodding.

“I have to be there anyways” —Melissa shrugged— “As you are the one playing, someone else must cover the game for the Dispatch.”

“Since everyone’s going...” Alex concluded, rolling his eyes.

We said goodbye to Melissa when we left the school and Kyle gave us a ride to the other side of the city on his convertible; once there, he left, and Samantha, Alex and I started

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walking uphill at the foot of the Hill, following a winding path with staggered sections that climbed up.

That was the moment Samantha chose to blow up my ‘normal bubble’, when she reminded me that there were still pending problems at the Magic Realm that we couldn’t forget so easily.

“Ryan...” the girl said halfway. “Have you heard anything... about Joshua?”

“No,” I replied sighing, feeling my spirits going down in a second, as I remembered our mysterious classmate. “Not yet.”

“I just... hope he’s OK,” she murmured.

When I met Joshua, I thought he was the kind of guy that use to spend his time alone and that is not very sociable; harmless. However, weeks before, we had discovered that he was a spy of Long, sent with the mission of keeping an eye on me. For months, he gave him all kinds of information about me. Thanks to him, my enemy knew about my family, my school, my routine and all my moves. Thanks to him, Long took advantage of things that even caused Samantha’s death.

You might think that all of this did not deserve my understanding, but despite having only five encounters with Long in person, I was already beginning to understand the way he played with everyone. Joshua was only a piece in his game; he was in his hands... And even if one day he behaved like an enemy of mine, I had to do something to help him and free him from the Darkness.

“The Wisers said that if they found out anything about Long, they would contact us,” I continued, after silently meditating.

“And?” Alex asked.

“And... nothing. Haven’t heard from them in days.”

“Must be that the thing is calmed over there.”

“I don’t think so,” I said, remembering Kanna’s continue ‘suggestions’. “When there’s no word of Long, it means he’s doing something. And that’s even more dangerous.”

“And... what has Kanna been up to these days?” Samantha asked suddenly.

Confused, I looked at her.

“Sorry. Wanted to change the subject.”

“Well... not much,” I responded; without any doubts, the Long topic was not pleasant. “What else can she do besides eat, watching TV, playing videogames and annoy me?”

At the last thing, I couldn't help but smile. They laughed.

“I tried to get her reading a book and she threw it at me. But she's always stealing my *mangas*.”

“She knows what's good” Alex nodded.

Samantha smiled again, shaking her head.

“Well, we're already here,” I said when we finally reached the lookout. “Can you tell me now why the mystery? What's the secret?”

“I told you it was a surprise; stop asking” —Samantha rolled her eyes, grimacing— “And do not ask Alexander through your mind”.

“I wasn't going to,” I lied.

“Sorry. Can't tell you,” he said, smiling at me, shrugging.

“What are we doing here?” I repeated, starting to lose patience. “What do you guys want to show me? Did someone fix the railing that Alex broke? After all these years?”

“Alex...” Samantha said anxiously. “Are you sure this is the right place?”

“Sure.”

“And... are you sure this is the right time?”

“Sure.”

“And...?”

“Would you trust in me for once in your life, woman?” my friend blurted.

Samantha shrugged, grimacing.

“I won't be in peace until I see him,” she murmured.

“What's with the two of you?” I asked, looking at them strangely. “Since when...?”

But my two friends had been watching behind my back; they both smiled widely all of a sudden.

“Oh, there he is,” Samantha said in relief.

“Right on time,” Alex added.

“Who?”

I turned and, when I saw that person right before me, it all

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made sense; only they could hide something like that.

“*Hola, Ry,*” the man with short tousled black hair said in Spanish; his smile lit up his seemingly young unshaven face. He had bright blue eyes behind a pair of small squared black thick glasses.

“Dad?”

“Surprise,” he said in his distinctive Latin accent.

Laughing, I gave him a hug.

“But, how...? What are you doing here? When did you get here?”

“Just now,” he said, pointing at a black suitcase he was rolling behind him.

“How did you know?” I asked my friends.

“Audrey,” Samantha explained. “She called Alex.”

“Only you would come here before getting home,” I said looking at my father, whose pale looks and fancy coat reminded me of the life I had left back in Mexico.

You see, when we were kids, it was my dad who took us to The Hill for the first time; he was the one in charge of taking us there to play on the weekends, and it was thanks to him that it turned into our favorite place. It made a lot of sense that he chose that spot to give me a surprise that warm evening.

“And mom? Does she know you’re here?”

“It’ll be a surprise for her too.”

“I see,” I said smiling. “*Se te olvidó decirle.*”

“Yes. I forgot to tell her. But that’s what makes it a surprise,” he said nervously.

“Well, I’m definitively surprised” —I crossed my arms.

“After all the work we’ve been doing, I decided it was time to take a little rest.”

“How little?”

“A couple of weeks. Maybe more, if I manage to prolong the emotional blackmail.”

“I see where you got your sarcasm from,” Samantha commented, entertained.

“Just... don’t encourage him,” I murmured.

“Show the molars” —Alex pulled out his cellphone and held it to take a selfie— “I must have another like this one

somewhere. We'll do a 'before and after'."

"Just don't post it until my mom knows he's here, alright?"

"Let's not stop the fun then," my father said, looking at Samantha and Alex. "Why don't we all go home; you can join us for dinner."

"That's not a bad idea," I said. "What do you guys say?"

"OK," Samantha agreed.

"Good! Dinner! Perfect! I'm in!" —Alex high-fived my father.

Since we met, my friend and my father got along very well... although, maybe too well for my taste.

"You just want some witnesses in case mom decides to kill you, right?" I said as we started our way back home.

"When will the day come when you begin to have faith in your old man?" he asked offended, dragging his suitcase.

"Don't make me say it."

My father snorted, smiling.

"And... how's Mexico?" I asked.

"Well, you know... lots of people, traffic, *quesadillas* with and without cheese; which reminds me..." —he looked in the pockets of his long coat and pulled out a white envelope, which he extended to Alex— "This... is for you."

"Me?" the guy repeated, taking the envelope.

"Sí," my father confirmed, frowning.

"Oh..." Alex snapped finally. "I see. *Gracias*."

"What's that?" Samantha asked.

"Nothing," my friend replied, putting the envelope in the back pocket of his jeans.

"Tell me."

"You are being nosy again."

"Fine" —the girl crossed her arms— "I don't care."

"Oh, you're dying to know what it is."

My dad laughed again and said something about how neither of them had changed at all.

I suppose a short explanation here is necessary:

Unlike my mother, my father was born in Mexico, although his parents were from England; only child. He studied archaeology and, as he did, he started working at the National

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Museum of Anthropology of Mexico City. Despite being so young, he managed to secure a good position in no time, and was sent as temporary director to a new Museum of Natural History that would open in a small town high up the continent, called Little Road. There, in cooperation with that country, he would be in charge of directing the assembly and organizing the staff of professionals who would work permanently in it.

When he got there, he found that the small place did not have many people specializing in the areas he needed, so, he traveled to the large neighboring city in the west that did have major universities. In Coast Lane City, he gave some lectures at the Faculties of History with the aim of recruiting professors and students who were interested in following him to the new museum that was being created in the nearby town to boost tourism... There, he met a young assistant in the Department of Paleontology at Coast Lane University. A young Bryana Edevane. Guess who?

Along with his new team, my dad returned to Little Road, where he worked hand in hand with my mother for about a year, and... the rest is a bit obvious. Coincidentally, my mother was originally from Little Road, and that was why it didn't take much for them to settle down. Even the house we lived in, they inherited. We didn't know much about my mother's family; she was also an only child. Although I learned that her mother, my grandmother, married a man from Little Road, and that is why she separated from a younger sister who stayed in the distant country from which she emigrated. Country we never knew what it was.

But let's go back to my parents. The got married, I was born, then my brother, some years passed and my grandmother died leaving us her house; later, the National Museum of Anthropology of Mexico called my father back, even though his stay had already been assured as definitive after his marriage. Thanks to my mother's studies and discoveries, she was also invited at the same time, and that's when we all went to Mexico... Until my mother was suddenly sent back, now

as director, but not my father. To stay together, it was decided that my brother and I would return with her to Little Road, while he finished a few studies with Audrey's fathers, before officially requesting his transfer home... If it all went well.

According to Kanna, the constant 'mood swings' of Mexico's museum were something of magic. Yes; I made the same face when she told me. According to her theory, we moved to Mexico just as she and Long fell asleep, and returned when they woke up for a very important reason: the Prophecy of the Chosen One was being fulfilled.

Right or wrong, at the moment, it mattered more to me that my father was home.



"Your father is here?"

Sitting in the middle of my bedroom, Kanna sat in her high-backed striped chair in the lounge of the attic; and even when her favorite *anime* was on TV, she watched me walk back and forth in front of her. It was one thing to hide the creature from my mother and brother, who rarely went up my secluded room, but it would be a very different one to include my father in the complicated equation.

"I will have to ask you to be more careful."

"Why?"

"Let's just say that my dad tends to be more observant than my mom... and, too intrusive. The fact that we are in the attic will not be an impediment to him."

"What do you mean?"

"Well..."

At that moment, I heard the bedroom's door opening, followed by quick steps on the wooden staircase; before I could react, I saw my father's head peeking out from behind the railing that held the television.

"Dinner time, Ry."

Unable to help myself, I started coughing because of the smoke Kanna left behind by disappearing in the midair.

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“Ry...” my father said cautiously, finishing up the stairs.

“Yes?”

“Were you smoking?”

“What?” I snapped, alarmed. “No! No, no, no, no. It’s the attic; it’s always dusty. I was dusting off the couch. See? Doesn’t even smell like smoke.”

“So... the attic,” he said, examining the place with his eyes; he smiled widely. “Big upgrade from your small bedroom at *La Condesa*.”

“I guess,” I said, shrugging.

“Did you know I lived here for a while?”

“What? Here, in the attic?”

“Yes,” he said, walking towards the main window facing the front of the house, where my desk was. “It was when I met your mother. The hotel room the museum was paying for was getting very expensive, so, your grandmother rented me the attic for a few months while I found a place of my own.

“I didn’t know that” —I crossed my arms.

“If only these walls could speak,” he said wistfully.

“They would say things I do not want to hear.”

“I think you might be right” —he smiled— “I’ll just say that, when I left the attic and moved into an apartment downtown, your mother and I were no longer just friends.”

“*Suficiente*,” I snapped in Spanish.

“I’m glad you’ve decided to follow the tradition,” he said, patting me on the back, as he walked back to the stairs. “Let’s have some diner.”

“I’ll be right there.”

But before he left...

“You would tell me if you started smoking, right?”

“I’ll see you downstairs,” I said smiling.

When my father went downstairs and I heard the door close, one of my wardrobes opened and Kanna poked her head out.

“Seems nice. He looks like you.”

Sighing, I walked to the stairs too.

“Nice move. You better start practicing more though; that

was slow for him.”

I left Kanna in my bedroom after convincing her to turn down the TV volume and went down to the dining room, where I found everyone at the table.

“It was incredible; I never thought I would see something like that,” my father was saying as he helped himself some salad. “I almost took a smuggling photo for you; *Tomás* and *Noel* tried to cover for me, but I didn’t get a chance.”

“I wish I had been there to see it,” my mother sighed as she helped herself some of the delicious sweet stew she only made on special occasions.

“See what?” I asked when I saw Samantha and Alex listening carefully.

“Oh, you’re here,” my mom said. “What were you doing?”

“Not smoking,” I assured. My friends frowned. “What are we talking about?”

“About a newly discovered Olmec sculpture that arrived to the Mexico museum,” Samantha said in wonder, as I sat next to her.

“Sounds interesting. How are *Tomás* and *Noel*?”

“Happy to have Audrey back,” my dad replied.

“You call Audrey’s fathers by their name?” Alex asked me.

“They’re amazing,” I said smiling. “Oh... wait. You don’t know them yet. I would pay to be there when it happens. They will finish you up.”

Pale, Alex looked at my father, who shook his head, trying hard not to laugh.

“Have they reached an agreement yet?” my mother asked my father.

“Not yet,” he replied.

“Are we still talking about the Luna León?” I asked.

“The museum of Little Road was created to boost tourism in the area years ago, but its own research department has grown over the time because of the perfectly preserved fossils that have been found in these mountains,” my father explained. “They have your mother to thank for that. However, a large investment is being considered in the coming months that would involve expanding the museum in other fields. Did

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you know that an archaeological site was discovered in the mountains recently?”

“I read about that,” Samantha commented, interested. “It’s impressive.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” I murmured.

“They found a Maya city not far from here.”

“A Maya city?” I repeated. “We are thousands of miles away from their territory. Is that even possible?”

“And there’s the reason it is necessary to investigate it urgently.”

“Wait,” I said, confused. “Does that mean they are sending you back here?”

Both of my parents smiled.

“You’re kidding.”

“It’s a possibility” —Dad shrugged— “Definitively, the matter is on the table.”

“It’s your area; you’re the best over there. What’s left to talk about?”

“Well, this time, I’m not asking only for me.”

My mother smiled again.

“Am I missing something?” I asked.

“I wonder if Audrey would be interested on transferring to Domum.”

Alex dropped his fork loudly.

“You’re kidding,” I repeated.

“We are in a very good moment to negotiate,” my father said nodding. “It’s also a good opportunity for *Tomás* and *Noel*; and the possible discoveries are infinite. We are talking about something that may completely change history. The subject came up shortly before I came, so, they stayed on it.”

“Audrey didn’t say anything when I spoke to her yesterday.”

“And that’s because she doesn’t know, Ryan. Please, do not tell her.”

“Why?”

“Do you know how many times we’ve been about to move to different parts of the world without you and Max knowing?” my father said, looking at my mother, who nodded. “In our fields,

possibilities are many. There is too much to investigate, but having a family must be a priority at some point. I'm sure *Tomás* and *Noel* will tell Audrey when they have made up their minds."

"What parts of the world are we talking about?" I asked.

"Edinburgh," mom murmured.

"I could have lived in Scotland?" I gasped.

"But you didn't. If you feel sad now, imagine how sad you would have been at the moment. Now, all the castles you want to see, can be seen in the books of the library in the other room."

Samantha and I looked at each other and smiled amused by the irony of the comment. But for his part, Alex just nodded.

I glanced at my friend and watched him eat in silence; it would surely be a great event if Audrey lived closer. I was about to make a comment to Alex about it, through my mind of course, when something else distracted me and made me stand up quickly.

"Ryan?" my mother said, confused.

"What is it?" my father asked.

"Uhm... nothing," I said anxiously, leaving the dining room. "I'll be back; won't take long."

I walked to the kitchen making a silly comment about dessert and closed the door.

"What – is wrong – with you?" I snapped at Kanna, who was peeking inside the fridge.

"I was hungry," her muffled little voice said from the bright cold interior.

"Didn't you hear what I said upstairs?!" I blurted, alarmed.

"About your dad? Sure. But I was hungry."

"Take whatever you're eating and go upstairs quickly" — grimacing, I crossed my arms.

"Fine, fine. You're more dramatic than a villain of a ninety's *telenovela*."

I walked back to the door and peered into the dining room, from where Samantha and Alex were looking at me.

"Kanna," I told them through my mind; they both nodded as I shrugged.

I went back to the kitchen and closed the door.

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“Hurry,” I murmured, as I saw the creature filling her arms with scones. “I don’t have all night.”

“I’m coming! I’m coming!” Kanna exclaimed, walking out to the stairs. “These youngsters, always hurrying.”

I sighed, trying not to lose patience, and Alex came in.

“What is it?”

“She was hungry” —I sat in a chair.

“How did you know?” he asked, looking at me confused. “You just suddenly left.”

“You know... that is a very good question,” I murmured, frowning.

“It is?”

“Well... I just felt her presence.”

“What’s weird about that?”

“It’s the first time that happens.”

“But you felt presences before.”

“I have, but it was always on purpose. I have felt presences because I tried to feel them, of because they were evil and it would be difficult not to, but I had never felt a presence without wanting to... Does that make any sense?”

“Strangely, it does. Your powers must be growing still.”

“I hate that.”

“Why?”

“Because every time my powers grow, we have problems,” I answered, regretfully.

“Right,” Alex said, leaning on the cupboard.

“By the way...” I started, “what did my dad give you at The Hill?”

“What?”

“The envelope from Mexico.”

“Oh, that. Nothing important.”

“I bet it is.”

“It’s not.”

“Must be... Audrey’s?”

“Of course, it’s Audrey’s!” Samantha exclaimed, entering the kitchen. “It’s a letter! The question is, would it be a love letter?”

“Ah!” Alex snapped. “Where did you come from?”

“A letter?” I repeated, smiling.

“I... don’t know what you’re talking about...”

“Audrey gave it to your dad so he could give it to Alex,” the girl explained, ignoring my friend, who was complaining about our violation to his privacy.

“Really?” I asked, following her game.

“Where do you get those ideas?” Alex asked. “You’re nuts. Letters are like from last century. Not useful anymore.”

“Not when they’re a great gesture. Gesture that is not commonly started by girls.”

“You sent her a letter to Mexico first?” I asked smiling.

“No. Shut up.”

“He did,” Samantha assured.

“What did she tell you?” Alex asked nervously.

“Oh... so it’s true,” I said, nodding, enjoying every second.

“You’re both confusing me; shut up already,” Alex blurted, walking to the door, heading back to the dining room.

“My dad told you everything, didn’t he?” I asked Samantha.

“Every detail.”

The rest of the evening was ‘calmed and nice’, as my mother opined when Samantha and Alex went home; but what she didn’t know was that, as we seemed to be quiet, paying attention to the great number of stories Max told our father about his school, Samantha and I were teasing Alex in a long discussion that was taking place over a magical silent medium.

I helped my parents clean up the table and after chatting for a while with them at the living room/library, I went upstairs to take a shower and go to sleep; after all, it was a school night.

But I wasn’t counting on...

“Ryan... Ryan... Ryan Bennett, wake up already!”

I yelped as I tangled myself in the sheets and, cursing, fell to the ground next to my bed.

Scraping my cheek with the rough mat, I sat up in the darkness of my room to see...

“Sam?! What’s going on? How...? What are you...?”

“What is this?” she snapped, waving a plate, as I turned on the light on my nightstand.

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“A plate?”

“We have got to start closing that window at night,” Kanna murmured, who had also fell over the bed by accident.

“Look at it well!” the girl exclaimed.

I had to rub my eyes a couple of times as I thought they were deceiving me; a blurry but bright Yin Yang was drawn on the surface of the white ceramic plate.

“What’s that?” I asked awkwardly.

“That’s what I’d like to know. I was at home helping dad with the dishes, when suddenly, this thing appeared from nowhere in some white light.”

“From nowhere?” I asked, sitting down on the bed, smiling slightly. Kanna started laughing out loud on a pillow.

“What are you laughing at?” Samantha shouted, glaring at the creature.

“Take it easy, Sam,” I said, standing up. “It’s just part of a spell.”

“A spell?”

“A very simple one,” I said, grabbing the ceramic plate carefully. “It means that someone is calling for you; it’s like some kind of magic video call that Kanna invented. Look at what happens when you say the magic word.”

“*Aperi Fenestram*,” Kanna recited.

I watched, smiling, how the girl’s face was slightly illuminated by the light from a portal that was created on the surface of the plate; the Yin Yang split in two, letting out a white light from between the two parts, and the image of the Council Hall in Greatville appeared within the circle once the light was extinguished. It was like a small screen.

“Greetings,” said one of the three red-robed sorcerers, who watched us from three elegant gold seats that gleamed with some torchlights.

“But... how is it that they’re inside the plate?” Samantha murmured incredulously, turning the object.

“They’re not inside the plate,” Kanna said, resigning herself to the fact that she wouldn’t be able to fall asleep again. “It’s just a way to communicate. I invented it; did you know?”

“I think I already said that,” I snapped.

“But I wanted to say it again.”

“You wanted to emphasize that it was your invention?”

“Maybe. I shall be respected and admired.”

“We have been trying to reach Miss Samantha for a while, but she didn’t open the portal,” the black-haired man said. Lord Kelvyn was the... coldest of the three; I was not surprised that the comment came from him in such a tone.

“That’s because I didn’t know what it was,” Samantha murmured, looking at me with disgust.

“What’s going on?” Kanna asked interested.

“We would like to see you as soon as possible in Greatville,” Lord Kevan explained, running a hand through his short red hair.

“What is it?” I asked. “Is it Long?”

“No.”

“A Seal?”

“No.”

“It’d be best if you tell us already, or Ryan’s questioning would go on for hours,” Kanna murmured.

“Actually, this matter is regarding Miss Samantha,” Lord Kenneth said finally, smiling kindly. “It is her presence the one we request.”

“Me?” the girl asked confused.

“Indeed. But if the Chosen One and Kanna want to be present, they will be welcomed,” the blond sorcerer concluded. Lord Kenneth was the kindest of them all, and something told me that, despite being a group, he was the one working as a leader, somehow.

“We’ll be there as soon as possible,” Kanna said.

“Very well.”

“*Claude Fenestram*,” I murmured, leaving aside the plate, from where the Yin Yang was already disappearing. “What could they want?”

“I don’t know,” Kanna said, heading to the window. “But we have to go to Greatville now.”

“What? Now?” Samantha asked.

“Of course.”

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“But... it’s nighttime, and there’s school tomorrow,” the girl said preoccupied. “Besides, I didn’t say I was heading out...”

“No problem!” Kanna laughed.

“We always go out there at nighttime; remember that is daytime there, right now. Besides, it won’t take long,” I opined. “We’ll be back in a couple of hours. They don’t seem to have a mission for us.”

“Alright,” the girl muttered pensively.

“Come on,” I said then, heading to the window.

“Ryan...?” Samantha said smiling.

“What is it?” I asked, standing still.

“Are you going like that?”

Then, I looked at my reflection on the standing mirror next to my bed. Because of how fast everything was happening, I hadn’t realized that I was only wearing some loose gray pants.

“You can put on a t-shirt and some sneakers while I wait down there,” the girl said, stepping out the window. “You wouldn’t want to become famous among the witches of Greatville for the wrong reasons.”

“Was that a compliment?” I asked Kanna, when the girl was no longer in sight.

“I don’t care. I’m sleepy. Hurry. Let’s go.”



Samantha, Kanna and I went out in the middle of the night and headed the dense dark woods next to the school. That old and kind of creepy cave, illuminated by the fire of some torches on the walls, seemed exactly the same as I remembered; it had been almost a month since the last time I crossed it to go to the Magic Realm.

When we walked through the door and saw the Sun shining bright, I stared at the beautiful landscape of the Magic Realm: endless forests to our left, far mountains ahead, and the wide ocean at the horizon to our right.

Kanna climbed my loose pants and pulled out a red crystal sphere from my pocket.

After using the Porter, that our friend Lorna had given us, to reach the kingdom of the great city, we headed to the building where the Wises of the Council awaited.

I was already beginning to get used to the opulence of the buildings in that place; however, I could see how, despite having been there twice already, Samantha admired the building with the great glass dome to which we were heading, walking through the wide access esplanade next to the immense stone wall of a cliff.

I thought it was a bit strange that Tristan and Lorna weren't waiting for us at the entrance as they used to, so, I dared to make my way through the large oak door and the impressive lobby with chandeliers; without running into anyone, not even the sorcerers on duty who normally guarded the inner doors, we entered the circular and majestic Council Hall.

"Welcome to Greatville," one of the three men said, who were standing next to the windows facing the esplanade.

"Good... morning?" I said, hesitantly.

"Hi," Samantha said, with a little nervousness that I could hear in her voice.

"Miss Samantha, welcome to Greatville," Lord Kevan told her, smiling.

"Thank you."

"I thought we'd be seeing Tristan here," I commented, examining the room.

"At the moment, the General is on a mission outside the city," Lord Kenneth replied, "however, he sends his regards."

"Lorna will join us soon," Lord Kelvyn added, seeing I was still looking around, "although, this is not an official matter."

"It's not?"

"We have a gift for Miss Samantha", Lord Kenneth announced.

"A gift?" she repeated.

The doors of the room I had just closed behind us opened again, and a young bespectacled woman with short dark hair and slanted brown eyes entered smiling at us. In her hands, she carried a two-foot wooden trunk with metal inlays.

"Hello, guys."

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“Hi, Lorna,” I greeted.

“I am glad to see you in a non-emergency moment,” she joked, walking to a stone pedestal near us, to place the trunk on it.

“Likewise.”

“Miss Samantha,” Lord Kevan said, inviting the girl with a sign.

“These objects belonged to the witch Nualla,” Lord Kevan explained, as Samantha opened the small trunk. “After the events occurred a month ago, we thought it would be appropriate that they reached their new owner.”

“What is it?” I asked Samantha, approaching the trunk as well.

“Some... clothes,” she replied, quite confused, as she examined the interior. “And... a sphere,” she completed, pulling out a crystal blue object.

“It’s Nualla’s Crosier.”

“Crosier?” I repeated.

“These are her most beloved belongings, and she left them in our hands so that we could give them to you one day.”

“To me?” Samantha asked.

“To her reincarnation.”

“And, how is it used?” I asked, examining the sphere.

“That would be Miss Samantha’s first task,” Lord Kenneth said, ceremoniously.

“What?”

“The way to use Nualla’s Crosier must be learned by herself.”

“What?” I snapped. “But, how is she supposed to do that? How will she learn...?”

“When the right time comes, she will.”

“Why can’t you just tell her?” I insisted.

“Each of us has a task that we must fulfill on our own way, and just as you have had tests from which you have learned, she will also inevitably have them. We all have a different path in which we must make our way through with our own means. This is just her first mission.”

I got what the sorcerers were telling me, and I knew that they were probably right; however, that didn’t stop me from feeling angry by the situation. I knew that when I ‘had to dis-

cover something on my own', it meant that lots of troubles were coming, and the simple fact that Samantha was now involved, worried me sick.

"Wow, wow; stop for a second," I said, confused by something else. "Are you saying that Samantha is a witch now? Because all that about the path, the tests, the mission, the new clothes and the sphere that's supposed to be a staff, which I assume is a weapon... sounds quite familiar. It seems that you're preparing her for something that's coming."

The Wisers looked at each other.

"What were you expecting?" Lorna asked softly. "She is the reincarnation of the witch that made the Prophecy of the Chosen One and that created your Sacred Sword. It's only natural that..."

"None of this is natural," I said alarmed. "She is not a witch. She does not have any powers. You can't just assume that only because she came back from the death with a Seal..."

"Ryan... it's OK," Samantha said softly, closing the trunk.

"No, it's not OK."

"Ryan, easy, boy," Kanna sentenced.

"All we know, we told you," Lord Kenneth said, shrugging, looking at me with sympathy. "We know how magic works, and that leads us to guesswork. Everything is uncertain. That is why, the best we can do, is prepare her, for whatever may happen."

Uneasy, I looked at Samantha, who seemed nervous.

"That was all garbage," I commented, as we waited for the Moon Door to open again, just a few minutes later. "Garbage."

"Here we go again," Kanna said on Samantha's shoulder, rolling her eyes.

"One month ago, they summoned us to tell us that they would help Sam in case she 'needed it', and now, they call us to give her these old things?"

I was carrying the wooden trunk.

"They just want to be gentle."

"No; they are up to something," I murmured, thinking that, when the Wisers seemed a little mysterious, it meant that

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there was something they were not telling us.

“They just want to help,” Kanna insisted.

“But, on what? That is the problem.”

“They shall have their reasons.”

“Yeah, right. I mean, what’s all that about letting her learn on her own? How is she supposed to do that? There could be thousands of ways to... do whatever she has to do. It’s not like it has a press button like my Yin Yang.”

“If the Wises say that only she can do it, it may mean that they don’t know how.”

“What’s the use of them being wises if they don’t know anything?” I snapped, stepping through the threshold of the already opening door.

“Ryan, would you shut up already?” Kanna blurted, pointing at the girl. “You are freaking her out, and you are putting me in a bad mood. I must remind you that I have not fulfilled all my hours of sleep today.”

Sighing, I looked at Samantha, who had stood quiet since we left the Council Hall.

“I’m sorry,” I murmured to her.

“One day at the time” —she barely smiled— “Shall we?”

THE WAR OF TREASON