

PROLOGUE

‘I bid you adieu,’ the little guy said.

Nicole knew he was real. In later years, her parents would say she imagined it, but she was sure they were wrong.

Nicole’s parents always said that she had a vivid imagination. Of course, she did. At eighteen months, she’d developed at a fast rate. She walked early, and her vocabulary was extensive. She memorised her times tables and the entire periodic table by heart.

She walked steadily and met the adorable fellow halfway across the lounge room. Her parents sat, each with coffee and cake. The couch was cream with matching lamps on the side tables and a cabinet on the far side was filled with glass and ceramic elephants her mother collected from her travels. The breeze blew in, making the curtains float in the mild summer evening.

He was cute, like a child, with round, blue eyes, and a flat, pale face. He was only the size of a teddy bear. His power buzzed around him in a quiet sound of twinkles, mixing with his chocolate aura. He wore an orange suit with a matching tie and a hat with a tail atop his wispy, straw-coloured hair.

He told her his name was Hamish, a Thisbe from a world called Orra, and that she was special, that she was 'Magic'. He said that he would be back.

But that was nearly eleven years ago, and she waited and looked for him every day.

Was the Thisbe from Orra a liar? Or maybe Nicole's parents were right, and it had always just been in her head.

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Raisa muttered to herself as she leapt from the balcony of her house in the Frail Realm, in an attempt to become airborne. She was outside the back of her house, in a private garden. She noted the beehives to one side and Dex's shed at the back boundary. No Dellamana would be without a fresh garden. Raisa did these jumps every day, numerous times, to practise her flying. She only managed to prevent an injury at the last moment before her feet crashed hard on the ground. She shuddered and massaged her foot. Raisa realised that even her wings were becoming useless, like the rest of her powers. How awful it was being a Magic living in the Frail Realm.

'You okay?' asked a voice above her.

'Yes, I'm fine.' Her jaw clenched. 'I can't even fly anymore, despite my wing size. I can't run and I have been struggling with a lot more.'

'Talk to me, Raisa. You don't need to go through this alone.'

Raisa pulled herself up to her feet and joined her brother on the balcony. They took a seat in a cushioned lounge. 'I can't meditate anymore. I am catching Frail problems, not just health-wise but mentally.'

'What does that mean?'

‘I feel sad and just can’t get enough sleep. When we first came here, I didn’t feel the cold, but now I do; it’s awful. I don’t know how Frail ever get used to that feeling.’

‘I’m sorry.’ Dex tilted his head. ‘It means that our baking business should be your main focus. You are a gifted chef. The word is out that our food is amazing and that is why we are doing so well.’

‘I know.’ She bit her lip. ‘You are away so much in the back shed. I feel so alone. Even after all these years of living here, I still hate it. I sit for hours thinking about Orra and how stupid I was to lose my Illuminance. We wouldn’t have to live here if I hadn’t been so irresponsible.’

‘I have noticed you daydreaming. It would be easier if you could get more interested in our other activities. Try and focus away from things you cannot change,’ Dex said. ‘And you must stay away from the gemstone in the wall. That can’t be helping, wallowing over there for hours on end.’

‘How can I when the Entrance to the Fire Garden, to my real home, is right across the street? It torments me that it is so close and yet I can’t use it.’

‘Just try to cut down the time you’re over there.’ His voice softened. ‘Life here is difficult, but we’re doing okay. The beehive is full, and the honey is selling fast. I’m building up a good supply of nectar dust.’

Raisa’s expression hardened as she shot a look at Dex. ‘You’re trying to build a Tracer. You need two stones to trace. What would be the point?’

‘I’m concentrating on one at present. It keeps me busy, and I love the challenge.’

‘Dex, the Tracers in Orra are for Thisbe missions. They are used to pinpoint spots from two different realms. What use would one be? We can’t go anywhere. What use is it to have one here in the Frail Realm? The construction would only be held together with your Voltz and won’t be as strong as it would have been in Orra.’

‘I got supplies delivered from Orra. Zosmine helped me,’ Dex said.

Raisa clenched her jaw. ‘You what? And why would you keep that from me?’

Dex stared blankly back at her.

‘So, you really are serious about building a Tracer. How do you know it will even be able to work?’

‘I love that I’m building one. You never know how handy it may be in future. You know how powerful they are, and we may get some benefit from one.’

What a waste of time, Raisa thought.

‘I need to be doing Orra work. It makes me happy.’

Raisa had forgotten he had not lost his ability to telemute and could read her thoughts. It was true Dex managed to hold on to most of his powers, and she put it down to his strong saffron colour dose that only elite Dellamana received. He was a Scholar in the Vault, which held Magical texts that controlled curses and revenge spells. A Dellamana had to be very powerful to get such a role.

He loved tending to the generations of written Magic work, safeguarding the ancient powers and tracking the talismanic rings, making sure they were all accounted for. If such things were stolen, it would be catastrophic for all realms. In the wrong hands, it would cause trouble for all Magic and Frail, and the Dellamana would not be as secure as they were. Minding the ancient powers, besides taking care of the Rogue in the Frail Realm, was one of the core jobs Dellamana had.

‘I want to focus on my Tracer after we finish the cook each day.’

Raisa sighed. Dex didn’t need much sleep, and he needed activities to keep him busy. The large shed on the property was where he did all his Tracer work. Raisa knew he adored being there, doing the work, but she admitted

to herself that she was jealous and lonely. But still, it was her fault they were here to begin with. She had lost the colour from her Crystal, her Illuminance; it wasn't his fault.

'There's no use going over it.'

'I take full blame for us being here. If I didn't take my Hallr Crystal on that Frail excursion, we wouldn't be in this mess.' Raisa thought of that fateful day when she took her Crystal to the Frail Realm, something that was gravely forbidden. No other Marnie would be stupid enough to pull such a stunt or even think of doing such a thing, and on top of that, it had been stolen.

Raisa doubled up, clutching her stomach, and let out a cry.

'What's wrong?' Dex asked, as he stood to reach her.

'Something is happening.'

'I can see that, but what? This is just another sickness.'

'I think I am getting a Helix message.'

'No, Raisa, what Magic would use a Helix on you directly? I haven't got one. Unless you were responsible in some way?'

'Don't look at me like that.'

'You either did something or you didn't. Just tell me.' Dex clenched his hands in fists.

'I must have, but I don't remember,' Raisa said.

'You hid it with a silk? I do not believe you would sink that low, Raisa. We are in this together. That you even had the power to silk and hide something from me is appalling. You should have told me, trusted me, Raisa.'

Raisa hung her head. She felt ashamed. It was true. She had covered her tracks with a magical cover called a silk. Dellamana used this talent to form some privacy around their thoughts. Dellamana can mind-read everything. There was an unspoken rule that to use it appropriately was fine. But to use it to deliberately cover a

bad action was forbidden. Not that any Marnie would ever contemplate doing that. Raisa felt the enormous weight of a new emotion, remorse, and felt a wave of nausea run up her throat.

‘Okay, we had better follow this lead. I will get your shawl. Can you walk?’

Raisa would do it if it killed her. No way would she ignore this.

They walked for twenty minutes past familiar houses, in the suburban, built-up area where they lived. As cars drove past them Dex put a protective arm around his sister. He said, ‘I think we should head home; you are too weak.’

‘It feels like my muscles are tearing,’ Raisa said, with a pained expression. She looked around and saw they were outside the local school.

‘There are too many people here. Let’s go,’ Dex whispered close to her ear.

‘Oh my god, Dex, this is a Helix. I am connected to something close by,’ Raisa whispered, her eyes wide. ‘I can recognise it. Instead of it being in message form, it’s pain.’

‘Come on, let’s get out of here. This will not end well.’ Sweat trickled down his face.

A bell rang; they watched children pour out of buildings, the heat of the day etched on their faces, the little ones running with their bags flying behind them. The coil in Raisa’s stomach had taken on a life of its own, pulling and pushing, but despite the pain, her eyes sparkled. She felt a rush of energy sweep through her.

At that moment, Dex’s eyes nearly popped out of his head. ‘It is a Helix, I just got it. That will mean all Magic will receive it. And because you got it first it means it was personal to you.’

‘What does yours feel like?’

‘No pain, just a heat, nearly scorching. How did you give a Frail a Spark, Raisa?’ Dex said.

‘Errr, um, I didn’t.’

‘You gave someone Magic cells and you can’t deny this. It’s a Spark directly from you, and they have your Magic molecules in them,’ he hissed. ‘Please don’t let this be happening.’

They saw her at the same time. Dex covered his mouth with his palm.

Soon all the Dellamana would know. Not just them, but all Rogue, high and low. Raisa felt her face heat up with shock and fear of the consequences because she did not know how she had this connection with this girl.

The girl looked around, sensing something in her world shift. Her vision passed over them, then back, and she focused on the two individuals standing by the gate. At that moment, Raisa recognised her own power circulating around the girl. She realised why the Helix was in the form of pain, as she could see the girl held pain herself.

Raisa and Dex saw her aura glow at their presence, Magic meeting Magic. They saw her clutch the adult with her hand. The girl’s eyes were still on them, wide and glowing.

‘She’s recognised us!’ Raisa was breathing hard. ‘She’s not afraid, Dex.’

Dex let out a gasp of breath. Raisa felt euphoric as she stared at the face of a Marnie, a child Dellamana, and one of them. Not a full Marnie but close, by the looks of her. Raisa examined the girl’s features, her pale skin and upturned nose. Her white-blonde hair was up in a ponytail, falling past her shoulders in curls and a weak, blue aura surrounded her entire body and moved with her. ‘Dex, look at that aura. How beautiful is that.’

Dex’s mouth was wide open. ‘No Frail would be aware of her. Who is she?’

‘The adult with her looks familiar,’ Rasa said, as another

lovely bolt of energy ran through her. The welcome injection to her weak skills was an unintentional gift from the girl.

‘She has Dellamana traits, yet why is she here in the Frail Realm? She has a curse in the form of a Tangle that will be fighting her Magic. I can see the Magic aura particles floating around her are yours. Raisa, what have you done? Why did you hide it from me? I could have helped you.’

Raisa’s heart missed a beat at the pain she had caused her brother.