

The Delengrad Trilogy

Book Two:
Resurrection

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For my husband, Blake. The real Pirate.

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Prologue

I woke up.

My body electrocuted back to the living. I gasped as the air invades my lungs and fills my body with life. I need to breathe so I sat up and pushed my blonde hair out of my face. My mouth was dry, and my hands shook so terribly I clasp them together to try to get a hold of myself.

I'm in a small bed. Large white candles surrounded the room, giving it a beautiful orange glow. It's hard to breathe in the windowless room. The darkness surrounds me like an obsessed lover, refusing to let me exist without it. My eyes run around the orange room trying desperately to find some sort of recognition. Nothing is familiar in the darkness. I'm dressed in a pale pink nightgown with matching pink sheets. Pink. My favorite color.

He sits beside me on the bed. I recognized Kaylee, my friend and makeshift father figure. He is older than I remember. Much older. I look at him confused. His eyes are no longer blue, but gray. His long, brown hair is peppered with silver stringy strands of knotted hair. Kaylee was now a thin man and who looked as if he hadn't eaten in years. My mind remembers him.

"Kaylee." I said with a scratchy, dry mouth. I recognized Regina's voice as my own.

"Anna, you remember me?" He wheezed. His gray eyes squinted with excitement, and I saw a lone tear escape his right eye.

"Of course I remember you. Why wouldn't I"

I can't speak. My eyes rolled back, and my head throbbed with pain. I felt Regina's hurt and pain deep inside me. Tears flowed easily down my face as memories of Regina float to the surface of my mind.

I yanked the soft material of my nightgown aside to see a large red patch of mushy flesh over the spot where Regina was stabbed. It was an unusually large wound. I did not remember the dagger being that big. My fingers shook violently as I touched the rectangular wound over my heart. I noticed the red patch on my hands, one solitary wound on the front, going through to my palms, as if I had been crucified. The memory surged through me.

Looking at my hands, I screamed out of fear and anger. Anger crawled so easily inside my heart. I stare at my wound, the memories of the other girls returning to my head. All had been named Regina. Vengeance ran through me, and starts beating like its own little heart come alive.

"Anna! It's alright! Anna!" Kaylee said. His voice was no match against my own.

I couldn't stop screaming and touching the red patch on my chest. Regina's life made sense to me now. Memories wash over me. Kaylee grabbed the tops of my arms and tried to calm me down, but I can't stop all the painful memories emerging from the depths of my mind.

“Oh, Kaylee, they killed me! They killed me!” I screamed over, and over. Thankfully, every time I said it, I felt my body relax. I let Kaylee embrace me.

“I know, my dear girl. I know.” He held me tightly. My face was pressed into his neck as I cry into him. He held me as the pain pours out of me. After I shed my tears, I felt like myself again. Every tear that fell from my eyes was the part of me that used to be Regina. With every sob I felt more in control of myself and my emotions. I stopped crying because it feels as if Regina, and her pain, is gone from my body. Kaylee looked deep into my face, his sorrow echoed through his eyes.

“Where are we?” I asked as I wiped away my tears.

“Under a small town called, Brenham. This is a temporaryhome, if you will.”

I shook my head in confusion. “Why are we here? Where’s Delengrad? Whispering Woods?”

Kaylee straightened his spine and cleared his throat as he says, “The world you used to know is gone, Anna. Judge Slider’s power has stretched beyond the borders of Williamson Law. He controls most of the lands. Delengrad, the Woods, Lordview, and all of the surrounding cities are gone.”

“Gone?” I asked with shaky breath.

“Yes, but I don’t want you to think about that. Right now, I need you to calm down and steady your breathing. We didn’t come this far only to lose you now.” Kaylee looked into my eyes, and calmed my breathing.

“Is everything okay?” Someone shouted from the open door.

I recognized my cousin Sarah. She is just as beautiful as I remember her to be. Her hair was a rich brown. A modern blue tank top and black leather pants hug her trim figure. Her head was high and her spine was straight as a board. Confidence emanated from inside her, I could see her time with Via in Whispering Woods did her well. I always thought of her as a sister and treated her as such regardless of her being my cousin. My heart filled with love for her as I think of our life together.

I let go of Kaylee, and looked at her. “Sarah.”

She ran over to me, jumped on the bed, and hugged me tightly to her body. I felt her heart beat into mine. “Oh my Universe, Anna, it’s really you!” It wasn’t long before her tears streaked down the back of my silky nightgown.

“Sarah, you look sostrong!”

She blushed and turned her head down. “Aww, thank you.”

I gently grabbed the back of her head, and pulled her forehead to mine. Her wet brown eyes look into mine. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine.” She insisted, making no attempt to wipe her tears. “Once I left the Academy, it didn’t follow me. I’m fine, I promise. Wow, it’s been a long time! I can’t believe you remember that.”

My smile dropped. “How long?”

She looked straight into my eyes as she said, “Five hundred years.”

“Five hundred!” I gasped. “What happened to Father and Mother? My brothers?” I asked with concern, looking at both of them for an explanation.

“Anna, your father is dead.” Sarah said to me with sadness. “His soul moved on to the Gates of Judgment, but your mother is alive and asleep upstairs. It’s a good thing you woke because she doesn’t have long in this world. Your brother, Richard, is below with the council. They’re in quite a stir since you woke. As for Syler, wellhe was with us when we went to rescue you from that house. He didn’t make it back and we don’t know what happened to him.” Sarah answered, and lowered her eyes.

I shook my head to show her I understood, but inside I cried for Syler. My brother, my sweet baby brother. His face flashed inside my mind. I remembered those sweet blue eyes that matched my own. He was twelve years old when I died, I could only wonder what he would be like now. Would he look like Father? Was his temperament like Mother’s? How did he manage to survive after Father and I died? My chest ached for my little family.

“Oh no!” I cried. The pain punched me in my gut. Sarah hugged me again into her arms. I cried, “This is so horrible!”

“Not anymore.” Sarah said. “We have you back. We’ll find your brother, and the others. We’ll find them.”

“You don’t understand, Sarah. Katie is still in Lee! She’s trapped there in some kind of time limbo, and Rachel is dead. Slider killed her the last time she gave birth to Regina. Rachel’sdead.”

“I assumed as much when I couldn’t locate her. Do you remember everything?”

“Yes, I remember everything. I know who I am, who I was, and in between.” My voice cracked and the tears threatened to release themselves from my eyes as I spoke. I clung to Sarah’s shoulder as if my life depended on it before I let her go.

“Are you okay, darling?” Kaylee stepped forward as he spoke.

"I think so. I don't feel pain in my body, except my heart." The last words were hard to get out. Instinctively I placed my fingers to my healing heart. The nasty patch was squishy like a rotten piece of fruit. Pain flooded my heart like a heavy rainfall, drowning me in its downpour.

Kaylee approached me gently. "Speaking of that, I need to check you. You need a complete exam, and I need to ask you some questions. Sarah will stay here to assist me."

The old wizard brought out a box of potions. His back has a hump and I thought I saw him limp with every step he took. On a purple sheet made of silk, Kaylee laid out his potions and instruments. I noticed there aren't many potions for him to choose from. As Kaylee inspected my wounds he asked me questions about myself. He wanted to know if I remembered being Anna, and Regina. My memory was full and overflowing like a cup with too much water so the answers came easily.

"My hands." I said as I hold them up. "Will I be able to use them again?"

"The magic inside the Kareithian Dagger is strong, but thankfully didn't reach your heart, only infected your flesh. Time will tell what the effects will be. I don't think you should be worried about your hands, I truly believe time will reverse the damage."

"What the hell is the Kareithian Dagger?" I asked.

"A knife made by a man named Kavner. No one has ever seen it, except for Sarah." He motioned to Sarah who is sitting beside me. Something about the way Kaylee said this brings a spark to my memory.

"It was you!" I exclaimed at Kaylee with wide eyes. "You were Bill Greer, the man who helped Regina decipher that video!"

Kaylee shook his head. "Yes. I realized you didn't understand what your dreams were telling you. I found a way to insert myself into your life. I had to get you away from your parents and that town."

"Wellwhy didn't you just tell me? Why didn't you warn me?"

Kaylee chuckled. "Oh, my darling Anna, forgive me for laughing. You might not remember it now, but we had the exact same conversation before you died. It was a different situation, but one that could have been avoided if I had warned you.

"Anna, tell me, would you have believed me if I had told you the truth about your parents, the town, and your impending death?"

When he explained it that way, he had a really good point. I chuckled as I said, "Probably not. Regina would've written you off as crazy, and looked somewhere else for an answer. But she did feel our connection. Is that how you found me?"

Sarah and Kaylee gave each other a conspiratorial gaze before she says, "We weren't the only ones looking for you."

"What? Who else was looking for me?"

"A man by the name of Pirate has been aiding our search for you." Kaylee answered.

"More like leading the search." Sarah muttered to herself while looking at my hands.

"Actually, it was sheer luck that we located you. Thank goodness I had the intelligence to mark you with the sign of the Woods. A young boy by the name of Javier Juanson identified you when he attended the Will Lawson School. While we are cursed to the darkness, his family and many others are not. They volunteered to help us find you during the daytime. It was the Pirate's idea. Javier was able to verify the mark on your head as that of the symbol for Whispering Woods. Sarah went to the school and followed you to Lee."

Sarah gently asked me, "Do you want me to call you Regina, or?"

"No!" My voice echoed around the room like a drum. "Never call me Regina. I've always been Anna, never Regina. That poor girl doesn't exist."

Kaylee saw the exhaustion in my eyes and said, "Maybe we should let you rest before we continue? There are important things I must reveal."

Judge Slider had stolen my youth and my life, so I could no longer rest. It was time to exact my revenge against him. Darkness covered my face as I said, "I'll rest when Slider is dead."

Part One – Anna

Chapter One

I was born in the light, and died in the darkness.

Darkness engulfed my life from the moment I was born. I was four years old when I had my first real memory meeting Kaylee and the Whispers. My memories were securely hidden in the dark corners of my mind. I was sick with something called Abnemal. It was a terrible disease that ravaged my little body, but I would recover. Kaylee was an older man with beautiful blue eyes, and long brown hair that constantly hung over his shoulders as he crushed and mixed herbs into potions.

I'm resting in my bed when my father appeared at my door. The pink sheets hid my body. I didn't feel as if I had been sick. In fact, my tiny body bursted with energy. I studied my father as he stood at the door. His hair was brown, almost black, and it matched his fuzzy black beard on his tanned face. I was amazed at his height. His strong, massive body blocked every inch of my open doorway.

"How are you feeling?" He came to my side and took my hand into his.

I smiled, but I didn't recognize his face. "I'm doing better."

"Thank the heavens! Your mother and I were worried about you. We were afraid the sickness would take your life, so I brought you here, to Whispering Woods. Do you remember that, darling?" His plump lips smiled wide in anticipation as he waited for my answer.

"No." I whispered.

"Well, that's alright. Kaylee said the sickness might make it difficult for you to remember certain things. Do you remember me, Anna?"

"No." I whispered again, this time the tears fell from my eyes as I said it. My father held my body in his arms.

"It's alright, my sweet tiny girl." He whispered into my ear. "Everything is going to be alright now. The King and I have been in council, making a decision on where you shall stay for the time being. I took the King and Kaylee's advice into consideration, and I agree it's best for you to remain here for three months. I'm going home to Delengrad to tell your mother, and brother of your wonderful recovery. She will appreciate the extra time to fuss over your return." He laughed.

"Where is this place? Will you be far?"

"Don't worry, we're not far from home. Delengrad is just beyond the river. I won't be far from you."

"I guess it's okay." It was fine to me. I felt such a connection to this man, yet the same could be said for the strange city I currently resided in, Whispering Woods. It had a mysterious ring to it.

"Welldon't worry about anything darling. I will return for you in three moons. Your mother and brother will be so happy to hear of your marvelous mending!"

His smile looked as if it didn't match his true emotions. His massive boots clapped the wooden floor as he walked away from me, and his sword clinked against the sliver design on the outside of his jacket. All the noise he made reminded me of a thunderstorm that raged outside a few nights ago.

My room inside the castle was definitely made for me. Pink silk sheets and soft pillows comforted me every day. My bed was quite big for me. It made the room appear larger. Long oak beams ran along the tall white ceilings and the color pink was splashed all over the walls. It as if someone came in here with a paintbrush and threw pink paint everywhere on the light green walls, except for the floor, it remained a dark stained wood. It sounded ghastly but actually looked quite pretty. The way the pink complemented the color of the green made me feel as if I was outside, in the warm sun. Unfortunately, all I could do was dream about the sun for there were only two small windows in my room. Yes, two small windows exactly six feet apart and way at the top of the room, gave my ceiling plenty of light. Regrettably the light was too far above me and did nothing for me in terms of being able to read. But it was so nice that the ceiling would be able to read a book.

The furniture in my room was extravagant and beautiful. A cherry wood vanity table sat opposite of my bed with a matching chair. A beautiful pattern of roses and leaves on a white silk fabric covered the chair seat. I saw a comb, mirror and small box with the same rose pattern on the table top along with a purple perfume bottle and a couple of small painted pictures of nature. A tall mirror encased in the same wood sat proudly on the wall in front of me. I could see myself in bed every second.

The day was perfect, as if it were a painting. There were large, puffy clouds all along the amazingly blue sky. The tree tops were brilliantly evergreen as they met the sunny skyline. And the wind! Oh it was amazing to see the wind blowing the silky grass. Flowers bloomed in patches a couple of yards from the entrance and continued through the open field.

I couldn't see from inside my room. Kaylee led me through the castle, to the entrance. I was so excited. No longer did I care about the large castle I was residing in for so long. I gathered the front of my pink silk dress into my hands so I wouldn't step on the delicate fabric, and let Kaylee guide me to the front of the castle, a huge smile of happiness on my face. My little pink matching shoes clicked on the gray marble floor gently as we walked. Kaylee knew how anxious I was and led me quickly. I ran ahead of him when I saw the gate leading the way out of the castle. My breath started to come faster. My little heart started beating wildly as I pounded the floors with my feet.

Oh, that moment. That beautiful moment when I felt the sun kiss my skin. I was a couple of feet into the open field when I stopped, let go of my dress and just opened my arms so the sun could touch every part of my body not covered. I kicked off my shoes so I could walk barefoot in the grass. It was glorious to have the wind toss my hair around my face. I laughed. I went to the flowers and made a small bouquet to put into my hair. I took a moment to notice the scenery as I made my hairpiece. The castle opened into a large field full of green fertile grass. Fifty feet away from the castle, large square stones were piled on top of each other to create a nice wall surrounding the city. There was an opening at the bottom of the wall. The sound of the river reached my ears and tickled my funny bone. I couldn't believe a sound of nature could make me so happy.

Multicolored butterflies danced over the large patch of flowers which I was picking from. I was amazed. They danced together in perfect harmony. It was if the butterflies were just as happy as I was about being outside! Their wings gracefully fluttered in a synchronized motion, creating a beautiful rhythm. The birds sung at just the right moment. I felt as if I were living in a fairytale. Kaylee stood a few feet from me, watching me with happiness on his sweet face.

"Let's go to the river!" I barked while making a grab for Kaylee's hand.

"Not today, Anna. The waters will wait for you another day."

I gazed at the little entrance in disappointment. I wanted to dip my feet into the cool water badly. The kingdom of Whispering Woods was not like Delengrad. For example, the citizens of Delengrad lived outside the castle. Here, in the Woods, the citizens lived inside with the royal family. There wasn't one family living outside in the field where I was playing. It was completely private and silent.

I took every opportunity to go outside and into the sun. Kaylee was with me every second. He stayed close but didn't hover over me, which I appreciated. He closely monitored my recovery. Every morning, and night he took my temperature, asked me certain questions to test my memory and checked to be sure I was not malnourished. He was at my side while I was ill and with me during my recovery. We spent every day together, and it was not difficult to look to him as my father.

Finally, we took walks along the river when I was well enough. He advised me about life, logic and love. I was a young girl, almost five years old, but Kaylee spoke to me as if I were older and understood, although I didn't. He felt very strongly that I should begin my education as soon as I returned home. This made my heart sink. I didn't want to go to Delengrad, even if it was my home. In my soul I felt as if I didn't belong anywhere else but in the Woods with Kaylee. However, I couldn't decide where I get to live. Only my father could make that choice for me. Kaylee advised me not to attend The Williamson Law Academy. It was a school for children of royalty, and when I reach twelve years old by law I was required to attend.

“Why?” I remember asking him as we walked one day.

“The education you will receive there would not be to your advantage. The teachers are funded and advised by Judge Slider, it is his school and his rules. Nothing but evil is waiting for those who attend the Williamson Law Academy.”

It was a hot day. Heavy beads of sweat dropped from my neck, and down my front. My pretty blue lace dress stuck to my skin, making my body heavy under its massive weight. It was getting a little uncomfortable.

“The Law says I must attend?” My little voice croaked while my eyes widen with fear.

“Yes, but I say you must avoid it at all costs. You will soon discover life isn’t a fairy tale, and not all people in this world are good. Fairy tales are made up stories of people who live happily ever after. Parents tell them to their children so they won’t be afraid of the world that lies ahead of them. It is a pillow meant to soften the harsh realities of adulthood. Don’t let stories fool you, Anna.”

“Is it so wrong to hope that life turns out to be a beautiful fairy tale where all my dreams are going to come true?” I asked.

“Not at all, my darling! You keep that feeling in your heart. Remember that life is what we make of it. We chose our destiny, it does not choose us.”

Chapter Two

The time had come for me to return home to Delengrad. Supposedly I was stronger, but I wasn't ready to leave. Something inside me wanted to remain in the Woods forever. As the days drew nearer for my departure, I became quite agitated about leaving. Every time I thought about going back to Delengrad, actual pain injected itself into my heart. I felt as if my father was taking me to people whom I didn't know. It would be difficult to leave with my father. Kaylee must've felt the same way. His sour face mirrored my own. King Gordon did grant me permission to return to the Woods if I desired, but only after I reached an older age. He insisted I was too young to be on my own, without my parents.

"When can I return?" I asked hungrily.

"When the time is right, I will come and bring you home to us." Kaylee said to me.

"Um...how will you know when the time is right?"

He chuckled at my question. "That is certainly a question every human ponders. I will tell you this, Anna. In this Universe, you and I are connected. It is a connection so strong, nothing can sever it, not even Death itself. You have to trust that I will come for you when the Universe says it's time. Until then, we want to give you a present before you go."

"A present?" My little blue eyes widened with curiosity.

Kaylee nod his head with a little smile on his face. "Tomorrow night we shall perform a ceremony called the Divine One. You will receive the mark of the Whispers. It indicates you are a friend of the Whispers and only those who reside in the Woods can see it. You will be forever connected to us and us to you."

"That sounds amazing!" I shouted with wide eyes.

Kaylee laughed as I said this. "It is amazing, I can assure you. Now you get some sleep, and tomorrow you shall become Divine."

The night sky was bright with stars and a full moon. The wind kissed my face as I walked out of the castle and into the front open field. My hair danced around my face as I watched the wind chase the clouds away. It felt nice to be outside. Small, hot beads of sweat formed on my forehead. The wind cooled my face and body down. A halo of pink roses ran around my head, creating a sweet perfume I quite enjoyed. Kaylee waited for me, along with every man, woman, and child who lived in Whispering Woods. Mona Bright took my tiny hand into hers and led me to a stone bench in the castle courtyard. Her bright red lips smiled at me as she sat me on the bench. Kaylee stood behind me, and tilted my head back.

“Tonight we celebrate a new family member. Anna has proved herself worthy of receiving the coveted mark of the Whispers. She is brave, strong, and above all else, she is of magical blood. May she now be known as Anna Anderson, sister of Whispering Woods.”

Kaylee dipped a long knife into the red dye and wiped the tip on my forehead, between my eyes. A red ‘W’ was forever painted on my forehead. I looked around at my new family and saw their marks for the first time. This new world was exciting and magical. I couldn’t wait to return, to discover the secrets, and benefits to being a Whisper.

After the ceremony, Kaylee slipped a little silver ring on my middle finger.

“Every family member has one. It’s enchanted. As is this,” Kaylee said as he brings out a necklace from the front pocket of his purple robes. It was a simple black hair necklace with a jade charm. As I looked closer at it, I observed a dark green stone, carved into two swirls at the top and intersected at the bottom to make a heart. It hung heavily around my neck. “Under no circumstances are you to remove them. Both pieces are enchanted to protect you from the evil that lurks in the darkness. Never be fooled by the quiet night sky, my darling, for it has the capacity to cleverly disguise danger, and those who mean to harm you. Do you understand?”

I was in awe of the jewelry. “I think so.”

“If you need to return to the Woods without me, the ring will lead you to us. The charm will protect you. Never, ever, take either one of them off. I mean this, Anna. Never take them off.”

“Okay, I got it. Never take them off. It’s permanently branded into my memory.” I said with genuine seriousness, but it was too hard to be serious when it was such a wonderful time.

The celebration began with music and dancing. We feasted on fine meats of deer and cow, delicious fruits and vegetables. It was rare for the Whispers to eat meat for they did not approve of the slaughter of animals. Kaylee spent days creating a powder that would explode when fire touches it. He created fireworks that burst with colors of red, blue, green, yellow, and pink. That night I truly felt accepted into their society.

This was it, I was finally a Whisper. And I would return.

Chapter Three

I felt full of energy as my horse gently galloped on the dirt roads leading to Delengrad. My heart ached for the Woods. I didn't have as much enthusiasm as I had hoped for. A darkness swept over me. Everything seemed dirty and grim as if the magic of the Woods didn't expand past its borders. I longed to be back there again.

I was genuinely happy to see my father again. Tears streaked down his beautiful blue eyes as he gathered me into his arms. The scent of soap and wood was heavy in his beard. My sweet mother stood and waited to lift me into her arms and hugged me close to her heart for many minutes. I took a clump of her red hair, brought it to my nose and inhaled her scent. I didn't remember her face, but I knew her scent. She savored the feeling of holding her child. When we pulled back from our hug, I could see her love for me shining in her face and gestures. They looked at me with pride and happiness.

I felt excited when mother told me I had a baby brother, Syler. He was a newborn baby when I returned, and I was so happy to be there for him as he grew. He inherited our mother's red hair, and sweet smile. I had an older brother, Richard, who was seven years old, and looked more like our father than mother. He was tall, dark skinned, and carried the same darker hair on his head. Richard and I played a lot together after I returned from the Woods. We were only two years apart in age, so we stayed close those first few years, but Richard grew into a stern boy who loved the rules and even more so enforcing them. I used to hate him when he would tell on me to mother or Lord Richard, our father's confidante, when I did something wrong. As he turned ten years old, he spent less time with me and started to spend more time with Father. He wanted to learn how to defend himself, and with the head of the guards, he picked up the skill quite quickly. Despite our differences I knew he loved me.

One day, we swam in a little shallow alcove in the River of Hope and I accidentally wandered too far out into the river. I wanted to show Richard how much better I was at swimming so I rolled forward, diving into the water. My plan was to paddle my feet and legs so I could surface much closer to the shallow section, thus impressing my brother. After I dived forward into the water, my foot was ensnared in the seaweed at the bottom of the river. I panicked and swallowed a bunch of water. I couldn't breathe! I felt Richard's hand enclosed around my hair, and pulled me up as hard as he can. After I surfaced, Richard put his arm around my chest and brought me to the shallow section.

"Are you okay, Anna?" He asked. His body slumped, the lower half of him sitting in the water, taking deep breaths.

"Thanks, Richard. You saved my life." I said once found my voice.

"Of course I did, that's what brothers do for their sisters."

As I grew older, only Syler and I remained close. My mother would read to us. Little Syler reacted to the stories with emotion. His cubby little hands clapped with excitement when the Prince saved the Princess, or cried with anguish when the witch put the princess into a deep sleep. There were nights when Syler wouldn't sleep, and I listened to him cry all night long. There were days when he was fussy and threw everything in the room from books to cups in order to get his way.

My father, King Tillman Anderson, and mother, Queen Abigail, were kind people. My brothers and I lived in our family home, Delengrad. Our city thrived. The people were happy under my father's rule. He kept food on their tables, protection at their door, and took care of each and every citizen. Though he was an older King, my father was well trained in combat and kept our city safe. He knew how to talk to his people, and could be tough when the time called for it.

Our city was a beautiful one. The castle was made of a sturdy wood, making it strong and very easy to repair. It sat amongst the tall cypress trees that surrounded the city, its tall red roofs towering over those who neared it. The castle stood two stories tall and housed the royal family, guards, cooks, maids, gardeners, council members, friends, and many more. I estimated three hundred people lived in the castle of Delengrad with a couple of hundred living outside in their own little homes. Flowers bloomed everywhere, I think my mother made it mandatory, and the city itself was quite big. I loved Delengrad, it was where I was born and a place I will always call home.

My uncle, Lord Edward Anderson, ruled Lordview. He looked as if he had the weight of the lands on his shoulders. His back slouched, and he never smiled his plump face at anyone. Short shiny brown hair covered his head and he refused to let one little stub of hair grow on his soft face. A scowl was perpetually etched on his face, and his eyes were constantly narrow with suspicion. The neighboring cities were friends. We relied on each other in troubled times and in happy ones. Lordview was much smaller than Delengrad, housing around one hundred people. We were small kingdoms. We were very close to one another.

My cousins came to the castle more than we go to Lordview. I loved being with my cousins William, Henry, Sarah, and Kyle. William was the oldest, and Sarah was my age. Henry was only a year younger than us, and little Kyle was only a baby. I never saw much of William as he was almost four years older than Sarah and I. As I went from seven to eight years old, Sarah and I spent a lot of time together. Father made me promise to never tell anyone where I truly was during my year in the Woods. I recited the story father made me remember for anyone who asked, like Sarah.

Sarah and I spent our summers in Lordview. I loved Lordview in the summer for it was near the River of Hope. Many nights I spent at the river, just hoping to see Kaylee emerge from the woods to tell me it was time to return. The years went by as Sarah and I lived our lives. We would talk by the banks of the river, and have picnics in the beautiful fields of Lordview. When

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