

PART ONE

She walked quietly; her long red hair turned copper in the setting sun. She walked east toward the darkness and the woods-- those woods that no one dared go in especially at night.

The chill in the wind was biting. Nevan pulled her long cloak around her and stopped where the path suddenly disappeared. She knew this trail by heart. The trail went on into the woods and forked.

A lone wolf howled somewhere. She ached deeply. Her heart was wounded. She found herself lone just like the wolf.

"Nevan," a voice so soft whispered. She turned around with that hope in her heart. Was it Mark? She grimaced to herself. Of course it wasn't Mark. He no longer cared for her--as if he did in the first place. He led her heart on a warm trail of love, but somewhere along the way the trail was a dead end.

There was no one around and she shrugged it off.

"You fool, he would not look for you here, if he looked at all," she muttered to herself.

Here, in these woods, there was a path that led to a legendary land. As a young child, she explored each and every path in these woods looking for the place-- as others have before her time. She knew that the Keeper of the Elidon kingdom wouldn't let anyone near the legendary village. The Elidon Woods were the source of all the rumors and people swore that they would see lights in the forest.

Nevan walked on and into the woods. She figured that people were just superstitious. She was forbidden a long time ago from the woods, but still she feels a connection to Elidon. No one knew of her nightly trips to the woods. No one cared. Her father was dead and her mother was probably in some man's bed. Her brother, Jon, Marks best friend, was off partying with Mark and their girlfriends.

Jon knew nothing of Mark's fling with Nevan. Mark wanted it that way. Deep down Nevan knew that Mark didn't want Jon to know that he was with Jon's sister. Mark was ashamed, but like a fool, Nevan cared anyways.

Nevan shook her head, willing the bitter memories to fade away and started walking again. The wolf was howling and it seemed to be closer.

Nevan quietly stepped off the trail near the fork and went to her left. She was deep in the woods now.

Most people who dared to go into the woods didn't dare to go at night. But Nevan had somewhere to go. She never spent the night in the old cottage, but that was going to change.

Nevan's ache was so deep that she never wanted to leave the solace of these woods. Wiping the hot tears from her face, she stopped. Someone was following her. She was certain of that. No-- it was only her mind playing with her. The night sounds were louder than before. The old cottage was just up ahead.

There was a sudden, loud crash just behind her. Nevan quickly ran and hid behind a thick oak. She slowly peeked around it and again saw nothing. It was suddenly deathly quiet in the Elidon woods.

"Nevan"

The voice was directly behind her

"Just leave me alone!" she startled the speaker.

"Nevan turn around,"

"No,"

"Turn around," the speaker suddenly had an authoritative sounding voice. Nevan slowly turned around. She saw no one.

"Where are you?"

The hooded figure suddenly came into view. His face was hidden and so was the rest of him-- except for his hands. They were large and pale. In them was a silvery object.

"I have been watching you, Nevan, for a long time,"

"Who are you?"

"I am Killian, Keeper and Guardian of the Elidon Forest,"

Nevan gasped.

"They say you are only legend!"

"If I was, Nevan, would I be here now talking to you?"

"I guess not,"

"Now I have a gift for you,"

He spoke with a rich voice.

"Okay,"

"Let us go inside the cottage,"

The cottage was aging, but Nevan noticed that someone was always keeping it up. There was a clearing around it and no weeds. The wild gardenias were in full bloom. She inhaled deeply.

"You like them?" Killian asked,

"Yes," Nevan replied

Slowly, the pale hands picked a flower and on waved around it--creating signs that Nevan did not know. Then Killian walked up to Nevan and gently tucked the flower in her hair.

"There," he smiled, but she could not see it.

"Now let us go in. I shall build a fire and prepare a meal. You must be hungry,"

They walked inside and yes Nevan was suddenly hungry. Killian pointed a finger at the fireplace and it came alive with light. Nevan took her cloak off and went toward the fire. Killian watched as the flames cast a light onto her rich, coppery hair.

Killian knew that she was the one. She was the missing child and the one to take his place as the Keeper. She would be the protector and lovingly keep up his cottage. This was his cottage and only one of the Elidona people could navigate the paths well enough to find it, or one of their enemies.

"Killian?"

"Yes?"

"Why not take off your cloak?"

"Does it bother you?"

"No its just..." Nevan trailed off.

"I was taught to never show my face to an outsider. You are an outsider, but a rare and special one," He smiled at her, longing for her to see it.

"I am sorry. I-"

"Don't be, Nevan," he said, slowly speaking her name.

Killian then made a meal. When it was ready, he brought it to her.

"Here, eat this,"

"Did you use magic to make it?"

"Yes, and soon you will be able to, also,"

"How?"

"I have decided to give you a gift, but you must learn to use it and let it guide you,"

"What is it?"

"This,"

He pulled out the silvery object from his robes.

"It is an orb. An ancient wizard created it. It will protect the wearer and also help the wearer discover his or her gifts. You wear it around your neck,"

"Why me?" Nevan asked. No one--not even Mark gave her such a gift.

"Because, Nevan, you are special. This has magic, Nevan,"

Killian walked over to her and lifted the light chain over her head. The chain was now around her neck. The orb was the size of a small ball and had a liquid, silvery substance in it. She cupped it in her hands.

"You will stay the night here, Nevan, where it is safe."

"I had planned to stay the rest of my life here. I don't want to go back to the city,"

"But you must,"

"Why?"

"Your brother needs to accept the truth of who you are and let you go. He needs to tell you the truth,"

"About Mark?"

"No. Mark is not involved with this. But Jon needs to know the danger he is putting you in,"

"What is that?"

"He is friends with someone tainted."

"Tainted?"

"Yes. Nevan, let me tell you a history story,"

"Okay,"

"Once long ago, God created three races-- Man, Elida, and Demon. They all came in the form of humans. The Elida are a peaceful race and created magic. Demons are our enemies and killed thousands of us until we created the Elidon Forest to protect us.

"Demons and Man mixed their breed. Some have evil magic in their blood and some are as ungifted as a lone wolf--except for what they practice at

"There was an ancient and powerful wizard ages ago. Her name was Larilee. She cast a spell to protect us. Now that spell is weakening and one of the Elida people found a way out of the kingdom and into the outer forest. You see, Nevan, only the Keeper knows and has the magic to surpass that spell.

"The woman who managed to get past the spell was of Wizard Larilee's ancestry. She was pregnant and soon would be in labor. When we noticed her missing, a massive search was conducted. Only I was able to find her--outside the protective wall. Her child was gone and her body had been there a long while. A young boy about six rescued the child and took her to the city,"

Killian looked directly into Nevan's eyes and she noticed that they were a deep violet--like her own.

"Our wizard who is living now believes the child to be alive. She is also pure. She has not had a man, Nevan, and we need to find her before she does. She must not mix her race with another without council approval. It would destroy her if she would to breed with a Demon,"

"What does this have to do with me, Killian?"

"I have chosen you to find this child. She is about your age. And before you ask why I picked you, let me tell you why. We Elida are a master of disguises, but I cannot search

and protect the forest. You are well known around the city and popular. No one would look twice unless they think you are lovely and you are,"

Nevan blushed softly and Killian smiled to himself. She is so young and has been through a lot with that Mark character. He knew that she had a lot more to go through before she would become the Keeper.

There was a sudden crash outside and Nevan jumped.
"Stay inside, use the orb to protect yourself,"
"What about you?"
"I am the Keeper, I will be fine," he disappeared in front of her.

Suddenly a hot pain left Nevan on her knees. When it faded, she found herself clutching the orb and looked down at it. It was blood red. There was the sound of fighting outside and Nevan feared for her and Killian's lives. Then there was sudden silence. And the door opened and in walked Killian.

He quickly gathered Nevan in his arms and wrapped his cloak around them. The brilliant red light from the orb blinded Nevan and she closed her eyes.

Killian focused on the air. His magic concealed them within the air. When the Demon-spirit came in to seek them out, it sensed and saw no one. It left and they stayed huddled until the orb turned its normal silvery white.

Nevan looked up at Killian as he pulled his cloak from her. They locked eyes. Nevan never saw a man as beautiful as Killian. His face was young and hair was dark. His eyes, she already knew, were violet.

"Nevan, you are the first outsider to have ever seen my face. I have been living a long time,"
"How old are you, Killian?"
"Old. I have been the Keeper of the Elidon Forest only for two thousand years. That's the longest anyone has kept it and my time will soon be up."

Nevan's mouth dropped open.
"You mean that you are older than two thousand years?"
"Yes, but only a little bit," He smiled and quickly covered his face.

"I am honored, Guardian," Nevan smiled up at him. Killian laughed and Nevan noticed how lively his laugh was.

"Killian, you do not look a day over 20," she said.
"Thank you, but there is a change of plans. Whatever that was has probably alerted its friends about you. You cannot stay the night here. You must go back home to your brother,"

Nevan looked nervously toward the woods. She also did not want to go home to her brother who was probably stoned.

"Do not be afraid, Nevan. You have the orb and I am the Keeper of the Elidon Forest," Killian smiled as he took Nevan's cloak and put it around her.

"Go now, before it alerts its kind," Killian walked her outside. She wrapped her cloak tight around her and put up the dark hood, concealing her face. She turned to Killian.

"Killian--"

But he was already gone. An owl hooted and the crickets chirped loudly. The stars were bright and the moon was closer to the earth-- a huge white ball illuminating the woods late in the night.

Jon was already home when Nevan walked in. Mark was with him. Jon, as usual, was high, but Mark wasn't.

"Nevan, where have you been? I have been so worried about you?"

"Really, Mark. Well, let me tell you one thing. Don't worry about me. You weren't worried last night when you were with Rissa, so don't worry about me now,"

"Nevan, I care about you,"

Mark was about to say something else when the doorbell rang. Nevan went to get it and saw Rissa, Naomi, who was Jon's girlfriend, and Nevan's best friend, and another guy.

"Nevan, sweetie," Rissa cooed, "How good to see you," then she went to Mark and looped her arms around him.

"Hey, baby," she purred.

"Hey," Mark replied, eyes on Nevan.

Jon came around and cuddled with Naomi and the other guy watched. Nevan noticed that he was staring at Rissa. Suddenly, a warm sensation was growing hotter against her skin. It was the orb. Nevan quickly went into the kitchen and stole a quick look at it. It was a deep, dark, red. One of those people in her living room was of Demon blood.

She shrugged off her worry and went back to the group. Mark was suddenly at her side.

"What's going on, Nevan?"

"I am tired, Mark,"

"Go on to bed then, little girl," Rissa said loudly.

"What is that in your hair," Jon asked, suddenly not so high anymore. His look of worry caused the others to stop murmuring.

"It's a flower," Rissa observed.

"It's a wild gardenia and there are very few places here where they grow wild," Jon was on the verge of worry. Only he knew of Nevan's trips to the woods even though she didn't know he knew.

"Nevan, where did you get the wild gardenia?" Mark asked.

"They grow in the woods-- the Elidon woods!" Derik, the other guy with them, spoke in a fake creepy voice.

Rissa squealed in mock terror and asked,

"Do you and your secret lover meet in the woods? Maybe she knows the magical Keeper? Maybe all the myths are true?"

"I know of a cottage," Naomi said softly

"Oooh, be careful, Jon, soon you may have a niece or a nephew to take care of," Rissa howled

"No!" Nevan interrupted. "I walked by the flower shoppe and saw they were going to throw some gardenias away. I asked for one and the lady gave it to me," Nevan spoke the lie and knowing that this group was high, they would buy it. Mark didn't buy her story at all. He just stared at Nevan with those dark eyes that she was crazy about.

"Oh, damn. Nevan is too chicken to go into the woods. But maybe Mark and I should check out that cottage," Rissa said sweetly.

"It's over Rissa," Mark said and left.

Everyone stared open-mouthed

"All right everyone. Party's over!! Go home," Jon quickly made everyone leave so he could be alone with his sister. Nevan ran to her room and shut the door. She sought that tranquility within herself, as she always had been able to. Tonight, it seemed closer and more real.

Nevan focused on that thought. She imagined herself floating away this time and soon she even felt like she was actually floating.

"Nevan!" Jon's cry broke the spell and Nevan fell on her bed. Jon was staring at her.

"Nevan, you were levitating!"

"I was what?" Nevan said, surprised.

Jon then noticed the necklace around Nevan's neck.

"Where did you get that?"

"It was given to me,"

"By whom?"

"A friend, a real friend," Nevan was angry.

"Nevan who gave it to you?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"Never mind. Just don't let anyone see it or they will try to steal it, Jon snapped, turned around and left.

Jon walked briskly out into the chilly night. It was cooler than it was earlier, he noted. The moon was full and huge. He thought about the chain. Only one person knew where he buried it and she was dead.

He went to that spot where he left Lana after she gave her last breath. That was years and years ago-- before his father died. Lana was long gone, he knew, but that necklace should be right where he left it-- his and Lana's secret spot.

Killian watched as Jon searched for the orb. Somehow, he must have seen it on Nevan and made her tell where she'd got it from.

"Oh, Lana," the boy wailed. "I promised to take care of Nevan, but I think I broke it. Someone knows about her,"

"Jon," Killian whispered, that someone is me,
Jon spun around.

"Who are you?"

"I am Killian, Guardian of the Elidona Forest,"

Jon just stared

"What are you looking for, Jon?"

"The necklace"

"What necklace?"

"The one that Lana had when she died. I tried to save her--honest I did! She was a mother to me. My mother hated me and my father would leave and be gone for days. Lana came from nowhere and took care of me. She saved my life,"

"What about her child, Jon. Tell me what did you do with her child,"

"Nevan. Lana asked me to name her child Nevan,"

"The necklace is called an orb. I gave it to Nevan,"

"Why?"

"To protect her. I suspected she was the one, but I wasn't sure. Jon, I need Nevan. The Elidan people need her. She needs us. She is our chosen,"

Jon shook his head.

"No, Nevan can't leave me! She is all I have. Her and Naomi,"

"Naomi is a danger to her, Jon. And you should have her tell you about her and Mark,"

"What about her and Mark?"

"Nevan was in love with Mark. He hurt her with Rissa,"

"No--"

"Yes. That was why she came to these woods tonight,"

"I am going to kill Mark!" Jon went into a rage and started punching and hitting at everything in sight. Then he suddenly couldn't move.

"Jon. I have cast a spell over you. I will not tolerate you abusing my forest. Nevan will have to let Mark go on her own. She will be okay. Jon, you have to let her go home to her people. Also, keep her away from Naomi,"

Jon slowly walked back to his home. Naomi and Mark were back.

"Where is Nevan?" he asked.

"She is in her room. Rissa came back and they had an argument,"

"Over you," Jon accused.

"Yeah,"

"Why, Mark? Why Nevan? I told you that she is the only one I didn't want you to have anything to do with! Tell me, did you have sex with her?"

"No, she wasn't ready,"

"So that's why you flaunted your relationship with Rissa in her face,"

"No. Rissa meant nothing to me! Nevan means everything to me okay?"

"Mark is in love with Nevan," Naomi spoke up.

"No! That is not it?" Mark yelled.

"Then what is?" Evans voice floated softly down toward them.

"Nevan," Mark spoke to her gently.

"Answer me, Mark,"

Mark shook his head and said, "I am not sure yet,"

Nevan looked down and looked up. "Well I am going to bed,"

School the next day went well for Nevan. She preferred her best friend, Naomi, to a whole group of people she barely knew. She spotted Naomi walking her way after school let out. Nevan greeted her with a hug.

"Nevan! How are you feeling?" Naomi was concerned about Nevan and Mark.

"Hey, I am fine,"

"Have you ever been in the Elidon Woods? Tell me if you have, you know you can trust me," Naomi said softly. She was hoping that her suspicions would not prove to be true.

"Yeah, twice," Nevan lied. She hated lying to her best friend, but the orb was growing warm against her skin.

"Just twice?"

Nevan nodded her head slowly. She was thinking, no way not Naomi. Surely there was a misunderstanding.

"What are you doing right now?"

Naomi brightened and said, "I am driving to the mall. Want to join me?"

"Sure," Nevan replied.

Mark followed them to the mall. There was something different about Nevan. She seemed... scared? No way. Naomi was with her. He smiled. Naomi was a martial arts student and Nevan's best friend. Nevan would be in good hands if something were to have happened. He shrugged off his fear and went on home.

Naomi was also worried. Devon, her sister was missing. The story was that Devon was away in college in California. The truth was that Devon and Naomi were on a mission: to find and kill the missing descendant of Larilee. Devon was here- as a spirit. No she wasn't dead. It was a kind of complicated thing to explain.

"Naomi?"

"What? Oh!" she smiled. They were at the mall and Naomi was driving straight past it with her turn signal on. She smiled and said, "I think I should have made that turn"

"Oops," Nevan said, laughing.

Naomi noticed Nevan's laugh. She had a musical laugh unlike her brother's. In fact it was unlike anyone's laugh. Nevan was different from anyone she had ever known and that was why they were friends.

Her eyes were violet, a fact hidden by contact lenses. The Elidon people had violet or blue eyes. But no, Nevan was her best friend. No way she was one of them. She wouldn't even think it. But what if she was the missing child?

Nevan eagerly stepped out of the car.

"Race ya!" It had been a tradition of theirs since they were children. Naomi always won the race, but not this time-- for a first. They fell laughing onto the outside benches. People just stared at them and they laughed harder. Then they went inside.

Time went by quickly for the girls and Nevan had a fun time. Naomi, on the other hand was lost in thought. She was torn between loyalties. Her family or best friend? Which would it be? If it even came to that.

"Naomi, there is Mark," Nevan said kind of shakily.

"Then let's go the other way. You don't need to see him right now,"

Nevan nodded. There was a sudden movement and both girls looked up. Nevan saw nothing. Naomi saw Devon. There was something different about Devon.

"Nevan, I have to use the restroom a moment," Naomi said and quickly went to Devon.

When they were alone, Devon came.

"Naomi, I am not going to be here much longer,"

"What? Why?"

"That Keeper of the Elidon Woods put a curse on me. I am dying,"

"I will kill him,"

"He is also dying. He is searching for the missing child. She is the Chosen,"

"You mean to take his place?"

"Yes. And he has your best friend looking for the missing child,"

"Nevan?"

"Yes, and she has the orb,"

"What? But I thought it was missing?"

"I did too, until I saw Killian give it to her,"

"No," Naomi shook her head. "It can't be true,"

"What? What is it, Naomi?"

"I am not sure if it's even true?"

"What?"

"No it is not true?"

"What?"

"I think that maybe Nevan is-- no"

"Nevan is what?"

Naomi looked up through her tears at her sister's face and whispered, "The missing child,"

Devon looked at her sister. "There is hope yet that she isn't, Naomi. Don't take any drastic actions. Have you seen her perform anything supernatural like levitating or disappearing into air?"

"No,"

"Then we will wait. Naomi, if she is the missing child, you will have to kill her. You were the Chosen, not me. But since she is your friend, you can kill her any way you choose. Ancients would torture her, but I know it would kill you to do that. But, if she is, Naomi, you must kill her,"

Naomi nodded.

"Naomi, I am dying. I will not last long. Heed this warning. If you do not kill her, she will kill you. If it is Nevan, then your friendship will end soon,"

"I know," Naomi said.

When Devon left, Naomi easily concealed her tear stained face with her power. Magic was always at her fingertips even though she was taught not to flaunt it. Most people didn't accept those who had the power. And she did. The Elidon called her people Demons. Maybe that was what they were. They were ancient enemies after all.

Nevan smiled up at Naomi when she returned. Jon was with her. Naomi smiled at Jon, but he knew something was wrong.

"What's wrong, Naomi?"

"Nothing, sweetie,"

"Uhhuh," he said, unconvinced.

"It's getting, late, Naomi said. That was the cue for Nevan to let them be alone. She loved the fact that Jon and Naomi were together. Jon deeply cared for Naomi and Naomi loved Jon. Now, she was just scared for her brother.

"I can walk home," Nevan said.

Nevan walked out of the mall just to run into Mark.

"Nevan, where is Naomi?"

"With Jon,"

"Come on, I'll take you home,"

"No thanks, Mark, I can walk."

"It is getting late and this area is dangerous,"

Nevan did something she had never done before. She took a deep breath and drew the power from the orb and spoke to Mark again saying that she would walk. She said that in such a way that Mark had to let her do as she wished. She was gone when the effect wore off.

Nevan took the long way home. It was safer. And it went right by the Elidon Forest. As she was walking, she let her thoughts wander. Then a scream broke her thoughts. The orb was cool, but something was amiss.

Nevan ran toward the screams and suddenly came to a stop. She was under the Interstate Bridge that crossed the river. How she came so far so fast, she didn't know.

She took a deep breath and willed herself to blend in with the night. Killian said something about magic, so maybe she could do it. She did levitate.

Calm and focused, she walked over and looked around. There was an old woman under the bridge. Rissa always made fun of her. The woman was nowhere in sight, but her things were scattered all over. Then something tripped her.

Nevan fell onto the woman. The old lady was still warm, but was dead. Shock left Nevan rooted in her spot. Then something made her look up. There was a man. He didn't seem to see her. Nevan took a step closer and saw that he was covered in blood.

"Excuse me," Nevan spoke loudly, feeling the power of the orb flow through her.

The man jumped and aimed a gun at her and then waved it around as if he couldn't see the speaker.

"Who's there?"

Nevan smiled. He couldn't see her. She was concealed by the magic.

"No one. Just me," she whispered.

"Who are you?" he said waving the gun around.

"Drop your gun,"

The weapon fell immediately to the ground.

"What do you want?"

"I want you to go to the police station and confess what you did," Nevan said forcefully.

"No,"

"Then you will die," Nevan was completely consumed by the power of the orb.

"NO! Please I'll go!!!"

"Then go, or I will find you and you will pay,"

The man ran as fast as he could. Nevan then went to the body of the old woman. She raised her arms over the corpse and spoke in a language that she didn't know she knew. She felt the power rush through her and watched as fire came from her fingertips and seared the old woman's body. She did it in such a way that left only the bones. And then Nevan left.

When she returned home, Nevan went straight to her room. She sat on her bed and stared out in space until something caught her attention. She frowned and then realized what it was. It was the wild gardenia Killian gave her.

She slipped off the bed and slowly walked to it. She caught her reflection and looked at it.

"Who are you?" she asked. Her reflection asked her the same question, but offered no answers. Then she picked up her flower.

The petals were cool to the touch and not one speck of brown on the pure white. How odd, Nevan thought. Shouldn't it be dying by now?

Nevan took the flower and slipped on her cloak. It was already dark out and she stepped outside. She pulled the hood over her head and felt the power from the orb flood into her. Or was it her own power awakened by the orb?

She walked to the edge of the woods and paused. She had to find Killian and talk with him. She knew he was here somewhere. She took the time to conceal herself with her magic. Then she took the path that eventually led to the cottage. When she got there, she stopped. Where the cottage should have been standing, was Naomi and Killian. The cottage was gone. Naomi's back was turned to Nevan. The orb was already burning hot against her flesh.

Killian looked at Naomi. She smiled at him. Her eyes were cold as death.

"You killed my sister,"

"In order to save Nevan. Or Devon would have killed her,"
Killian looked away from those cold Demon eyes.

"No, don't use Nevan. She is not one of you! She is an innocent,"

"No, Naomi, she is not. She is one of the Elida.

"I will kill you, Guardian, for speaking such lies,"

"Then kill me then, but then Nevan will take my place-- unless you kill her,"

Naomi lunged at Killian and Nevan ran to break them up.

"Naomi no! Don't kill him!"

Naomi instantly had Nevan pinned to the hard, cold ground.

"Nevan, don't make me kill you,"

Nevan looked into Naomi's eyes and saw that this was not the Naomi she knew. This was a monster.

Nevan drew the power from the orb into her. She felt it become her. Naomi was prepared, but Nevan was more skilled than Naomi suspected. When Naomi realized that Nevan had the chance to kill her, she vanished. And so did Nevan.

Killian knew that Nevan was still there, but Naomi was gone.

"She's gone, Nevan," he said softly.

Nevan slowly let herself become visible. Then she fainted into Killian's arms. He took her to his new cottage hidden beyond the wall of magic. It was by the river.

Jon was watching the news when Naomi came over. There was a murder by the Interstate bridge. Some man killed the bag lady.

"Naomi, hey" Jon grinned at her. Naomi looked so different. Then he noticed her eyes.

"It's over, Jon,"

"What?"

"Us. Nevan and I aren't friends anymore and I have to let you go,"

Jon understood then what was happening. Killian's warning about Naomi helped him understand.

"Did you kill her?" he asked shakily.

"Not yet, but I will. I must or she will kill me," Naomi looked her cold, hard eyes with Jon's for a minute and turned around and left.

Nevan never did come home that night and Jon was worried. He called Mark, but Mark was out.

When Nevan came to, Killian was with her, tending to her wounds. His cloak was off and Nevan marveled how beautiful he was.

"Killian," she whispered, "I have failed you,"

"How?"

"I can't find this missing child and I want out of this. Take back the orb,"

Nevan slipped it off, but Killian refused.

"Nevan, you are the missing child. You are also the Chosen to take my place.

"What?" Nevan closed her eyes and shook her head. She was unconscious or something and dreaming. Soon this would all be over and she would wake up at home. Then she opened her eyes and looked at Killian.

"Me?" she whispered. Killian saw how pale she was and fed her some fruit.

"Yes you, and Nevan, you are in danger. You must kill Naomi,"

"NO!"

"You must, Nevan, or she will kill you. Naomi is a descendant from the great demon lord Nomen. Larilee killed his parents when he was young and then defeated him by keeping his people out of the Elidon Forest. You see, Nevan, every time a new Guardian is chosen, there is a chosen Demon to kill that new Guardian. The new Guardian must kill the chosen Demon or let his or her people be put in peril,"

"No,"

"Naomi is the chosen. You must kill her,"

"She is my best friend,"

"She will kill you if you don't kill her first,"

Nevan started to cry. She was shaking violently and Killian held her tightly. There was one test that she must pass before becoming the Guardian. That, Nevan would have to do on her own without guidance from Killian.

Killian walked Nevan to the edge of the woods- as far as he could go. He knew the orb would protect her, but knew she was unsure of herself and worried that her loyalty to Naomi would leave Nevan dead.

"Do not go home, Nevan,"

"Why not?"

"Naomi will expect you to be there and eventually will look for you. Go to her home. This has to be done tonight,"

"No,"

"You must. Cloak yourself with magic. You know how. The orb will protect you, Nevan,"

So there she stood, cloaked in her magic. Naomi's house was a dark one and there were no lights except flickering ones. Nevan had never been in her house before. Naomi always said that her parents were strange and did not like visitors.

Nevan looked up at the dark home. Slowly she started to climb the steps and was at the door. Before she could touch the knob, it opened. Naomi walked out and Nevan barely made it inside. Naomi walked back in and closed the door.

It was so easy. Nevan could easily let the orb take over and kill Naomi. But it was too hard.

Nevan followed Naomi up the spiraling staircase to her room. Nevan paused a moment and touched the oaken banner. It was warm to the touch.

The orb was already blazing against her skin. Nevan let it guide her. She was suddenly feeling very powerful. She knew then that the magic she ached for was now at hand's reach.

Naomi's room was dark except the fourteen black candles lit in several different places in the room. She watched as Naomi took out a long sword. The blade glowed in the flickering candlelight and Nevan noticed the symbols on the sword's pommel. She didn't understand them, but is sent a chill through her body. Then the orb's magic gave her understanding. The symbols read,

"The blood of the Chosen belongs to the bearer of this sword,"

Naomi raised the sacrificial sword above her head. Nevan watched in horror as the blade lit up in flames. Then she lost all control over her power.

Fire exploded from Nevan and shot towards the sword. Naomi suddenly screamed and ran at Nevan. Nevan froze, unable to move. She suddenly saw herself and Naomi as children. The love of friendship they had for one another. And then the realization that this same person was betraying that friendship hit her hard.

The sword's flaming blade touched Nevan's chin, but Nevan felt nothing. Naomi looked into Nevan's eyes. Those beautiful violet eyes. Nevan saw the monster's eyes. This was not Naomi. Demon. Then it hit her what Naomi truly was. This was the other part of her-- the real Naomi. She was just doing what her heritage required her to do.

"I love you, Naomi, even though our people hate each other," Nevan whispered softly.

The burning blade dropped to the floor and winked out.

"No, I can't do this,"

The orb stopped blazing against Nevan's skin and she managed to regain control over her newly found power.

"Nevan, I can't do this. You are my best friend. You will have to kill me,"

"No, I can't, Naomi,"

"Devon said you would,"

"Devon? She is the demon spirit, isn't she? She is the one who followed me that night I first met Killian?"

Naomi nodded.

Naomi looked into Nevan's eyes and asked the one question that ran through both of their minds:

"Is there a way that the Demons and Elidon can come to a truce?"

"Yes, I think we can. Our races may still hate each other, but Naomi, we don't have to join in,"

"Yes," Naomi lifted the sword above her head and shouted

"I refuse to kill the Chosen, my best friend, Nevan"

"Then if you will not, we will," Nevan turned and saw Naomi's parents. Hate blazed in their eyes.

The woman grabbed Nevan while the man took the sword from Naomi. Then he ran towards Nevan, sword aflame. Nevan watched, trying to will the power of the orb to work, but it was dead. She looked helplessly as he came, burning blade inches away from her heart.

"No! Naomi screamed and ran. The flaming sword caught her and Nevan watched as Naomi screamed and writhed in agony. Then the power of the orb came.

A sense of despair filled Nevan and she embraced the mindless rage and power of the orb. She let it combine with her own and felt the flames touch. She willed them to take the lives of Naomi's killers and the fire obeyed. Fire was all around and Nevan was lost in it. Then suddenly the orb went ice cold. Then the fire died out.

Cloaked again in magic, Nevan walked outside and looked numbly at all the people staring. Then she saw Mark. Her concentration faltered and the cloak was gone.

"Nevan!" Mark yelled. He went to her and she collapsed into his arms.

Killian went to Meridon's shop. Meridon was a botanist and loved the forest. When the botanist looked up at Killian, hope and fear was in his eyes. It was a long time since the Keeper himself came to Meridon-- and the last time was with the news of his wife's death and daughter's disappearance.

"Nevan is alive, Meridon," Killian said with a smile.

After bestowing the good news to Nevan's father, Killian went to see her. She was in a hospital and was questioned by police. Nevan had no memory of what had happened-- the doctor said. Only Killian and Nevan knew the real truth.

Spring faded into summer. Nevan was healed and knew that it was time to say goodbye. Jon walked her to the Elidon Forest. He walked her to the spot where Lana died. Dawn hadn't yet claimed the sky.

"Jon," Nevan's eyes filled with tears

"I know, Nevan," Tears were in his dark eyes as well. "I know,"

Nevan clung to him tightly.

"I love you, Jon," her hoarse voice full of sadness and nostalgia.

"You must go, Nevan,"
"Jon, will you--will you be okay?"

He stared into her violet eyes--eyes that held hope and fear-- and knew that he would be all right.

"Yes, I will be fine,"

"Nevan, it is time for us to leave," Killian's cloaked form appeared from the dense woods. Nevan nodded and walked toward him. Then they turned and walked into the lush forest along the barely visible trail. Jon watched.

A short distance down the trail, Nevan stopped. The rising sun turned her red hair into fire. Jon watched as she raised her hand in a final wave goodbye.

"Goodbye, Nevan,"
He waited until they were out of site before he left that spot.

Meridon watched the west. Killian said it would be by sunset when he would meet Nevan, his only child.

Nevan numbly followed Killian. They stopped about midday and had a short rest followed by lunch. Then they moved on. Finally, it was sunset and they arrived.

Meridon saw her. He knew it was she-- for she looked exactly like Lana. He went to her.

"Nevan?"

"Nevan, this is your father," Killian said.

Nevan studied him. He was as tall as she was and eyes were a darker blue than most people.

"Go on," Killian whispered.

Nevan took a small step towards her father. Then they embraced. Meridon hugged his only daughter tightly. Killian disappeared into the night. He watched as father and daughter, hand-in-hand, went inside the shop.

Killian still had the wild gardenia he recovered when Nevan lost it in her fight with Naomi. He looked at it. He watched as the petals, freed from the spell, slowly turned brown. Then they crumpled and died.

