

Amira's Secret Wish (Draft)

Chapter 1

"Awake, child! You must awake."

"But Aunt Elna, might not the matter be dealt with in the morning?" was my teenage reply.

"No" She was stern but calm. "A woman has come for our help. She says someone is having a baby and something has gone wrong." I breathed deep and quiet in the warmth of my itchy blanket. "Amira... I need your help." Her tone was solemn now, and I could not refuse.

Silently I rolled out of bed, not asking questions, and hurried to get ready. After splashing bitter cold water on my pale face from the basin in my bedroom, I became aware of my surroundings. Our cottage was simple, but it was high enough on our hill to provide me with a breathtaking view of the kingdom of Alcas. One large window to the north let in all the frigid winter wind and every hot scorch of summer sunlight. I had lived here all my life and couldn't imagine anything different.

After changing from my thin tunic to a worn dress, I put on high boots and Elna helped me with my dark cloak. The coarse fabric scratched my skin, but I didn't mind. It kept me warm. I took a quick glance at the mirror that hung awkwardly on the wall and instantly regretted it. Cringing at the sight of my brown hair in such disarray and the circles under my sharp grey eyes, I reminded myself to keep my hood over my head while we were out.

"Aunt Elna, must babies always be born in the middle of the night?" I asked her, trying to keep the whine out of my voice, but not quite succeeding.

"Oh child, a self-proclaimed midwife and nurse should never be surprised to be woken in the night." I peered at the woman who raised me. Her kind blue eyes were tired but lively and

soft grey hair turned in twisted curls on her shoulders. I admired her grey locks. Not many in these harsh times lived to have their hair turn grey, and she wore it well.

She cocked her head looking me up and down.

"You look just like your mother," she whispered to me. I smiled slightly.

"You always say that. What about my father?" I asked. She shook her head, looking down.

"You don't look much like him." Her wrinkles carved deep in her face. "He was tall and overbearing. You have more of your mother in you, short and sweet." I lifted a questioning brow. "Though sometimes a little spicy," she added. I smiled. She knew all too well how much trouble I could cause.

"My younger brother got lucky when he met your charming mother and double lucky when she had you." She softly tickled my side. I playfully slid away. Even when life got too serious, she had a way of helping me remember I was still a child.

"Do you think I'll ever meet my father? Will he come back for me?" I wondered.

"Perhaps." She grabbed her shawl, "Now let us be on our way." We were off into the dark. An owl hooted at our departure, and the hard mud squished under my small feet. I was glad I was wearing tall boots. An old, hooded woman waited for us, carrying a small lantern. She tapped her foot impatiently and upon noticing me, gave a sour look, puckering her lips.

"Is the little one truly necessary?" She asked in a harsh voice.

"Yes. She is my apprentice and is nearly 14 now." My Aunt was assertive but kind in her reply. I knew I was small for my age and wasn't surprised by the assumption. The hooded woman nodded slowly at my aunt, her eyes squinting and thick brows uncertain. She then turned her back on us to lead the way.

We traveled in silence down our peaceful green hillside. The kingdom seemed still and lifeless at night. Not many would dare be out at such an hour. Not much good happens in the night where magic stirs wildly in the enchanted forest just bordering our kingdom. It was always a risk to be out in the dark with little light for protection. Though I'd never seen an enchanted creature, I'd heard stories that kept children in their beds at night.

Our footsteps echoed on the wooden bridge that bordered our farmland, as we made our way into town. I breathed in the strong pine scent of our bridge. The familiar smell always reminded me of home. I picked up a small stick and began wiping off the dirt and pulling the bark off.

The hooded woman moved fast. We past gloomy dark houses and closed up shops. It was a chilly, night without much of a moon. The distant red and orange bursts of flames shown vibrant from the northern mountains.

"It is a fine thing the dragons stay far away from here. Do you agree?" It was my aunt's attempt to make light conversation.

"Certainly." Replied the hooded woman. "The last thing we need is for one of those fire-breathing monsters to come down and destroy what is left of this place. Best for us, if they stay put in the mountains. We have enough to deal with, as it is." I knew she was referring to the desperate state of our kingdom. We've seen much sorrow ever since Lord Rohas had taken control by marrying the heir to the throne. I often wondered why the Queen had even married him. The strange woman pointed to the fenced in graveyard just outside the castle walls.

"If we cross through here, it will save us quite a distance." A knot immediately formed in my throat. "Walking around it will add another 2 kilometers." She insisted as she noticed my hesitation. Aunt Elna turned to me.

“Child, do not worry. We will stay together.” My aunt’s words were reassuring, but I took her hand just in case. I followed them into the haunting mist of fog and took a deep breath to calm my nerves. The air was cold and hurt inside me. The ancient trees that lined the moss-covered graves seemed to move every time I lost direct sight of them. I shook the idea out of my head.

Only the pale light of the woman’s lantern saved us from complete darkness. We were almost to the edge of the yard when the woman leading us, stopped abruptly. I squeezed my aunt’s hand but kept quiet. The woman shone her light over a large grey headstone with a golden crown carved in it. We all knew who it belonged to.

“I always pay my respects when passing by her majesty’s grave.” Her words gurgled in her throat as she spoke. “The Kingdom we once knew died with her. I never believed that the Queen died in childbirth. If so, whatever happened to the child?” My aunt squeezed my hand. I wondered why. “No.” The strange woman continued, “He killed her. He used his power to control her, just like he does everyone else. After they were married, he got rid of her when he had the chance.” She bitterly spat next to the grave.

“Perhaps he did,” said my aunt, “but should we not hurry to help the girl?”

“Who?” squinted the woman.

“The one having a baby, of course.” My aunt insisted, not hiding the strain in her voice.

“Oh... yes. Follow me.” The hooded woman seemed dazed but led us on.

I sighed, audible relief when we finally stepped out of the fenced in graves. The fog never stopped lingering over the old stones, and I was pleased to be out of it.

We were lead to an old one-room cabin on the outskirts of town. Trees and vines surrounded this humble home, and a black stone well sat quaintly beside it. Upon entering the

dusty shack, I knew there was something amiss. A young mother, not much older than I, lay on the floor crying on a thin blanket. Elna knelt down beside her and began teaching her how to breathe. I knelt next to her noticing the cold breeze coming up through the cracks of the wooden planked floor.

"Look up at me. Look at me." Elna commanded. She got her attention and the young mother tried to mimic her breathing, but only for a moment. She turned her head away, her face, a ghostly white.

"How long has she been like this?" My aunt asked.

"Only a few hours." The woman replied. "The baby is turned the wrong way. I've been trying to turn it, but it is too far down." The hooded woman eyed Elna as if to ask what she was going to do now.

"I need a wet cloth and a warm, clean blanket." the woman nodded and left the cabin. I turned to my aunt.

"I can do it." I said confidently. "You know I can. Let me do it." Elna's thin eyebrows furrowed as she considered my request. Moving in closer, I felt the mother's abdomen.

"She is right. The baby needs to turn." I whispered. "I have to help, or they won't make it." Looking up at my aunt, the woman who raised me, "Please." I begged.

"Alright, but quickly." She gave in, as she usually did when the timing was dire. Another tired but piercing cry came from the mother. Taking a new wet cloth from the hooded woman and placing it on the mother's forehead, I reassured her. "You will be alright, and you'll be holding your baby soon." Covering her with another blanket, I handed her the clean stick I had picked up on the way there and placed it in her mouth.

“Bite on this,” I told her. “Concentrate on it. When you feel the pain, don’t fight it. Let it come and bite hard. Keep your breathing steady. Her light orange hair stuck to her sweaty forehead. She nodded at me. Her green trusting eyes locked on mine.

I pictured in my mind's eye this young mother’s baby, inside of her. I envisioned him rolling completely forward and imagined the baby moving himself in the exact position best for delivery: head down, face down.

“Turn.” I commanded him under my breath. The baby did what he was told. The mother’s scream seemed to fill the small cabin. Cold sweat dripped down her neck. In only a few seconds the infant was completely turned around. After that, she began to start her labor productively. With each painful contraction, the infant moved down the birth canal. She held my hand, and Elna patted her tired face with a wet cloth.

We breathed with her for hours until miraculously I saw this exhausted woman summon enough strength to push through a few more intense contractions. A precious red-haired baby boy took his first breath.

After drying off the infant, and clearing his airway, I wrapped him tight in a blanket and laid the little bundle in his mother’s shaking arms. No words needed to be said, only a few silent tears, as we all four, well, five now, sat there relieved it was over. I leaned against a cold, large barrel and looked up at the ceiling of the shack. The spider webs that lined it caught the morning sunlight and lit soft rainbow colors. We were still for several minutes, and I soaked in the moment, wanting it to last. It was times like these that reassured me my healing power had a purpose, and I could use it for good.

"You don't seem to need me anymore." My aunt's voice was soft. I turned to her, my eyes widened in surprise.

"How could you say that? Nothing could be more untrue." I said sincerely. The hooded woman took this opportunity to move closer to us and peered intently at me.

"I saw what you did. I saw the whole thing." She spat as she whispered. "That was dark magic." She leaned in, the floor creaking below her.

"Was it?" My Aunt spoke before I could. Upon hearing her accusation, I moved away from the woman and headed towards the door. I heard Elna continue in my defense. "She was helping someone. She saved her life. How could you think that was evil?"

I knew this conversation well and had little patience for it. If my Aunt had not been there, I might have turned the woman into a frog. I smiled at the idea. I had never actually turned anyone into a frog, but who's to say I couldn't.

"Not an evil cause, I suppose." She shifted her gaze a bit then confidently said, "I only know of one other who has that controlling power and he sits on a throne that is not rightfully his."

I stepped outside where I wouldn't hear them and filled a bucket with gray water out of the well. After soaking the bloody blankets, I scrubbed them with my knuckles, rung them out and dumped the pink water out on the rocky ground. I rinsed and repeated till my hands and arms screamed at me to stop. This was the part of midwifery that no one ever mentions, how messy the clean up is.

My aunt finally joined me outside, and we finished washing together. After hanging the dripping laundry over the fence, we started the trek back home. The sun shining above the tops of the trees reminded me of my morning chores awaiting me at our cottage.

"Horses need to be feed and chickens' eggs won't gather themselves." Elna chimed in, reading my mind. I let a smile creep up on my face.

"If only they did. That would sure make things easier if we could but control them, and they obeyed." I enjoyed teasing her. She rolled her eyes again.

"Nothing can take the place of-"

"Hard work," I interrupted her. "I know, I know. Next, you will tell me how idol hands only cause trouble."

"I've taught you well." She smiled as though she may have been proud of me. My Aunt and I walked side by side along the dusty pathway, saying nothing. The morning was on us, and I was exhausted. As we made our way back to our green hillside, I rubbed my stinging eyes and wondered how red they were. They always seemed to puff up when I stayed up all night.

In that moment of thought and distraction, I didn't notice the shadowy figures waiting for us behind a tree. Before I could react or even realize the danger, my arms were grabbed from behind me. Only a muffled yell had escaped my lips before someone plunged me into the hard, unforgiving ground. My face pressed down in the dry dirt, and a lightning bolt of pain soared up my back and neck. My weak attempt at setting myself free hurt my neck as well as my pride.

I heard someone scream. It was Aunt Elna. She was hurt, and the very thought tore me apart. It changed me. Anger like I had never felt before boiled inside of me, steaming out my fingertips and nostrils. With dirt in my mouth, I turned my head to see the arm of the man who had me pinned down. I controlled him. He immediately let go of me, and I stumbled to stand. Staggering, I glared at my perpetrator. He was stout, blonde, and dirty as any I'd ever seen, poor soul.

His face caught me off guard. It wasn't frightened, but completely calm. Then I realized he had no control over himself. I had the power to do anything I desired with him and yet he showed no visible sign that he was the least bit frightened. I hadn't experienced anything like this

before. I could control him! I could make him do anything! Energy mixed with exhilaration and panic soared through my entire body. I was hot and cold at the same time. Elated and terrified, I stumbled back. I had the very world at my fingertips to control at my command. I had heard that Lord Rohas used his power to control others just like this, and now I stood in his place.

Surprised at myself, I let my attacker go from my control. He stumbled back, shocked. I stood unmoving as he turned and ran off, sending dust into the air between us.

Never mind him. Where was Elna? My heart beat loud as I frantically searched for her. She was on the ground unmoving. I ran to her. Her attacker was nowhere I could see, but she was breathing, and I held on to that hope. Thick red blood covered her forehead and stomach, and I attempted to heal her. I commanded her to heal like I had controlled so many others, but nothing happened. I had no control over her. She opened her blue eyes and softly spoke to me.

“I should have told you before, Amira. Your father is Lord Rohas. After your mother died giving birth to you, I stole you away from him for your own safety. He doesn't know you are alive. I told him that you died with your mother.”

My world spun. It couldn't be true. I am a healer, and nothing more. I can't be heir to the throne. That's impossible! My aunt gasped for breath, and I wrapped my arms around her, desperate for her not to leave me.

“No!” I cried with filled eyes. “Why can't I heal you? Why won't my power work on you?”

Her last words planted in my heart as my tears moistened the dusty road. “The kingdom of Alcas is rightfully yours to reign. When you do, you must do it differently than your father.”

And she was gone.