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## **Love is Magic**

The bark of the willow gave way to her and she came out, puffy handed and rosy-cheeked. A bow of willow vine wrapped and tied around her fuzzy, peach colored head. She lay in a bed of soft porcelain roses and young lamb-ear leaves. And when her predecessor touched her cheek she looked up at her with big, dark eyes and blinked in a bit of a wonder. Her mother wrapped herself in the cloak of vines she bore and smiled with old, sun-kissed lips. The infant watched her mother-like predecessor sink quietly to the grass and curl herself into the shimmering bundle of old, tarnished willow vines before silently fading away. The baby blinked softly, as if she knew what had happened. And after she lay in a strange silence, she opened her mouth and began to cry. And out of sympathy, the willow tree's branches embraced the child in a prickly, but comfortable sort of way.

The baby, silent again, stared at her faded mother before finally looking away and drifting into a peaceful slumber in the arms of the willow tree.

Isla was raised by her life force, as every other sprite was. It was common belief that Isla would be the last generation bore by her life force: an old willow tree with graying leaves that twinkled in the moonlight and dipped into a young spring which it sat beside. The generations of the willow hadn't been particularly accoladed by surrounding life forces. But none contravened the system as Isla had.

From a dramatically early age, Isla's beauty had startled those around her. She had long, twinkling white hair that floated in the air. She had flawless, green-tinted skin, and outstanding dark eyes, the color of damp tree bark. She wore a gown of the same fashion as the earlier generations of her life force, braided of willow vines and bouquets of baby's breath. Tangled in her hair was a crown of willow and bits and pieces of white flower petals. She was truly a sight to behold. And not only to behold, but to talk to.

Isla talked of things bigger than herself; she talked of the world beyond Cataline; she talked of taboo things like love and war. Of course, this made her a controversial character among the other sprites. Some even refused to speak to her because of her rebellious ideals. Others adored her for speaking of things everyone else feared.

Then there was Thorn, who sought no opinion in anyone, really. She spent her days hidden in her life force, the spring that Isla's willow dipped into. Only at nightfall, when everyone else was sleeping, absorbed in their life force, did Thorn emerge and pace the clear, sparkling water of her spring, allowing her long, watery blue gown and her flowing black hair to trail over the water.

The first time Isla saw Thorn was a sleepless, stormy night. Isla sat awake, crouched under the protective branches of her willow, quietly cursing the sprites that maintained the clouds and the rain. That is when Thorn, quietly and confidently, emerged from the spring and began to pace the water. Her soft, gentle feet sent tiny ripples. Raindrops only enhancing her beauty and further clarifying and framing her flawless figure. Isla stared, dumbfounded, at the beauty that walked the spring.

As Thorn turned at the bank of the spring, she noticed Isla crouched beneath the willow. And instead of cowering, as she generally might have, she only stopped. She stopped and stared back at Isla, and into Isla's eyes as no one ever had. They held each other's gaze steadily for a few long moments before Thorn quietly sank and diminished among the ripples of the spring.

Isla could not blink, afraid of losing the memory of what she had seen. What they had shared was stronger than any words could manage, and stronger than any touch. It was something of fairytales. Something magical.

Isla gripped the rough bark of the willow and slipped into her life force, still throng with a feeling of grounded captivation. Thorn's bright blue eyes still burning fresh on her retinas. Her heartbeat a little faster and her body quaked within the old life force.

Her mind felt warm and she felt beyond herself in a rosy sort of way she hadn't ever felt before. She yearned to see Thorn's beautiful body, beautiful face, beautiful auro again.