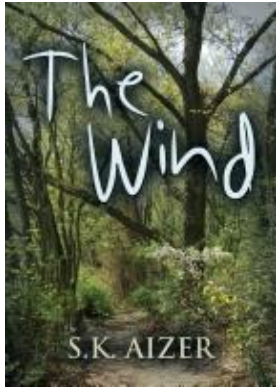




The Wind

S.K. AIZER



Imagine living in a world where you can control the wind currents with just your mind; a world in which you and your friends are gods with unique and different gifts, and powers over the forces of nature. Sajar is such a world, where young deities on their sixteenth birthday inherit powers beyond their wildest dreams. However, in this world filled with beauty and magic, there is also danger and evil - the daemons...

The Wind

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The Wind

A novel by

S. K. Aizer

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First Edition

SUNNY

CHAPTER ONE
Do you Believe in Miracles?

I am Sunny Ray, and I live on a ranch in upstate New York with my parents Stephen and Jessica Ray. They are not my biological parents, they found me one day as an infant. They do not know where I came from, or who left me in their care. But to them, I have been, and always will be their daughter.

My dad, is a rancher and a farmer, and has been all his life. He grew up on this farm, and worked on it; side by side with his father, from the time he was a small boy. It has been in my father's family for generations, passed down to him by his father and his father's father before him.

We raise horses and run a riding school and trail ride program. We also keep a small farm with a few cows and chickens from which we get our milk and fresh eggs. There is farm land where we grow cabbages, cucumbers, green peas, onions, squash, corn and tomatoes. There is a lot to do and keep up with. Dad does have ranch hands and others who work for him, but, he likes to be sure all is running correctly, up to his standards of perfection. He rides around

from stable to fields checking, and staying on top of everything, and on all that is happening. He is the most happy when he is doing so, and it is obvious how much pride he takes in his land.

For a very long time mom and dad were worried that they would never have a child to love or an heir to pass the ranch down to. They had tried for ten years to conceive a child of their own but were not able. Although they were best friends and partners they were lonely. Something was missing.

Dad had been an only child, and his father had been his best friend growing up, but he had always wanted more. Especially after both of his parents died in a car accident when dad was only nineteen years old. He took over the ranch work and the farming on his own then. Working day and night to fight his loneliness. But it was too hard. He couldn't manage it on his own. Although there were a few people who worked at the riding school, most of the preparation and maintenance of the school and farm had been done by his father, mother and himself. They had always worked together and he had done a man's worth of the work load ever since he was in his early teens. On his own there was too much to do. Money was tight too, but out of necessity, he finally decided he needed to hire more people to help with some of the work. It was surprising that he met mom at all, he worked so hard, and so many hours. The way they met was by a stroke of luck. Perhaps destiny.

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Mom had grown up alone as well. She was an orphan in Nassau County, Long Island. Her parents died in a car accident like dad's parents, however she had been an infant. Without any family she grew up in a series of foster homes and state run group homes. Nothing that happened to her in any of them were particularly horrible or traumatic, but she had been lonely. She was always envious of classmates who had parents and seemed to have a sense of belonging and love in their lives, which she craved. At eighteen years old she was no longer a minor and on her own.

Up until the last minute she had planned to go to a Community college but received a scholarship to a State University school upstate, with a good education program. Although she couldn't really afford it, she took out loans and took a chance, she always knew she wanted to be a teacher. Since she was paying her own way she needed to find a job to help with her bills. She loved horses ever since she was a little girl, so even though she had no real experience with them, she applied for a job cleaning up in the stables, at a nearby ranch.

At first dad wasn't going to even consider calling back a college girl that applied for the job. However, the first two men who he interviewed, were both so rude and condescending when he showed up and introduced himself as the proprietor of the ranch; that he decided to give the college girl a chance. Upon meeting and interviewing her, although he didn't think she would make a good ranch hand

and knew nothing about horses or raking a stable, it didn't matter; it was love at first sight. He knew instantly she was the woman he would one day marry. She was hired on the spot, and spent more than her work hours with dad from day one.

The day after her college graduation they were married, in a small civil ceremony. The best day in both of their lives. And they were happy. During ups and downs and struggles and the disappointment of not being able to conceive a child, they stuck together. Their lives were not perfect but they were perfect for each other.

From that very first day that they met, the riding program and farm continued to grow and prosper. My dad, now employs a staff of fifteen people. Some of them run and work at the riding program. And some of them work as farm hands, plowing and tending the farmland. Mom is no longer an employee; however, she often assists with the horses as we both really enjoy riding.

Another thing about my dad, he is the world's greatest story teller. Not all of his stories are true. And he often comes up with wildly imaginative ones. But he swears this one is; it's the story of how I was found, and I ask him to tell it often.

This is the story, as dad tells it:

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“Mommy and I had the most wonderful marriage and loved each other more than anything in the world but something was missing; a family to share it with and to share our love with. We prayed every day for a miracle and finally it was answered. I believe your grandparents, my parents and your mother’s, whom I am sure are friends in heaven, got together and sent us an angel to love. This is how it happened..... One day after a particularly long, cold winter and miserable and rainy spring, scattered with wintry snowy days, the sun came out. It felt like a miracle because your mother and I were beginning to think that spring would never come. Never mind the summer. But like clockwork it did. June 21st came and it was bright and sunny and warm. The vegetables that were soggy and dying days before were suddenly hardy and soaking up the sun. I swear that I actually saw the vegetables smiling. Don’t ask me to describe it, because I can’t, but I just knew that they were. The cows, horses and chickens were definitely smiling though. That I am sure of. As for me, as far as I was concerned this was the best day I could remember in a long time. Everything about it seemed to have a divine, mystical feeling. It was as if magic was in the

air and I knew something wonderful was going to happen. It turned out that I was right too! I couldn't remember a day where I felt happier. I skipped through the chores in the stables and the fields and had a smile on my face all day. But there was something bothering me too, it was strange really. All day I had this reoccurring feeling that I was being watched. I kept turning around and looking behind things. I swear, I kept seeing a midget out of the corner of my eye, but when I turned there was nothing there. I even started talking to some of the animals. Asking them if they saw anything, or if it was just me. Thank goodness your mother was not home, she was finishing up her last week of school for the summer. (She was an elementary school teacher at the time). She definitely would have thought I was crazy and paranoid. But when she pulled up to the house and came over to greet me by the barn as she always did, the first thing she said was, "I had the strangest day. All day long I thought I saw or felt someone watching me. Isn't that weird?" No, I said, because I had the exact same feeling. But it has to be the heat or something, what else could it be? But, even as I spoke those words I didn't believe them. I thought there was something else. Something I was missing. And

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then we heard something. Something incredible. The most beautiful sound we had ever heard and had been wanting to hear for so long. It was a baby's laughter. Which if you have never heard is unlike anything else. It is different from a grownups, it's more innocent and pure. The perfect sound is the best way to describe it. We turned our eyes toward the sound and followed. As we got closer to it we saw a basket by the front door of the house. I had been to the house earlier and it wasn't there, and your mother had just moments before passed the main house before she came to the barn, and hadn't noticed anything either. I remembered the midget I thought I had seen. Could it have been real? Could he have left this basket? It was the only explanation. But it had been at least an hour ago, since I last thought I saw something. I would have noticed this basket during the past hour! Wouldn't I? As we approached we saw it more closely; a tiny plain wicker basket with a baby wrapped up in a blanket inside. That baby Sunny, was you. At first I didn't know what to do. I looked around to see if anyone was there. To find the person who left a baby. I looked for the midget I had thought I saw all day. But there was no one around. Mom knew what to do though. She

picked you right up and held you in her arms and smiled down at you, then at me. And I knew what she was thinking before she said it. “It’s her Stephen, the baby I prayed for, every day for the past ten years. She’s ours and her name is Sunny, S for you Stephen, the man I love most in this world and Sunny because she brought the sun in to our lives today, I am sure of it.” When we took you inside to look at you more closely, a strange realization occurred to us. You looked like a newborn, your skin was still pink and wrinkled, your eyes mostly closed, just opening now and then to blink and look around. And you only weighed 6 pounds, and were 21 inches long. You couldn’t have been laughing. Babies don’t laugh until they are approximately three or four months old, especially the full hardy laughter we had heard. We knew we heard it. We both did. But it didn’t make sense. We decided the laughter was part of the miracle that brought you to us. And raised you as our own from that day forward. From day one you were the perfect baby, all smiles. You rarely cried, and slept through the night without a hitch. We were blessed with a beautiful baby girl and our lives were complete.”

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Another miracle occurred a few months later. Although my parents were convinced somehow that it was a miracle that brought me to them and that it was meant for them to raise me as their own daughter; unfortunately that is not the way the law works. Although there are fables and stories of babies being found in baskets, in reality one has to report finding a baby and then possibly if no biological parents are found can petition the court to become foster parents and later apply for adoption. However, this is not a guarantee and can take years and never work out at all. This thought terrified my parents. They did not want to give me up for even a second, never mind chance losing me forever. Like the connection between my parents when they first met, when they saw me it was also love at first sight. However, they knew that I would need a birth certificate and childhood vaccinations.

They put off doing anything for three months, but finally decided to take me to a pediatrician. They explained to the pediatrician that I had been born at home, hoping that would suffice. However, as part of standard protocol, blood tests and genetic testing were done, to screen for various illnesses, since I was not born in the hospital.

A few days later when they got a call from the doctor, both of my parents held their breath and sat in silence and panic on the phone. They knew that the DNA tests would show that they were not my biological parents. They feared that since they had lied, they would be reported to the

authorities and I would be taken away. They worried that they would never be able to even be considered as adoptive parents.

But the conversation did not go as they feared. The doctor didn't say anything about the DNA tests at all. Somehow, miraculously the DNA test results matched. I was genetically compatible to them. The doctor told my parents my blood type was O just like both of theirs were and that I was perfectly healthy. He also told them that he had already put in the paperwork for my birth certificate, which they would receive in a few weeks.

They were in shock because obviously I was not their biological child, they had found me in a basket at the door. Now more than ever they were confused, but were sure I was a gift sent to them from heaven.

My parents thanked the doctor and made a return visit appointment in three months for an additional round of vaccines and a checkup. They couldn't understand how that news was possible. There was no biological way that there DNA would match mine so closely if I was not born to them and I wasn't. It was at this point that they were sure that it had been a miracle and I was deliberately sent to them from heaven to raise.

My earliest memories are of them. Jessica was the most doting, wonderful mother. She stopped working and spent all of her time with me, playing, singing and reading. In the

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evenings dad would take over for tickling, laughing and rough housing. I loved them both. And my childhood was perfect.

I remember everything from the moment they took me from the basket. Which is peculiar because people usually do not remember anything specifically before they are two or three years old; and then only sporadic memories if any at all. This is because memories before speech are stored differently and memories become more secure as the brain matures. I don't understand why I remember things as clearly as I do, maybe it has something to do with where I came from before I was left at the Rays (which I have no memory at all of), or my unique way of interpreting the world around me, which I became aware of at a very young age.

When I was around 18 months old, my parents started to become concerned that I didn't make babbling sounds. They would often question themselves how they didn't notice that I never made any sounds at all, before then. They sometimes felt guilty that they didn't recognize it earlier. I cried occasionally and laughed often, but that was it. I was responsive to my parent's faces, but I didn't make any sounds. I turned toward them when they called me or spoke to me, but did not respond to the sound of a rattle, (which I now understand makes a noise when you shake it). I never babbled or repeated sounds like most babies did. But it wasn't that simple, and they still are not sure, and are still

often confused by my conception of things. Even as a baby my actions and reactions didn't fit into any pattern that would signify to them a problem, but they decided to take me for testing.

We saw lots of different doctors and specialists and heard lots of different diagnoses. They were told that I was deaf, mute and autistic. But I am none of those things; and somehow my parents knew the doctors were wrong. I never had a problem understanding them and always responded when they spoke to me, so it didn't make sense to them.

The specialists basically came to this conclusion, because I did not respond to noises made in a testing room. I was supposed to turn my head towards a sound they made on a computer. As a one and a half year old there were few other tests they could do. However, if they had thought to ask me to do things they would have been surprised at how much I understood; more than most children my age. One doctor even suggested that I be placed in an institution. Another recommended a boarding school for seriously disabled children. This angered my parents greatly. They decided they would disregard all of the doctors, and find a way to communicate with me on their own.

My mom took it upon herself to become an expert in hearing and speech. She read everything she could about being deaf, on learning language and communication styles. She even looked into cochlear implants (a surgically

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implanted device that provides direct electrical stimulation to the auditory nerve in the inner ear), but ended up deciding against it; because she was not convinced that I couldn't hear. She didn't know what it was, but felt it was something else. If I was meant to communicate orally, she knew I would in my own time. She decided she would be my teacher and coach, and we would navigate this new path together. She decided on American Sign Language (ASL), as a means of teaching me to communicate. From then on, I was home schooled by my mother. This is why my mom, dad and I are so close. For eight years they were my whole life.

I know all this, because, in a way they were right. I can hear them. Except not in the same way they do. I can't hear speech, but I can hear their thoughts. I always could.

I am aware that hearing thoughts is a strange thing. But I am not like other people. I can hear only what others are thinking. Other people communicate by talking. I can't speak. I also can't hear others speak, or hear what I call artificial sounds like music or television. I am still often perplexed when my family members turn on the radio or speakers to listen to music. I can see them dancing around and I can hear the lyrics and words that they hear in their minds but can't hear the rhythm or beat that they seem to be moving to. This is also the case with television. I can see people and animated characters moving about on the screen but can't hear what they say. If someone else is in the room

watching I can hear what they do. But it is mixed with their thoughts and perceptions of what they see and often other thoughts as they get distracted and think of other things. It is very confusing. Especially if there are multiple people in the room.

Once when I was three years old my mother not really understanding my strange perceptions of the world, tried taking me to an animated movie as I had learned to read lips and use sign language. Even before the movie started the thoughts of all the other children, and adults in the theatre were so loud and disconcerting that even before the movie began my mother had to take me home. I was holding my ears and shaking my head so violently from the noise my mother couldn't stop me until we were out of the theatre. I signed to her that I didn't like it there because it was too loud. She took me home but didn't understand, and tried repeatedly to correct me that it was too crowded maybe. But I insisted signing over and over, "No crowded, too loud!" Although she didn't completely understand, in a way she did. We rarely went out in public after that, but instead spent most our time on our ranch, together.

It was shortly after this that I taught myself to tune in and out thoughts when I wanted. At first I could only tune something out if there was another thought in closer proximity for me to concentrate on; but with practice, I could turn on and off what I wanted to. Every once in a while, especially at the beginning, I would listen closely to mom

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and dad, just to make sure I didn't miss anything important, like in an emergency or if I was being called, or needed. But I soon realized that unexpected or important thoughts would catch my attention.

Besides my parents never yelled for me from downstairs because they thought I couldn't hear. If they wanted me they would come to my room and get my attention visually. Of course I always heard them, because as they approached their thoughts got louder and drew my attention. But, since I never let on, they still always came to find me. Occasionally when I felt lonely I would concentrate on them and could hear what was on their mind. But, I was rarely alone, they were always there for me when I needed them.

I also found by not listening to my mom's thoughts while we were speaking using sign language, my signing skills grew quicker. Sometimes my mom would tell me to slow down because I signed too quickly for her to understand. But since we spent so much time together we soon developed a perfect rhythm. After learning to sign, I learned to read and write and finished the high school curriculum by the time I was fourteen.

We'd frequently take our books to sit outside on the porch or in the garden and fields and read and write in the fresh air. Which I knew she partly did for me. I always loved to be outdoors. I still do. I mostly like it because of the sounds in nature. I could hear the wind blowing and

variations in its speed and direction. I can hear the wind rippling over the water in the lake on our property and the lake that is in the park over a mile away down the road. I can hear the rain, and the building up of moisture in the clouds and predict when it will fall quite accurately. I can hear electricity in the air and know when a thunder storm is coming. I love to listen, and find these sounds soothing and calming.

I can also hear the sounds of all the animals on the farm, both physical sounds and emotional thought. I also hear the animal's subtle sounds; like the swish of a horse's tail, and the rustle of feathers as the chickens and other birds in the trees prune and stretch their wings. I can tell the difference between different species and sizes of the birds just by the sound.

I can hear the softness, and rustling of the footsteps of the horses and cows in the barn and fields, and their calls, and communications to each other.

I can hear the animal's thoughts too, just like humans. They don't think like we do though. The best way to describe it is, they respond with emotions. Hunger is a big one and the smell of food initiates an excited frenzy. Sounds make them interested and they'll listen closely and try to identify it. They recognize the sounds dad makes doing various tasks and especially ones that are associated with food. They also, like me, can hear changes in the wind and

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air pressure. They know when a rain or snow storm is coming, or if it is going to be a windy day, or perhaps if there will be a drop in temperature. They are usually content nibbling grass or pruning themselves but always on alert for the next sound or smell in which to respond to. They communicate with each other when they are alarmed, excited or happy. Sometimes they are very quiet when I am near. I think that they know that I have a deeper understanding of them than other humans, but I am not sure.

I like listening to mom thinking too; and she often reflects on her life and how perfect she feels it has turned out, when we were sitting outside together. She frequently will get lost watching dad, as he just simply goes about his day tending to the ranch. Her heart will often skip a beat and then beat a little faster as she catches a glimpse of him in the fields. It doesn't matter what he is doing she loves him so much and is overwhelmed with the feeling that she is so lucky that he belongs to her. She feels similar about me too. I often will catch her staring at me while I work, thinking about how amazing and bright I am. She is proud and impressed at how I learn things so much faster than most children my age. She also frequently thanks god or the forces of nature, or whomever it was that brought me to her. She never worries or feels regretful anymore that I can't hear like other children we meet or that she had taught. She someone knows that I am special and perfect and will be happy.

It feels good being with her too. She is more than my mother, she is also my best friend. For a long time she was my only friend and primary playmate too. We enjoy playing catch, soccer, taking long walks together and playing hide and seek. I am much better at finding her, no matter how clever her hiding spots are; because her thoughts always give her away. Sometimes my dad will join us. I love it when he does. He has a wonderful, exuberant energy that makes everything more intense and lively. Mom thinks so too.

In addition to schoolwork and playing, I also learned to cook by watching and helping my mom each day. Cooking is something she loves and is very good at. We have been working side by side for as long as I can remember and now we are equal partners in the kitchen. I always know exactly what she needs me to do before she says it. She believes it is from cooking together so often that we have developed a perfect rhythm together in the kitchen. That is part of it, but hearing her thoughts helps too! We always have big wonderful meals and baked desserts. Dad's favorite part of the day is dinner. He always walks into the house after working all day, with an excited energy and anticipation of the feast we have prepared. It is fun pleasing him and listening to him enjoy what I helped to make.

Another thing I love about cooking with mom is she always sings when she is cooking and has the most angelic voice. I love listening to that most of all. Yes I can hear that! Everyone's voices in their thoughts are different and

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different in thought and in song. I don't hear it like you do, but there is a difference and I like it when she is happy and singing. It is almost like listening to the wind.

My dad spends a lot of time with me too, mostly teaching me about running the ranch; as I will one day inherit it. When I was three, he started with teaching me how to ride horses. Now one of my favorite chores is helping him and the ranch hands clean, feed and exercise them. From the beginning, I was a natural on a horse. I think it was because I could read the horse's feelings and mood and communicate my thoughts; (more like intentions, and feelings to it). As soon as my dad taught me the right way to hold the reins and to use my legs and heels to guide the horse, we had an instant bond and communication. All the horses respond to me in this way and I am a good rider and enjoy it.

I also learned from him the correct times of the year and temperature for planting, and how often and what amount of water each vegetable and tree needs. Also how to tell if the soil is too dry, moist or needs fertilization. But most importantly how to use an Almanac, and how to track weather patterns to figure out the best planting times each year. My dad is a naturalist and environmentalist. He only uses natural products and does not spray any pesticides on any of his fruits or vegetables. Our farm is organic and there is a high demand for his products.

REISS

*“Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some
have greatness thrust upon ’em”*

William Shakespeare

Twelfth Night

REISS

CHAPTER TWO
The Calm Before the Storm

I am Reiss. I have grown up on Sajar, with my mothers, my fathers and my three best friends, but they are more like my brothers. We have grown up together, spending almost every waking moment, side by side. I have two sets of parents; as do my friends. Although Rhodes and Serafina are my biological parents, I was equally raised by Remus and Shira. They are the parents of my mate. I have never met her, but she was born on the same day as I. However, she was taken away at birth to be protected in the Other World, safe from the daemons. Tomorrow I will leave Sajar and begin a six day quest. The most important part of my quest is to find her. My friends are also looking for their mates.

Currently all of our mothers are pregnant. They conceive a new child every sixteen years. Each of the eight woman will give birth at the summer solstice, which is seven days away. Just as I was born almost sixteen years ago on the same date with my mate. This time however, Shira will have a boy, and my mother Serafina will have to give up her

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daughter to the leprechauns, who will take her to the Other World.

The thought of the adventure ahead of me is exciting but scary too. No will tell me exactly what to expect or where to go. But I have been preparing for this journey before me, since I was a baby. Everything I have been taught and learned was to help me on my quest. Even when I was playing with my parents, or friends I was really in training, building strength, courage, agility and cunning in order to survive. Of course most of it was fun, and I look forward to what lies ahead, but I am also very aware of the danger.

It is the daemons that scare me the most. I know I will have to fend them off myself when I leave. I can only pray that I am prepared to do so. I have never had too before. I have never even seen them, only heard their screams at night, and it makes me shiver. I will have my three best friends with me, but only at the beginning of our journey. After the first night we will be alone. At night is when the daemons are out.

But I haven't really thought about it at all today. I have been having too much fun playing with my friends; Royal, Riley and Rory. We played catch, tag, Frisbee, raced and wrestled. We practiced target shooting with our bows and arrows and played at being swordsmen with our spears. Royal won almost all of these games. He is the best athlete among us. The strongest, most agile and gifted in creating

things too. He was always that way. When we were younger, he had learned to make and use a bow and arrow and spear effectively before any of us even got ours assembled.

He is also whom, I am closest with. We are usually off together talking, playing, wrestling or exploring. He is a blast to be with; mischievous and unpredictable. His favorite thing to do, is to pick up rocks, pebbles or dirt and throw it at me and others. His throws are extremely accurate and fast and always hit their target. But, I don't mind at all, because this is somehow, not true when it comes to me. This frustrates Royal, but he never gives up, I am often the intended target of one of his stones. That is why I am not surprised that when my back is turned a pebble bullet comes rushing my way.

But as usual, I don't even have to turn around, I feel the rush of air before it reaches me and duck out of the way in the split second before it hits me. I hear his sigh of despair at missing me and I turn to pick up a pebble of my own to throw back at him. I miss but not before he lunges and throws a handful of dirt at my face. I move out of the way of that too; but not out of his reach and tackle. We wrestle each other on the floor, simultaneously picking up handfuls of dirt to shove in each other's eyes, mouth, ears, and face. We both end up calling a truce as we cough and laugh simultaneously; as we wipe the dirt away.

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Then Royal is on his feet and says, “Let’s go clean off in the lake, Race ya!”

He speeds off not waiting for a response, or for me to get up. Everything is a competition with him. But this is one I can win. Even with his impressive head start I can beat him. I am the fastest runner and he knows it. However, he also hates to lose, and will cheat if he has too, to win. I get up and run after him. I can catch up to him and surpass if I want to, but I slow down instead and make him think he has a chance. I wait until the last minute and push in front of him and dive into the lake first.

Not surprisingly Riley is there. He is the fastest swimmer and practically a fish. He loves the water and spends hours floating around. Royal and I being mischievous as we are, quickly devise a plan to jump on him and dunk him. But we fail miserably. We have made too much noise, he had felt our splash in the water and was aware of us as soon as we entered. He thwarts our attack and dunks us both effortlessly with one hand each. We come up splashing, but he anticipates this too and his splash is more like a wall of water that leaves us sputtering and giving up.

“All right, All right truce, you win.” we say.

“Thanks for the heads up, I wanted to have some time to get out and dry off before dinner anyway guys. Appreciate it.” he says.

“Anytime.” answers Royal, as he splashes water again in Riley’s direction; but the water just seems to stop before it reaches him.

We all get out together and join Rory, on the edge of the lake. He is sitting quietly on the rocks examining something in his hands.

“What do you got there?” Riley asks.

“It’s a salamander, but look, I’ve never seen one like it before. It has a line down its back one side green the other brown. Isn’t that interesting?” Rory exuberantly announces and asks.

“Yeah that is cool!” Riley responds, but he is only feigning interest for his friend’s sake. He is already spread out on the rocks with his eyes closed drying in the sun.

Royal and I exchange a glance. We are an interesting group. We often speculate with each other about our future. More like joke about it.

We are deities and each destined to harness one of the four forces of nature, Wind, Earth, Water and Fire. We have been told by our fathers not to speculate, that we would not come into our true powers until we went out on our quest. But we knew.

Royal could throw the fastest and hardest, could create anything he needed with just the raw materials of the earth

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and forest, and had a natural talent at planting and growing things. He was the Master of Earth.

Riley was practically a fish and the fastest swimmer and the water seemed to respond to him in return. He was definitely the Master of Water.

Myself, I was the fastest, fast as the wind, Royal would always tease me. I also could feel subtle changes in the wind when things were thrown at me, that's how I always avoided Royal's rocks. I was Master of Wind.

That left Rory, the quiet one, content to play with salamanders and read. What that had to do with fire we didn't know, but it was the only force left. So we guessed he was Master of Fire.

I have to admit I was a little jealous of my friends. Their gifts of nature seemed to be better than mine. Avoiding things thrown at you didn't seem like such an extraordinary power. I often wished I could harness all four and be the most powerful of all. We had heard stories from our parents of one very powerful deity, Rider, who could do that.

Maybe I could if I wished hard enough. Apparently we had not come in to our full powers yet. Maybe there was still a chance.

My train of thought is broken by the sound of one of our Mothers. I sounds like Sarina, Riley's mother calling us for

dinner. “Boy’s dinners up! Come and get it before it gets cold!”

We all realize just how hungry we are, and don’t need to be called twice to come. Of course Royal is the first to leave.

“Race ya!” he yells, not waiting for anyone as he takes off running.

I could beat him easily again, but don’t feel like it. I walk home with Riley and Rory.

We all live adjacent to each other, our dwellings positioned in a circle with a courtyard between us. Although unrelated, we are family. Our parents are the only adults and Royal, Riley and Rory are like my brothers. We have been raised together in an area of Sajar known as the Dome. It is just us and we do everything together.

The only others that we see, are four deities that have come before us. Roman and Sophia are the son and daughter of Riley’s two sets of parents. Reed and Sasha are the son and daughter of Royal’s two sets of parents. Like us, Roman and Reed were raised here, separated from their mates at birth and went on a quest the week before their sixteenth birthday to find their mates. Roman and Reed with their mates were the only ones to return. Ranger, my brother, the son of Remus and Shira, as well as Raleigh, the son of Rory’s parents did not return. They were killed by the daemons on their quest. There have been years too, when no

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one has returned safely. This thought terrifies me. I could leave tomorrow and die at the hands of the daemons.

Roman and Reed live in the Other World with their mates, but come to Sajar sometimes on our birthday June 21; that is the only day they are allowed to return from the Other World. Their parents visit with them alone and Royal stays with us on that day and Riley stays with Rory. We are not allowed to speak with them or have any communication. Although especially now, I would love to speak to them. There are so many questions I have. They are like us, only sixteen years older. I wish they could tell us what to expect on our journey and how to fight the daemons. And what the Other World that we will travel to is like. But our parents tell us we must learn for ourselves; that their experiences and stories will not help us on our own quests. We must find our own powers and destinies uninfluenced by any before us. As many times as I hear this, it doesn't make sense. But we have never met the other deities, only seen them briefly as they arrived.

Our parents have prepared us with what we need to know to survive on our own. Over the years, they have taken turns each day, teaching us different things about the land we live on. Everything we eat is either grown or caught. With our mothers we tend the fields; where herbs, fruits and vegetables are raised with care and patience. My brothers and I are responsible for keeping the dam and irrigation ditches that supply water in good order and running well to

water the crops. Riley is the best at this, the water seems to flow smoother, quicker and faster when he is near. Royal is a natural around the crops. He remembers everything that he has ever learned about plants and vegetation, and everything grows better when he is around.

Our fathers take us outside the dome into the meadow and the light forest, in the summer months. They have taught us all about the plants that grow and what is safe to eat and what is not, so that we can survive off the land alone. They have also taught us to hunt deer and bison to eat. Royal is the best at this too. He remembers every plant and where he saw them and what health and medicinal properties they have. (I can barely remember their names). He is also amazing with a bow and arrow and a spear. His precision and aim are perfect and he never misses a target. We also have learned to fish using fishing lines and catching fish with a spear while swimming. Riley catches 20 fish to our one by hand no less, although he refuses to eat them, and always sets them free. We have also been taught how to cook and prepare the food we harvest and catch, however our moms usually do most of the cooking.

We have study hours for six hours each day where we learn about the other inhabitants of our world, the history of our world, literature, science, math, and most recently of our destiny and the journey we are expected to make.

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Rory is the book worm among us. He excels at math and science, and remembers everything he reads. I have not found what I am good at yet. Royal teases me about it all the time. But I know that it is in fun and to only make light of it and to make me laugh because it does bother me. I am the only one who seems to have no useful skills. Master of wind is definitely the lamest of gifts, which makes me very worried about my chances of survival on my quest. I try not to think about, but it is hard.

When we get to the picnic area set up by our parents in the courtyard at the center of all of our homes, Royal is already eating. We all sit down without a word and join him. Everything is delicious.

By the time we are done with dinner it is getting dark. Our mothers begin cleaning up and getting ready to go inside. It is dangerous to be about at night. Only the Protectors patrol the perimeter of the dome in which we live after sunset. Even though our village is protected by a shield spell that creates the dome, the daemons are powerful in the dark and continually try to get in and to lure others out. We are prime targets for them too, because they are aware of our destiny and quest. They know we are the next generation of deities that will fight against them. They are determined to stop us.

I begin to get up to go inside, but our fathers tell all of us to stay. We all obey patiently.

“Reiss!” my fathers, say in unison. “Come with us, we want to show you something.”

I follow. My friend’s fathers guide them off as well.

My fathers, walk with me in silence for about 20 minutes until we reach the edge of the dome. The dome is an invisible wall created by the shield spell, which is very powerful magic. Our kind can walk through it but daemons can’t. Although it is invisible you can sense it and feel the vibrations it makes as you get close. As we get closer, I can hear the screams of the daemons getting louder. A chill goes through me. I have never been to the edge of the dome at night. When we are only about a foot from the edge my fathers, sit down and gesture for me to sit beside them.

“You don’t have to be ashamed to be afraid.” says Rhodes. “All your brothers before you felt the same way. Just don’t let it consume you. A little fear is healthy, as you know there are very real dangers out there. However, fear can also be your greatest obstacle. It will paralyze you if you let it. Don’t! Let confidence keep you strong and sharp. You also must remember all the things we have taught you. And you must trust your instincts. We have taught you everything we can, and we are depending on you to succeed. You have all the skills you need and many more that you will discover on your own. We have confidence in you and you must as well.”

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I want to tell them that I am not afraid, that I will not let them down, but I am terrified, so I say nothing.

We sit in silence. The only sound is the daemons howling, and the sound is getting closer, and louder as it gets darker. The air seems to get chillier by the second too and I feel the hairs on the back of my neck stand up, and a chill pierces through me, like thousands of tiny icicles bearing into every inch of my skin.

Suddenly in front of me appears a being that could only be a daemon. It is solid, but not, its flesh or outline of it seems to flicker and change like a fire, yet beneath the fire something glistens and seems to be made of stone. It is strong and malevolent. The fire does not give off heat but it radiates a cold that penetrates easily through the barrier between us. (A barrier I pray silently will hold). The daemon has the most terrible, piercing, red glowing eyes, that hold my gaze with a force that makes it difficult to look away, and it is grinning almost mocking me.

It is as if it is challenging me to come and fight. A challenge, now more than ever I know I don't want to accept. It is right in front of me and I am terrified that it will reach through the barrier and grab me.

My fathers, put their arms around either side of me, as soon as it appears, and this time it is Remus who speaks.

“He can’t reach through the barrier, although he would like to very much. He can hear us but does not understand what we say. That is Abaddon, the destroyer. He is the father of all the daemons and the strongest by far. He posses’ all four of the forces of nature: earth, wind, water and fire. He is only here to frighten you, he rarely engages in battle. But leaves it to his sons:, Akhar- daemon of earth, Anemos- daemon of wind, Archos- daemon of water and Aelius- daemon of fire. It is curious that he chose to sit in front of you Reiss, and not your friends sitting nearby. He is sizing you up because he has determined you the strongest. That should give you confidence, but also should be a warning. He rarely fights himself but he will probably send more than one of his sons against you. If he has determined you the strongest, you are, and you have the ability to defeat them.”

“Do the sons look like him?” I ask.

“No, they all are different and can take different forms. They may appear as an animal or hide amongst a plant, or in water until you get close. So you need to be very aware at all times. As your powers grow you will be able to sense them when they are nearby. Until then you will need to be very careful.” Dad answers.

Now my friends and their fathers come closer next to us to get a better look at Abaddon themselves. Now it is Rory’s father Raj who speaks.

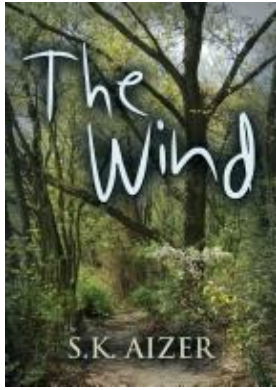
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“You all know that you each possess one of the four forces of nature yourselves. Each of you a different one. Although all of your fathers including myself have speculated who is the master of which we can’t be sure. Only you can know by feeling it and using it as needed. It has been said that there are some deities that can call upon more than one or even all four when they are in need, but only with great confidence, control and practice. Over the past thousand years, I have seen only one who can do so, Rider. He was the most powerful deity I have ever seen. I say, we are do another, and it very well may be one of you. All the things you have been taught and trained for, prepared you to use these forces. Now it is up to you. Your mothers have prepared a special potion for you to take tonight before bed. It is on your nightstands. It will help you to sleep and guide your dreams to remember all that you have been taught that is important to remember. Good luck our sons. Now let’s go, it gets darker and the daemons grow stronger, let’s not tempt them to break through the barrier.”

Our fathers all rise and we get up to follow them back home. I don’t know if I feel better or worse than I did before. But at least for now I choose not to be afraid as my fathers warned me. I will be brave for them and for myself. I will be like the great Rider who brought peace and beauty to Sajar and the Other World.

As I walk into our dwelling, my mothers are waiting for me. They tell me again about the potion they prepared for

me to drink and I thank them. I kiss them both goodnight, perhaps for the last time. I walk into my room, get undressed and slip into bed. I think about what my father said, that Abaddon chose to sit in front of me because I am the strongest. But this is not true. Why would he think that? Surely my father is wrong. Abaddon must know that I am the weakest and most afraid. I can't think about it anymore so I drink the potion beside me sweetened with cocoa beans, my favorite and fall to sleep immediately.



Imagine living in a world where you can control the wind currents with just your mind; a world in which you and your friends are gods with unique and different gifts, and powers over the forces of nature. Sajar is such a world, where young deities on their sixteenth birthday inherit powers beyond their wildest dreams. However, in this world filled with beauty and magic, there is also danger and evil - the daemons...

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