

a dream war saga story



whatever
it takes

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WHATEVER IT TAKES

THE DREAM WAR SAGA

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My mother always told me that you could make anything happen if you wanted it bad enough. Anything, she promised.

Problem is, even she thinks what I want is impossible.

The one thing I want is to change a night I can never get back. The night I could've saved him. I want that chance more than I want food, water, and air combined, but everyone tells me it's impossible. "There's no use crying over spilled milk." "You can't unring a bell." "Those who walk looking backward fall behind." It all translates to one thing: you can't change the past, so don't bother trying.

I don't buy it. Mom told me I could make anything happen, and I've always believed that line more than she has.

When I was little, I saw a man disappear before my eyes. I was in a park at the edge of town. Although the playground was crowded, the rest of the park was almost deserted. I saw a man in a purple coat standing in the middle of a field, his arms stretched high over his head. He was gone before I could get anyone's attention. Vanished. Nothing to hide behind and no holes to drop down into. I know. I looked. My mom didn't believe me, but I know what I saw.

That one instant made me think that the word "impossible" is overused. It's why I've taken the train a couple hours north of New York City, to a town most people haven't even heard of, so I can go to a store most people avoid and ask a question most people would call ridiculous. I'm here because, despite my belief in possibilities, I've run into too many dead ends on my search for the key to time.

In my research, one name kept coming up—"DreamWeaver." First, a girl in the New Age store near my house told me DreamWeaver could answer any questions I had. Then, on certain forums, quoting DreamWeaver was akin to quoting an encyclopedia. I even found the name referenced on a scientific site as someone capable of blending science and pagan philosophy into something almost believable.

DreamWeaver ran a blog called *The Mystical Demystified*. The more posts I read, the more I knew that *this* person could help me. The problem? No one had any idea how to find them. It took bribing a hacker at school to figure out that the person behind the pseudonym operated out of a New Age store a couple hours north of New York City.

Only when I'm actually standing outside the shop do I hesitate. The place is called Martha's Magic Market and behind the large glass window is a red-velvet-draped display with a mix of books, rocks, crystal wands, and incense. Through a crack in the drape, I see a girl with neon-blue hair staring at a computer screen. My hopes falter. This is a bad idea. Even someone who works in a magic store will probably think I'm crazy.

This is my last chance, though. The only way I can cope, even if the doctors keep telling me otherwise. Taking a deep breath, I put my hand on the cool glass and open the door to the tinkling of wind chimes.

The blue-haired girl doesn't even look up from the screen as she calls out, "Welcome to Martha's Magic Market. How can I make your day more magical?"

"Are you DreamWeaver?" I ask.

The girl's head snaps up and her hand jerks, sending the mouse flying into the wall. She cringes and quickly bends down to pick it up as she mutters, "So much for online anonymity."

My pulse picks up as I walk toward her. She can't deny it after that reaction. I stop a few feet away from the counter, the weight of her stare holding me at bay. Her gaze roams my face, studying my features in detail, but lingers for a strange amount of time on my hair. I dyed my hair black last year, but the color is downright normal next to the bright-blue cascading down her back.

"You *are* DreamWeaver, aren't you?"

"My name is Aisling, not DreamWeaver," she says. I nod and start to talk, but she cuts me off before I can say anything. "Have you been having weird dreams lately?"

My mouth snaps shut. Weird, no. Hauntingly terrifying, yes. It's practically instinct to lie when someone asks me this—I had to start telling my parents the nightmares stopped or they would've dragged me to *another* shrink—but when I try to now, I feel like my tongue has been glued to the roof of my mouth. I struggle for a moment before I stop to think about what I'm doing. Why lie to her? The worst that can happen is she'll think I'm pathetic for still dreaming about something that happened a year ago. Might as well tell her the truth.

As soon as I make that decision, my tongue releases. I clear my throat. Before I can say anything, though, Aisling says, "What I mean is, have your dreams featured anything or anyone supernatural?"

"No, just memories." Horrible ones I can't erase. "I've had the same nightmare every night for a year. There's no space in my head for anything else."

Aisling exhales and nods, her eyes narrowing as she asks, "What's your name?"

"Valari."

"Who'd you lose, Valley?"

My heart jumps. How does she know to call me that? Only Will ever called me Valley. He was the only one I let get away with it because he was my Will and I was his Valley. I clamp down on my memories and answer her question. "My best friend."

"More than that." Aisling eyes the air around me like she's reading the story of my life in waves coming off my body. "There's too much distress for this to be just simple friendship."

My hope blooms, and I pray I'm right about Aisling. "I love him. I just never got the chance to tell him that."

A shadow passes over her face, but she shakes it off fast as she leans forward, her bright-blue hair swinging over her shoulder and clashing with her pumpkin-orange shirt. “You think you’re the only one who wants to bring back someone they love? *Everyone* loses someone. It’s inevitable. Everyone thinks they’re willing to give up everything to get that person back. There aren’t many who are actually capable of it.”

My breath catches in my throat as my brain processes her words. Nowhere in that speech did she say what I wanted was impossible. She just said most people aren’t willing to make the necessary sacrifice.

“I’ll do it. Anything. Whatever it takes.”

Aisling looks at me, a new weight to her gaze. I stand silently as she studies me, fingering the torn pocket of my jeans and holding my breath. It feels like she’s looking at something that isn’t really there, seeing me and somehow seeing something else at the same time. She climbs off the stool she’s sitting on and walks around the counter. When she steps closer, I notice her eyes are so dark I can’t tell where the iris ends and the pupil begins. I’ve never seen eyes that black before.

Blinking slowly, Aisling seems to shake herself out of some kind of trance. She brushes past me, locks the front door, and hangs an “Out to Lunch” sign on the glass.

When she turns to face me, she nods her head toward a door in the opposite wall and heads to it, obviously expecting me to follow. We cross through a heavy brocade curtain into a small room filled with overstuffed couches and armchairs. The whole room is lit only by candlelight, and incense smoke hangs heavily in the air, burning my nose. Tapestries adorn the walls and fluffy blankets have been thrown over a few of the cushions. She points to one of the armchairs and sits down.

“Tell me what happened.”

Will’s face immediately fills my mind. Sandy-brown hair that always seemed to fall into his sapphire eyes, round face and perfect skin marred only by the thin scar on his left cheekbone—a scar *I* gave him. Willem King had been my best friend since he shared his dessert with me in third grade. He lived in my neighborhood, was in my class most years, and stuck by me even when it was uncool to be friends with a girl. He smoothed over all the rough patches of adolescence for me, carrying me through my awkward transition from graceless preteen to celebrated centerpiece of the school, but he never expected anything from me. Not even thanks. And the one time he needed my help, I turned my back on him.

“Will and I had a fight because I was supposed to go out with this guy and Will was trying to get me to cancel.” I shudder and look down at the floor. Will had been right, of course. More than he knew. Why hadn’t I listened to him?

“He had a game the next night, and I went on my date instead of watching him play. Wires got crossed and his friends with cars left him there. His parents wouldn’t pick him up. I wouldn’t answer the phone.”

I *couldn’t* answer the phone because, by then, I was in the grip of Tommy Boggs, psycho-asshole extraordinaire. He threw my phone out the window when he saw who was calling. Then he took something from me I never wanted to give him.

My voice is dead as I recite the facts, the little bits of truth that my brain distorts into nightmares night after night, combining the pain of what happened to me that night with the horror of finding out what happened to Will.

“Will got hit by a car while he was walking home. It was a hit-and-run. They still don’t know who did it. He died from internal bleeding. Alone. On the side of the road.”

I look up into Aisling’s dark eyes and am suddenly frozen in place. I feel like someone is rifling through my thoughts like they’re files in a cabinet. It’s impossible to know how long we sit there, but finally she sighs and blinks, releasing me at last. My eyes are so dry they burn as I blink to refocus them. *What* just happened?

Aisling sits with her legs pulled in to her chest and her chin resting on her knees. It seems like she’s muttering to, or maybe arguing with, herself. Eventually, Aisling lets her legs slide back down to the couch and focuses on me.

“What, *exactly*, are you hoping to do?”

“To go back to that night. I want to stop it from happening. I want to save him.”

Aisling seems relieved. I’m not sure I want to know what she feared I might say.

“For most people, that would be impossible, but you...” She falls silent and her gaze bores into mine again. “Do you believe in extrasensory perception? ESP?”

Do I believe in ESP? I’m asking her to help me go *back in time*, and she’s actually asking me if I believe in ESP?

I meet her eyes and nod. If she picks up on the jagged, sarcastic edges to my thoughts, she ignores them. Instead, she gets up and walks back into the store; only a quick glance at me over her shoulder tells me I should be following.

“Humans are capable of a lot more than we use,” she says as she grabs a book off a shelf. “Don’t get me wrong, most of the stories you hear about psychics and telepaths or whatever are complete crap, but that’s because the world is made for normal, not extraordinary. People who actually have these abilities know better than to go shouting about them.”

She stops walking and stares at me again. There’s a warning in her dark eyes. *If you pull this off, shut up*, she seems to be telling me. Who would I tell, though? Or, really, who would believe me? Once she believes that I understand, she starts walking again, this time heading to a display of stones and crystals.

“Everyone has *some* exceptional skill.” Aisling picks a small basket up off the floor and starts filling it with stones from the display. “Most of the time, people need an external prod to turn that skill into what most people would call magic. It’s rare that someone develops this on their own, but willpower is an incredible thing.”

She walks over to a wall of candles and adds a few of them to the basket, then browses a row of incense until she finds what she's looking for and adds that too. I hold my breath waiting for her next words, because I have a feeling that what she's about to say will change my life. And save Will's.

I follow her over to the register and watch as she lays out her collection for me to see. Only after she's done does she take a deep breath and continue talking.

"Sometimes someone wants something so badly they create in themselves the power to make it happen. I think you may be one of those people, Valari. I can't guarantee anything, but I think you may be able to pull this off."

At last. For the first time in thirteen months, I let myself smile.

Aisling raises an eyebrow. "Don't get giddy yet. This is going to be expensive, but if you want this as badly as you say you do, you'll follow my instructions."

She stares at me, her dark eyes boring into mine. I meet her stare for stare.

"Whatever it takes," I repeat. I'm coming back for you, Will. Whatever it takes.

"The time jump won't work the first time you try it," Aisling says as she rings up my supplies.

I watch the total growing higher and higher with a knot in my stomach. If this doesn't work, how am I going to explain spending all this money to Mom?

Aisling snaps her fingers in front of my face. "Hey. It *won't* work the first time. It may not work the tenth time, but it will work eventually if you keep at it. Maybe not for as long as you hope, but you should be able to get half an hour. An hour at most. Luckily, when you're dealing with time, it doesn't matter when it works or how long it works for, as long as it does."

Aisling writes me out a set of instructions and passes them across the counter. I look it over, but the directions don't make sense—they seem too simple. It doesn't matter, though. I have real hope for the first time since my life fell apart. I will follow her directives to the letter because I'm not giving up before I've tried everything—even something that doesn't seem like it'll work.

I pay for everything with my emergency-only credit card and try to restrain myself from gushing when I thank the only person who has truly helped me. Then I turn to go. Before I reach the door, Aisling calls me back.

"Hey, Valari. How did you find me?"

"Your ISP address, I think? Something like that."

She stares at me, her eyebrows furrowed and her lips tight. "I don't even know what that is. Ugh. Whatever. Good luck. Don't tell anyone you were here."

Since I barely understand ISPs myself, I can't explain it to her. I just nod and walk out onto the street, carrying my last hope to put my life back together.

This better work. I'm putting my last eggs in this basket. If I fail this time, I don't think I'll be able to keep going anymore.

