



# **The Princess With Laser Eyes Who Saved The World in Two Minutes**

A Novella

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*For Meredith*

*The girl who can't sit still.*



# CHAPTER 1

Meredith discovered quite by accident that she had superpowers.

It happened on the day of her seventh birthday.

All of her previous birthdays had been celebrated by just Meredith, her mother and father. It was one of the very few times that the three of them were ever completely alone.

As the only daughter of the powerful King Randolph of Aldalore, Meredith always had a square-jawed, muscular bodyguard close enough to rush in and save her from any danger that might befall the young princess. She never learned the names of the bodyguards who lurked a few feet away from her all day and night. The princess could have asked them to tell her, but did not really want to be on a first name basis with the dark, stern men who stood guard outside her bathroom door while she showered each morning.

Once a year, her father asked the bodyguards to leave the family alone for an hour so that the three of them could be just a normal family for a few minutes. There was a cake (chocolate, Meredith's favorite) and always just one gift. Never anything elaborate. Her parents could have afforded to lavish their daughter with anything the young girl desired but on her birthday, the gift was

simple. Sometimes a new doll. On her third birthday, a red dress. On her fifth, a small puppy. Always small. Always simple.

But today, instead of a family party in the royal dining room, Meredith's father had summoned her to follow him outside to the wide veranda on the front of the palace.

"Am I in trouble?" Meredith asked as she followed her father down the hall. Randolph was balding but still looked regal in his blue uniform which on this day was emblazoned with a dizzying array of colorful medals. If Meredith were not in trouble, she knew that whatever was on the veranda would be special because her father only wore his medals when there was something truly important happening.

"Makes me look more important than I really am," he had once told his young daughter about the blue uniform and medals.

Maybe my birthday gift is too big to bring inside the palace, thought Meredith as she walked silently behind her father down the long hall. Something like a pony!

But as Randolph swung open the heavy doors and the two stepped out onto the wide portico, Meredith saw that there was no pony. But what she did see made the young princess catch her breath.

Gazing back at her from the plaza and rooftops surrounding the palace was a sea of smiling faces. Every single Aldalorian who lived in the kingdom.

All 987 of them!

## CHAPTER 2

Aldalore is a tiny place. The entire country is less than a five miles long and two miles wide and is tucked into a rolling valley surrounded by jagged snow covered mountains. It is these impassable mountains that have kept the small nation isolated from the world for centuries. The mountains are too rugged to be scaled by climbers and so tall that radio and television signals from the outside world just shot over Aldalore.

It was an idyllic place to live, free from the hurried race towards death run by the busy world beyond the mountains.

But now, standing on the veranda and looking upon the nine hundred and eighty seven pairs of eyes staring back at her, Aldalore seemed like the scariest place on Earth to the seven year old princess.

Meredith's first impulse was to turn and dash back down the dark hallway to her room and jump under the bed where the eyes would not stare at her. Her father sensed Meredith's uneasiness and before the young girl

could dart away, he reached down and took her hand. The gesture wasn't meant to stop Meredith from fleeing. It was meant to let Meredith know that it was okay. These were the same hands that had wrapped themselves around Meredith each night and held her close as her father told the young girl just how special she was and how much he loved her.

The message in those hands was clear. There is nothing to be afraid of.

Meredith felt herself relax a little as her father led her towards an elaborate table that had been placed in the center of the veranda. She recognized the table as the one that usually stood against the wall in the palace's formal dining room. At mealtimes, it was usually covered with a dazzling array of meats, vegetables, breads and desserts from which Meredith and her family could choose their evening meal. But today, the only thing on the long table was a single birthday cake. Chocolate, of course.

And rising from the cake like the peaks of the Aldalorian Mountains were seven slender white candles.

Without a word, Randolph pulled the gold-tufted chair from underneath the table and waved for Meredith to sit. She did not hesitate. There might be hundreds of eyes fixed on her at the moment, but that cake was huge. And because there was only one plate and one fork sitting



on the table beside the cake, Meredith knew it was all for her.

When she was seated behind the monstrous cake, Randolph smiled at his daughter and then turned and addressed the crowd. His voice, always so gentle when speaking to Meredith, now boomed across the plaza.

“People of Aldalore, today is a very special day. Today, my daughter, Meredith, Princess of the Valley, is seven years old.”

Randolph turned away from the crowd and glanced at his daughter. Meredith could see tears pooling in his blue eyes. She had never seen her father cry before. She wanted to ask him what was wrong, but before she could open her mouth, Randolph turned back to face his people.

In a voice filled with pride, he announced, “Today, I pass to my daughter The Gift.

The roar from the crowd was the loudest sound Meredith had ever heard.

## CHAPTER 3

The Royal Family of Aldalore had once been peasants who lived on the slopes outside the city where they quietly tended to a small grove of olive trees. But that all changed when Randolph’s great, great, great, great grandfather, Nathaniel, awoke on his seventh birthday.

The young boy had a strange tinkling in his arms and legs and decided to take a walk in the cool morning air. But stepping outside of his family's small home, Nathaniel suddenly felt very light. As if he could just lift his arms and fly away.

So, he did lift his arms. And to Nathaniel's utter astonishment, his body rose slowly into the air. The tingling in his arms and legs turned into a heavy pulsation and instinctually, Nathaniel knew that he could fly.

And he did.

Over the top of his small family home he flew. Lowering his head, he skittered across the top of the olive trees. Then, he rocketed up the near vertical wall of rock behind his home.

Of course, the family was shocked. No one in Aldalore had ever seen a boy who could fly like a bird. But Nathaniel could fly much better than any bird. He swooped and twirled and did loops over the city, soaring to the top of the mountain peaks and then back down to the bottom of the valley like a rocket.

At the sight of Nathaniel flying above the small village in the bottom of the valley, most of the Aldalorians ran back into their homes in terror. But then they heard the giggles of the young boy as he swooped low over their roofs and knew young Nathaniel was harmless.

Randolph's famous relative might have remained just a peasant with an odd talent if it had not been for the terrible invasion of their country when the boy turned twelve. Aldalore was so isolated from the world that the thought of other people scaling the surrounding mountains was almost unthinkable. So, the small country had no army. No weapons. No fear.

And it was this naivety that almost cost the Aldalorians their lives.

That summer when Nathaniel turned twelve was unusually warm. The snow on the mountain peaks began to melt and for the first time in centuries, the gray rock underneath could be seen from the valley. Nathaniel awoke early that morning and decided to celebrate his birthday with a aerial circumnavigation of his homeland. The air was cool and crisp and after a cold drink of spring water and a slice of his mother's bread, toasted and dipped in the amber oil squeezed from the family's olive trees, the young explorer was airborne.

Nathaniel had no idea how he was able to fly. He did not have to flap his arms or kick his feet. All he had to do was think about where he wanted to go and his body took him there.

So, as the young man was flying along the northern slopes of the mountains, he wasn't really paying attention to what was passing underneath him. Instead, Nathaniel

was thinking about a pretty young girl he had met in the city's marketplace a few weeks ago. Her name was Meggin and she had the greenest eyes Nathaniel had seen. Maybe he would swoop down and take Meggin on a ride above the city. He had never given anyone a ride before (he was not sure he would be strong enough) but the beautiful Meggin was very petite and would be the perfect test of this new idea.

But as Nathaniel began to swerve away from the peaks and back toward the village and Meggin, he saw a sudden movement below him. Had one of the herder's goats wandered this high to find some tender grass hiding beneath the snow? No, thought Nathaniel, that is impossible. But what else could it be?

Nathaniel made a wide loop and flew back towards the movement. Meggin would have to wait for her ride.

As he approached the crest of the mountain, Nathaniel saw the movement again. He flew lower and for the first time since the morning of his seventh birthday, Nathaniel suddenly forgot how to fly. He had not lost his ability. No, Nathaniel could still fly. But for a brief moment, what he saw was so shocking that Nathaniel forgot to think about flying.

And he began to fall.

Nathaniel quickly recovered. It seemed that the fear of death from slamming into the jagged mountains was

even more terrifying than the sight of the black-clad soldiers that he saw climbing down the gray rock towards the city.

These were not Aldalorians. Nathaniel did not have to fly any closer to be sure of that. The creature's misshapen heads and long arms that seemed to end in black claws made it clear from even such a high altitude that the things climbing down towards his homeland were not coming over the mountains for a friendly cup of tea.

Nathaniel did flap his arms as he flew over the invaders. Not to keep him aloft, but to let the creatures climbing down the rocks know that they had been seen. The dark figures with the claws did not seem to care if they had been discovered and continued to creep headfirst down the wet cliffs towards what Nathaniel knew would be acts of terrible violence against his people.

Scaring the creatures would not send them back from where they came. The grim determination on their vile faces made that clear. So, Nathaniel stopped flapping his arms like an oversized bird, turned and flew straight towards the village.

It was early but there were already people outside tending to the day's business. Nathaniel flew low and screeched a warning to these early risers to awaken the city and prepare for an assault. At first, most of the groggy citizen's ignored the crazy shouts from the bird

boy, but when Nathaniel pointed to the slopes surrounding the city, they saw for themselves the invasion force creeping down the peaks.

The Aldalorians had no trained army, but they somehow rallied on that day and threw off the invading marauders. But not before nearly a hundred of them perished from the strange creature's touch. The dark claws that Nathaniel had noticed during this high pass over the mountain top were not claws at all, but black gloves. And underneath those gloves were knarled hands that possessed a strange power. Anything touched by the flesh of these hands would turn to dust.

The invaders called themselves Translys and had been waiting centuries for the day when the snow on the peaks surrounding Aldalore grew thin enough for them to climb into the valley and collect the dust of their enemies. The last invasion of the Translys had been so many centuries ago that the creatures had been forgotten.

But they had not forgotten their hatred for the people who lived in the sunny valley.

If it had not been for Nathaniel's warning, all of Aldalore may have been exterminated on that warm summer morning. After the enemy had been pushed back over the peaks of the mountains by the men of Aldalore, the young boy with the magical power of flight had been

unanimously declared King of the Valley and his family had ruled the small nation ever since.

And on the seventh birthday of Nathaniel's son, the new king's powers had vanished and those of his son had emerged. And with every generation of Nathaniel's family, a new "Gift" had been passed to the firstborn child. Strangely, only one Aldalore at a time could possess superpowers. Maybe it was this way to keep the family from going to war with itself. Maybe it was just the same power that somehow was working its way through Nathaniel's lineage and like hair color, changed with each successive generation. The unique powers of each of Nathaniel's relatives were never repeated. Some of the young princes and princesses had amazing strength, could freeze objects with their breath or could stop time. Randolph's great grandfather had the power of invisibility.

Nathaniel's offspring became the Protectors of Aldalore and despite several attempts by the Transyls to scale the mountains and turn them to dust. But because of the amazing superpowers inherited by each of his heirs upon their seventh birthday, none of the invasions had succeeded.

Meredith was seven years old.

On this day, she would become a superhero and inherit the power passed to her by the legendary bird boy, Nathaniel.

And on this day, Randolph would lose his.

## CHAPTER 4

This was the moment that Randolph had been looking forward to all of his life. And also dreading.

Randolph knew the legend. One day, the incredible powers that had passed on to him from his own father him would flow out of him and into his own child. As Randolph grew older and was able to fully control his own unique power, he began to dream about just staying childless. There was no law in Aldalore that required him to marry and reproduce. Randolph could just remain unmarried, childless and his powers would grow stronger and stronger. Maybe, Randolph thought, if he kept the power for himself, he would live forever.

But despite his fantasies of immortality, Randolph was a good man. He knew that to keep the powers that had entrusted to him for only a season would be selfish. If he were to die, the Gift would die with him. Randolph was sure of it. And then, there would be no one to defend his people from the Transyls.



Keeping the Gift would mean the certain extermination of his people. And no matter how wonderful it was to be able to send shock waves through the air with just the wave of his hand, Randolph could never let his people die.

So, the king raised his mighty hand one more time and, careful to control the power that would flash from his fingers with just a mere thought, sent a small shock wave out into the crowd. The people huddled together in the Plaza and on the nearby rooftops were not thrown to their feet by the wave of energy, but merely felt a strong vibration in the air that made their body's tingle.

The Aldalorians grew instantly quiet.

Randolph closed his outstretched hand into a loose fist and lowered it to his side, savoring the feeling of invincibility one last time. He then turned to Meredith, now sitting in the chair staring at her birthday cake. The moment was here. It was time for Randolph to once again become just a mere mortal.

"Do you like your cake, Merry?" said the king, calling Meredith by her childhood pet name.

"Yes, father. Very much."

Randolph looked at the smiling young girl and decided that he would never call her Merry again. His daughter, all elbows, scabbed knees and ponytails, was

about to become his superior. He would only address her by her given name from this day onward.

“I have something I must give you, Meredith,” said the king.

“A pony?” Meredith teased.

Randolph laughed. His daughter might be a princess, but she was like every other girl in the kingdom who loved dolls, pretty dresses and ponies.

“No, my darling, it is not a pony.”

Meredith wrinkled her nose, feigning disappointment. But both of them knew that she really did not want a pony. There was little room in Aldalore to ride such an animal and keeping one locked up in the palace’s tiny stables would be cruel.

“That’s okay, father. I don’t really want a pony,” the young girl said, her face suddenly looking like that of a mature woman.

She knows, thought Randolph. She knows that it is about to happen. Just like I knew when I was her age.

It was unlawful to discuss the powers held by the Royal Family of Aldalore. No one in the kingdom was allowed to talk about the Gift in public, or even write about it. It would have been almost impossible for Meredith to know this day was coming.

But she did. Somehow, she just knew.

Randolph knelt before his daughter and wrapped her tiny hands in his. They could both feel the electricity of the Gift as it swirled beneath the king's skin, anxiously waiting for the moment when the words would be spoken and it would enter a new host. Meredith had felt it many times before during their nightly bedtime ritual and vaguely remembered her father entertaining her with the magic in those hands as a baby by sending a rippling wave across the surface of her morning juice or making the oatmeal in her bowl quiver.

"I have a special gift for you on your birthday, Meredith. One that is much better than a pony. One that was passed to me by my father on my seventh birthday and to him by his father."

Meredith did not dare say a word. Whatever her father was talking about, from the look in his eyes, it was serious.

"Today, you become the Protector of your people. Today, you become the..... "

This was the last chance for Randolph to push away his daughter's hands and keep the power for himself. For a second, he actually considered it. But looking into Meredith's eyes, he saw himself growing old and the Transyls turning his daughter to dust. Nathaniel's powers were not his to keep. Randolph had only been the

caretaker of the Gift for a short time and now it must be passed on to a new generation.

So, after clearing his throat, Randolph continued.

“Today, you become the Keeper of the Gift.”

As soon as the last syllable had left Randolph’s lips, he felt his arms begin to heat up from within. Soon, they felt like they were on fire and the king opened his mouth to cry out. But just as was about to scream, the fire rolled down his arms, across his palms and through his fingers.

And into Meredith.

## CHAPTER 5

The young princess felt a sharp tingle of electricity in her palms as the Gift left her father and entered into her body. Unlike her father’s molten pain, the moment the powers passed between the two of them, it cooled and flowed up Meredith’s arms, across her shoulders, up her neck and into her skull like a cool river.

Randolph released his daughter’s hands and stood. He smiled down at her for a moment and then turned to face his people. Holding his hands outward, Randolph tried with all his might to produce a shockwave through the air that would flatten the Aldalorians gathered below.

But nothing happened. The Gift was gone.

Turning back to his daughter, Randolph waited. If Meredith had received the Gift, it would soon manifest itself.

Randolph said a quick prayer as he remembered the fiasco that had occurred on his seventh birthday.

His father, Arturius, had placed his hands on the young Randolph and spoke the words that passed the powers from his body to his son. Randolph had no idea what his father meant when he proclaimed him “Keeper of the Gift” but he did know that something happened. At first, the cool sensation that had travelled up his arms and into his body had felt wonderful. Tingly and fuzzy like when he had whacked his funny bone on the corner of his desk. But then, the sensation changed. His hands felt heavy and filled with fluid. What was happening to him? Randolph did not know. All he knew was that he had to do something or his hands would blow off.

So, the young boy had raised his arms and held his hands out towards his father, as if asking for help, and it happened. A huge shock wave shot from this fingertips, lifting Arturius from the floor and flinging him across the room. His father had to wear a back brace for a month after the incident and Randolph learned a great lesson about the Gift.

Never forget that it not only has the power to save his people, but also the power to kill them.

Randolph took a step back, away from his daughter, suddenly afraid. And he simply watched. Meredith would soon show her powers or explode from anticipation.

Meredith did not know the story of her grandfather flying across the room and wrenching his back on that fateful day. But she did know that whatever had just passed between her and her father was not sizzling inside her head.

At first, the sensation was pleasant. Like rolling in the snow.

But then, it changed.

Her head began to ache and then to burn. Especially her eyes. They felt like they were on fire, like there was a small blast furnace blazing away behind her pupils. Meredith reached up and rubbed her eyes furiously, trying to cool them, but the more she rubbed, the hotter the fire became.

Meredith had to get rid of the heat. So, she opened her eyes and 'threw' the flames straight at her birthday cake. And with a loud whoosh, the seven candles burst into flames. Then they melted all over the chocolate. Then the cake began to melt.

"You must control it, Meredith."

The voice belonged to her father, calling to her from somewhere on the other side of the inferno.

“No, I can’t,” Meredith wanted to scream at him. But, hearing her father’s soothing voice, she knew that he was right. She could control it. And she did.

Slowly, the fire shooting from her eyes cooled and the crawled back into her head. Meredith could still feel it smoldering behind her eyes, ready for the moment she called upon it again.

The cake had turned into a large pile of smoking goo. Meredith wanted to cry, but seeing the smoldering the mess on the table, she could not help but laugh.

She had melted her birthday cake. Melted it! And it was hilarious.

Looking up at her father, Meredith giggled and simply said, “Sorry.”

Randolph chuckled.

“Laser eyes, huh? Incredible.”

## CHAPTER 6

It took Meredith a few months to learn how to fully control her new power. She melted several plates and utensils in the first few days after her seventh birthday and almost set the Royal Garden ablaze while trying to light one of the night torches from the window of her room.

The King had joined the servants as they rushed into the Garden and stamped out the fire.

Meredith got a stern lecture that night about the responsibilities of being the Keeper of the Gift. And again, she just said, "Sorry."

As Meredith grew, so did her ability to control the laser simmering behind her blue eyes. At eight years old, she was able to light the candles at the dinner table from across the room without setting the wallpaper ablaze. At nine, she could look at her father's coffee and warm it to boiling in less than a second without bursting the porcelain cup and ruining the linen tablecloth. At ten, she learned to control the depth of the fire and was able to send the laser through a wall and start the logs in her room's fireplace from behind the curtain of her shower.

By age eleven, Meredith was in full command of the Gift and could 'throw' the lasers anywhere in the kingdom she desired, sending them through walls, curving them around corners and even into the people of Aldalore to help in the healing of diseases, although only the very brave would allow such a terrifying thing.

Just as Nathaniel had once marveled his countrymen with his miraculous ability to fly through the air like a bird, Meredith amazed the people with her incredible powers. King Randolph had been a powerful warrior with his ability to control the bursts of energy shot from



his royal hands. But his feats were nothing compared to his daughters.

Meredith was truly invincible and the Aldalorians slept soundly knowing that no force on Earth could conquer their princess.

The day after Meredith's fourteenth birthday, their faith in the young girl would put to the test. Because early on that Saturday morning, while the entire country slept, the Transyls returned.

## CHAPTER 7

The Transyls and the Aldalorians had descended from a common ancestor. In fact, they had descended from two brothers who had almost killed each other in a bitter fight over which was the greatest warrior. The battle raged on for days along the peaks surrounding Aldalore. Finally, exhausted and drawn to a stalemate, the two siblings had decided to go their separate ways. One went south and the other north, vowing to never see each other again.

The brother who one day father all Aldalorians walked into the small valley at the foot of the peaks. Here it was sunny and warm and the fields were lush and green. The brother who would become the Transyls also walked into a valley. But his new home was cold and

dark. Thinking that maybe the bitter cold would pass with the seasons, he waited. Months passed and the dark valley never warmed. The light never shown. With great despair, the boy realized that the mountains surrounding his brother's kingdom were so high that they blocked the sun from reaching his new homeland.

He would freeze to death in this climate, the boy knew it. But his pride would not allow him to climb the mountains and ask for forgiveness from his brother in the warm valley beyond the peaks. So, he killed the beasts of the valley and made himself a thick coat and gloves to protect his body from the bitter cold.

And he sat in the cold, he thought about how much he hated his brother. As the temperatures plummeted, his hatred turned to a great loathing for his sibling. As the snow fell and covered his small hut, a deep jealousy blazed from every pore in his body. The more he hated, the more he envied, the less the cold seemed to bother him.

So, night after night, he would sit by his fire and dream of grabbing his brother by the neck and choking him to death, stoking the flames of hatred in his heart until he no longer needed the thick coat and heavy gloves. Or even the fire.

Each brother found wives and their numbers grew on each side of the peaks. One clan warm and happy. The other cold and bitter.

It was the accumulated joy in all Aldalorians that birthed the great power discovered by Nathaniel, the Flying King. And it was the accumulated jealousy and bitterness that birthed a much more sinister power in the inhabitants of the dark valley beyond.

Just like Nathaniel, this power had been discovered by accident. And again, it was the result of a fight.

Two Transyl men found themselves the suitors of the same young woman and met one night to settle the disagreement once and for all. At some point in the fierce combat, one of the Transyls imagined his foe blowing away in the wind like dust. The thought was horrible, but each time the man would strike his enemy, the image became clearer in his mind. Finally, he swung a powerful thrust straight at the weaker man's jaw and imagined his hand punching straight through the man's skull as if were made of dust.

And it was.

The blow landed, not with a thud, but with a soft wisp as if the attacker had punched his fist into a sack of flour. And at the sound, his enemy broke apart into a million tiny particles that swirled then drifted away on the wind.

A new weapon had been created. Hatred.

The young man taught the method to his brothers who then went forth and destroyed their enemies. And the brothers trained their sons in how to use this new weapon. Soon, the entire country had mastered the art of hatred. If one Transyl was wronged, all he had to do was imagine his fist punching through his enemy and the poor victim would become nothing more than dust in the wind.

The Transyls, drunk with this new found power, almost exterminated themselves before they learned to control the awesome weapon. Finally, every Transyl was commanded to wear thick, rubber clothes which managed to block the power from escaping from their minds into their hands.

It became unlawful to kill another Transyl.

The new weapon had a higher purpose.

It would be used to kill the happy Aldalorians basking in the sun on the other side of the mountains.

## CHAPTER 8

On the day of the invasion, Meredith awoke early. She was anxious to read the new book her father had given her for her birthday. As the Transyls were connecting the last of the long pipes that would pump hot water from a large cauldron in the dark, cold valley to the

top of the peaks, Meredith climbed from her bed and opened the book on her desk.

As the Transyls opened the valve that would send boiling water up the pipe and over the mountain, Meredith turned to the first page of her new book and began reading. It was a rare autobiography written by her ancestor, Nathaniel the Flying King. There was only one copy of the book known to exist and it now belonged to Meredith.

As the boiling water began to slide down over the rocky peaks, melting the snow and creating a wide highway for the Transyls to climb down, the young princess was reading about how Nathaniel did not know why he could fly- he just could.

Meredith knew what the old king meant. She did not know how she was able to shoot twin lasers from her eyes. Somehow, she just could.

As the Transyls began to slip down the mountainside, intent on finally exterminating their enemy, Meredith was reading about the day that Nathaniel passed the 'Gift' on to his son, a red-headed boy named Mobus. Meredith laughed at that name as she finished the short book (apparently Nathaniel was much more comfortable with flying than he was with writing), slammed it shut and jogged downstairs for a late breakfast.

The young princess had grown nearly two feet since the day she had inherited the Gift from her father. Her hair, now chestnut, hung in long coils down her back.

Meredith was growing up.

And in the process, was becoming bored with her powers.

For the first few months after her seventh birthday, the young princess spent her time learning how to control the laser beams that shot from her eyes. At first, she melted a lot of things. Plates, utensils and even the commode in her royal bath. Apparently porcelain explodes quite easily.

Meredith then moved on to learning how to focus the beams into tight circles or wide swaths. That was easy. And so was fine tuning the ability to shoot the beams through objects of varying thickness and density. Meredith even learned how to bend the deadly lasers around corners by sitting at the dining room table and boiling pots sitting on the stove.

Several of Meredith's friends asked her to melt things at school. And she did. Until the princess accidentally set her teacher's desk on fire. There was an 'F' on her report card for that trick.

Even one of her stodgy bodyguards asked for a demonstration. Meredith agreed if the man would smile. Just once. And he did, revealing two rows of gleaming

white teeth. The princess never knew the man even had teeth.

But after a few years, the novelty of being able to shoot lasers from her eyes began to wear off. What good was it? Meredith didn't have to cook for herself or heat the water for her bath. There were servants for that. And there were no enemies to smite. She loved that word and liked to tell her father that she couldn't wait to 'smite' their enemies, the Transyls. Randolph told her to worry about how to not get any more 'F's' at school instead.

So, as she aged, a strange thing happened.

Meredith forgot how to use the Gift.

Well, maybe she did forget, but just like someone who hasn't ridden a bicycle for several years, she was afraid of what might happen if she tried to call forth the lasers again. What if she tried to boil water in a cup from across the room but directed the laser beams at her father instead? Then she would be an orphan (and probably branded a traitor no less) so Meredith just stopped practicing.

The Gift, so incredible at first, was unneeded. And like all unneeded things, it slowly crawled away and hid in the darkness. A relic.

But on this morning, the forgotten power would be called on again. It would have to come out of hiding and

show itself, no matter how threadbare and rusty, or her people would perish.

Because on this morning, as Meredith walked into the dining room and gazed through the floor to ceiling windows towards the high peaks in the distance, she saw something that terrified her to her marrow. The white blanket of snow had been parted by a strange gray highway descending down the mountainside.

And crawling down this highway like bugs on a glass were thousands of creatures with misshapen heads and black clad hands.

Transyls!

## CHAPTER 9

Meredith wasn't the only one to notice the approaching horde. Looking down towards the Plaza, the princess saw a crowd of stunned Aldalorians had gathered in the open space and were now pointing towards the mountainside. Several of the children in the crowd were crying and clinging to their terrified parents.

As Meredith watched, an old woman near the back of the crowd turned and looked towards the palace. Their eyes met and the message in the woman's aged blue eyes was clear.

"Save us!"



Meredith took a step back, hoping to hide from the old woman's pleading eyes, but she knew she could not hide for long. Soon, all of Aldalore would be beating on the palace doors, begging the young princess to stop the Transyls before they reached the city. But how could she? Meredith had barely thought about her unusual power in more than a year, much less practiced throwing the lasers from her eyes.

Did she even know how anymore?

The mob would be at her door any moment begging for their princess to save them. Meredith had to at least try.

Turning around, the princess saw a small pitcher of milk on the royal table- apparently a leftover from when her parents' breakfast a few hours earlier. Could she still concentrate the lasers on just the white liquid inside the glass pitcher without setting the entire palace on fire? There was only one way to find out.

Concentrating on the milk and imagining the beams of fire passing coolly through the glass and boiling the liquid, Meredith 'threw' the lasers from her eyes. There was an immediate flash and the twin beams shot across the room and engulfed the pitcher of milk. For a moment Meredith was sure that the thing would explode, but magically the beams penetrated the glass and turned the white liquid inside into an instant cauldron.

“I can still do it!” Meredith shouted to the empty room.

And in response, a small voice deep inside her head answered.

*Yes, but that was just a few feet away. Are you going to get that close to the Transyls?*

Meredith knew the answer. No. She was too frightened of the horrible creatures to dare approach them. If she were going to be able to use her superpowers to stop the advancing army, she would have to be able to strike from a distance.

The princess looked into the kitchen and saw a large pot on the stove. She remembered seeing a thick soup simmering in the pot when she had passed through the room earlier. It was one of her father’s favorite recipes, her mother’s vegetable soup which would cook all day and be served at their weekly private family dinner. The pot was nearly a hundred feet away. Could she focus on the liquid inside the pot from this far away?

Meredith wrinkled her brow and concentrated mightily. Feeling the heat build behind her eyes, the princess ‘threw’ the beams towards the pot, commanding the lasers to pass through the metal and boil the soup inside.

But this time, the results were disastrous.

Instead of warming the liquid inside the pot, the twin laser beams lifted the thing from the stove and flung it against the wall where the soup splashed against the stone wall.

Meredith wanted to cry.

Her father had reminded her that her powers were just like the rest of her body. If Meredith did not exercise them regularly, they would turn soft and difficult to control. Watching the dark soup slide down the kitchen wall, Meredith realized that her father was right. She still had her powers, but she was no longer in complete control of them.

Turning back towards the windows, the princess saw the panic on the faces of the people below. Glancing up at the mountainside, she saw why. The light gray highway descending down towards Aldalore was now a squirming line of black creatures. Transyls! Hundreds of them. Thousands.

And every single one of them had just one goal.  
To kill her people.

## CHAPTER 10

Every since she had learned to count at the age of three, Meredith had always called out the number of every single step as she ran up or down the grand staircase that

led to the front door of the palace. There were thirty-six steps in total and even as she grew older, Meredith still enjoyed singing out each number as she would race up or down the stairs.

But on this morning, Meredith was in too much of a hurry and, if the truth be told, too frightened to bother with calling out the number of each step as she ran towards the palace foyer. She wasn't sure if she would be able to do anything to stop the Transyls, but Meredith had to at least try.

Swinging open the wide double doors, Meredith was met by hundreds of anxious faces. She'd been correct in predicting that the townspeople would quickly turn away from horrid sight of their enemy crawling over the mountains and run to her for help. Meredith had taken only one step through the doors when the pleas began.

"Oh, please, Princess. Please save us!" begged a woman who looked to be only a few days away from having a baby. She was rubbing her swollen belly furiously and Meredith knew that when the woman said 'us,' she didn't mean the Aldalorians but specifically her and her unborn child.

"There's nothing to be afraid of. The Princess will protect us," wailed an old man who was bent over a short cane. Meredith wondered if the old man had been alive

when Nathaniel had flown over the Transyls nearly two hundred years ago. He certainly looked like it.

“Kill the Transyls. All of them!” This cry came from the very same woman who had turned and stared through the dining room window at the Princess. Her face, which had appeared so kind earlier was now twisted with hatred.

These were not the faces of her happy countrymen. These were the faces of scared animals.

The onslaught continued as Meredith pushed her way through the crowd. Old men and women scream vile words at the approaching Transyls and commanded Meredith to destroy them. Mothers clung to crying babies who weren't even sure why they were afraid. Still others stood silent, frozen in shock at what would soon become of them.

Meredith finally broke free of the crowd and ran down the wide boulevard that led through the center of Aldalore. As she jogged along, she wondered if she could really do it. Kill the Transyls. King Randolph had warned his daughter many times about misusing the Gift.

“We were not given our powers to destroy life, Meredith,” her father had said as he watched the young girl experiment with the lasers that leapt from her eyes with just a thought.

“The Gift was meant to bring peace. Not death.”

Now, as Meredith ran along the wide street, she wondered how many of the terrified people following her down the street would agree with that statement. When given the choice between peace with the Transyls and Meredith roasting them against the mountainside, she was certain they would choose the roasting.

The street began to narrow and soon ended at the edge of a wide field. It was the last barrier between the city and the mountains. This would be the place where the Transyls would stand up on two legs and march towards Aldalore, bringing death with one touch of their knarled hands.

Meredith looked up and calculated that the first of the Transyls would dismount the mountainside in less than a minute. And then, two minutes across the field. And then...

She did not want to think about what would happen then.

Behind her, Meredith could hear the people approaching. Mixed in with the sound of the sandals, shoes and bare feet slapping against the hard surface of the boulevard were of terror at the sight of the black-gloved monster just a few hundred yards away.

Why aren't they hiding, thought Meredith. Why aren't they hiding?

“Because they know you will save them,’ a voice answered from behind her. It was her father. Meredith spun around. Either her father could read her mind or she had spoken the question aloud.

“What?”

“The people are not hiding because they know you’ll save them,” her father repeated.

For a moment, Meredith didn’t know what to say in response. How could she save them? Not only had she forgotten how to control her powers, but wasn’t she forbidden to directly harm the Transyls? They were living creatures, regardless of how evil, and she was never to use the Gift against the living. That was the law. Her father had said so himself. And if she couldn’t harm them, how in the world was she supposed to stop them?

Meredith looked at her father, eyes pleading. Randolph didn’t have to be able to read his daughter’s mind to know what she was thinking. But instead of trying to give her a solution, Randolph just smiled.

Meredith wanted to scream at her father. *Why are you smiling? Don’t you see what is coming down the mountainside?* But she didn’t. Even in the face of death, she had great respect for the kind man who still hugged her close and told her how truly special she was each night at bedtime. So, instead, Meredith took a deep breath and returned her father’s smile.

And that was what Randolph was looking for. Calmness. In his years ruling Aldalore, he had learned that one never made good decisions while in a state of hysteria. Serenity bred wisdom.

Looking into his daughter's eyes, he simply spoke three words.

“Remember the game.”

## CHAPTER 11

### The Game.

For the first few years after Meredith's seventh birthday, she and her father had played it incessantly. It was simple. Her father would challenge Meredith to use her laser vision to destroy one object while leaving another untouched. It had started out simple, like melting the cheese between two slices of bread without turning the toast into black dust. Or roasting the flesh of a nut while keep the shell cool and untouched.

The Game was very difficult at first. Controlling the depth of the burn was challenging. And sending the lasers through one object and then reheating it to burn or melt something on the other side was nearly impossible. Meredith had practiced for hours, destroying hundreds of cheese sandwiches and entire orchards of nuts until she perfected the skill.



But how in the world would The Game help her now? The Transyls were not made of cheese. Or nuts. Which part of their enemy was she supposed to melt and which part was she supposed to save? And wouldn't melting *any part* of a Transyls violate her oath to never use her powers to harm another living creature. Even one as terrible as a Transyl?

Meredith looked at her father, her face desperate.

Randolph smiled again.

And then he held up his hands and wiggled his fingers. For a moment, Meredith had no idea what he was trying to tell her. And then, she remembered.

Of course!

It had been the last lesson in The Game.

When she was ten, her father told Meredith that she was ready for the ultimate test of control over her laser vision. He led Meredith to the edge of the city where the mountains met the meadows. Placing his back against the rock wall, Randolph reached into his pockets and pulled out two large black gloves. Silently, he slipped them on and extended his hands outward.

"Burn off the gloves."

Meredith had looked at her father's gloved hands and shook her head.

"No," she said. "I can't do it. What if I mess up and burn off your hands?"

“You won’t,” replied her father.

“I might,” Meredith said.

“You won’t.”

Her father smiled then closed his eyes. And he prayed.

Meredith did a quick calculation of the distance between her eyes and the gloves, the distance between the two outstretched hands and the thickness of the black leather. She said her own quick prayer. And then, seeing the gloves blow away like ashes in the wind, ‘threw’ the lasers from her eyes. The two beams split apart less than a foot from her father’s face, and in a flash of white, vaporized the gloves.

The ashes didn’t blow away into the wind, but fell into two small, neat piles at Randolph’s feet. Opening his eyes and letting out a loud sigh of relieve, Randolph smiled at his daughter. He then reached down and scooped up the black ashes at his feet, putting them into his pocket. Without a word, the two walked home, his unmelted hand holding hers the entire way.

Randolph had put the black ashes from those gloves into a small glass bottle which he displayed on the mantel about the fireplace in the palace’s great hall. They were meant as a reminder to his daughter that nothing was impossible if you really believed.

Meredith knew what she had to do.

She turned back towards the mountains and saw that the Transyls had reached the edge of the meadow. A large group of the creatures had gathered there and were waiting for the order to charge. Even from this distance, Meredith could see the hatred in their eyes and knew they would not leave until every Aldalorian was dead.

Meredith calculated the distance between her and the menace on the other side of the field. The Transyls could be across it in less than two minutes.

Meredith, the girl with the laser eyes had two minutes to save the world.

## CHAPTER 12

The thick gloves worn by the Transyls were not unlike those that had been donned by Randolph on the last day he and his daughter had played The Game. The king was wise and knew that one day, the terrible creatures from the dark side of the mountains would return. And when they did, he already knew how Meredith would defeat them.

The power in the Transyls' hands did not discriminate. As soon as the black gloves were removed, any creature the Transyls touched would be turned to dust. Even themselves.

The Transyls had learned to control this unintended suicide by always keeping one glove on. When they were ready to kill, they would use one gloved hand to gently remove the glove from the other. If they had to scratch their nose or push aside a comrade during battle, the Transyls would always have a safe hand to do so.

So when Meredith shot the lasers from her eyes across the field and the both of the gloves on the Transyl's hands turned to ash, the creatures panicked. Instinctively, some reached over to try to protect their 'attack hand' and in the process turned themselves to dust. Meredith would lock on one of the Transyls rushing towards her from across the field and throw her beams. And before the gloves had barely disappeared into dust and blow away in the wind, the creature would accidentally touch himself and he, too, would become dust.

Realizing what was happening, the Transyls panicked. They stopped their rush across the meadow and whirled around, trying to hide their gloves from the terrible beams. But Meredith found them and another cloud of dust would appear where a Transyls once stood.

The creatures screamed and bolted back towards the mountain, pushing their confused comrade ahead of them. Some had forgotten that their hands were now exposed and in an instant, their friends were transformed into a million tiny particles which swirled and blew away.

Afraid to touch each other and afraid to touch themselves, complete pandemonium erupted among the Transyls and they scattered. Some ran wildly across the field, flinging off their gloves and in the process, destroying themselves. Others launched themselves back onto the rock and scratched their way back up the steep cliffs.

Meredith stopped throwing her lasers. She didn't need to. The Transyls no longer cared about invading their country. All they wanted to do was make it back over the top of the mountains and return to the dark safety of their cold valley. She and her father stood together and watched the last of the Transyls scurry up the rocks while the people of Aldalore cheered behind them.

When the Transyls were no more than dark specks against the high peaks, Randolph turned to his daughter and smiled.

"I think old Nathaniel would be very proud of you, Meredith. Our people are safe and you didn't destroy one single Transyl."

"Only their gloves," said Meredith and they both laughed.

The pair held hands and watched the last of the Transyls crawl over the distant peaks. After the last of their enemy had topped the crest of the peaks, father and daughter turned and headed for home.

“The Princess with the Laser Eyes saves the world,” said Randolph, imagining the headlines on the next day’s paper. “What do you think of that?”

Meredith smiled.

“I think I need to go home and do my homework,” she said.

As the two walked along, hand in hand, Randolph said how much he was looking forward to dinner.

“Your mother made my favorite soup.”

“Actually, I think I might have destroyed your dinner, Father” said Meredith, remembering the soup sliding down the wall of the kitchen.

“That’s okay. I know someone who makes a really good cheese sandwich.”

