

## Life, As I Write It (Preview)

“Ney. Ney, wake up baby girl.”

A familiar husky voice stirred LaNeya that morning. She opened her eyes to a blurry silhouette that looked like...it couldn't be.

“Ney!”

She rubbed her eyes and blinked until her vision focused. Then she saw him, “Daddy? Daddy!” she screamed and threw her arms around him. “How are you...? You're up! You're here! How?”

Myles squeezed his daughter and leaned back so he could see her face. He saw tears forming and wiped her cheeks, “I don't know the how, but I feel...energized today. I've been tired for so long and...I just..I don't even know. Today just feels...good!”

LaNeya pulled her father back in for another hug; she wanted to cherish the moment for as long as she could. Now she didn't want to go to school.

“It's ok. I'll come get you after school and we can spend some time together, just us two, before your mother gets off work.”

“Does she know?”

“I figured we could go surprise her together,” he grinned a warm, sneaky grin. LaNeya leapt up from her bed and pulled her father to his feet. They excitedly raced to the other bedroom where Crystal was getting dressed.

“Mommy, look!”

Crystal turned around and nearly fell to the floor. Myles caught her before she landed and held her close. “Babe? I can't believe it. You're out of bed and moving around and...”

“And still sweeping you off your feet,” Myles cupped his wife's cheek and stared into her eyes. “I don't know what changed but today, today I'm here.” He kissed her with all the dormant passion and love that had been inside of him for the duration of his sickness.

LaNeya, feeling awkward, yet delighted, stepped out of the room to give her parents some privacy.

School couldn't go by fast enough. When approached by her best friend, LaNeya couldn't wait to share the good news, “I can't believe it! Yesterday he was still bedridden, and this morning he woke me up and raced to my mom's room!”

“That's amazing! Do people with chronic fatigue syndrome bounce back like that?”

“I have no idea. What’s crazy though, is I was just writing about this happening yesterday.”

“What happened yesterday?”

“Well, you know we didn’t have school since there was a blackout. You know what, that was weird too,” she paused for a moment. “But anyway, I wrote in my journal that I needed my dad to be well again and then this morning he was.”

“What were you saying about the blackout?”

“I don’t know. It’s like, I had been feeling like I needed a break from all the stress lately and then the power goes out and I spend the day with my mom.”

“Weird. Did you write about that too?”

“I did! It’s almost like...nah, that’s not possible.”

The two sat in silent reflection until the bell rang for them to go back to class.

#### AFTER SCHOOL

LaNeya went to La Casa de Comida like usual.

Unintentionally eavesdropping, Anita Rodriguez furrowed her brows, “Do you have this journal with you, hija extra?”

Caught off guard by the request, LaNeya found the book and handed it to her. Anita briefly studied the cover before reading the inscription on the inside. At that, her brows deepened, and she pursed her lips.

“What is it, Mami?”

“Ney, where did you get this book?”

Still confused at what was happening, LaNeya stuttered, “My dad gave it to me.”

Anita nodded and held the journal up by her head, “This book is what is known as *La Página Mágica*. I don’t know where your father got this from, but you better heed the warning written on the inside.”

“Where I got what from?” Myles entered the restaurant in time to hear the conversation.

“Daddy!” LaNeya ran to her father like a child and hugged him tightly.

Anita gasped in horror, “I thought you were sick!”

“I know, it’s like a miracle.”

“Or magic!” Mrs. Rodriguez blankly began to mutter to herself in Spanish.

Maria stepped to her mother’s side and rubbed her back in comfort, “What’s going on, Mami? Are you saying Ney’s journal is magic?”

Anita glanced down at her daughter, then to the others in the room, “You’ve all heard that ‘there’s power in the pen’, but legend tells of a powerful book. Created by a frustrated medicine man that was unable to make his healing work. He petitioned his ancestors for a way to make his spellcasting permanent and they granted him this book. Whatever is written inside the book cannot be reversed. Over the years, he became obsessed with power and began to write things for his own selfish purposes. His selfishness soon backfired and trying to fix the mess he caused drove him insane. He eventually threw the book into the ocean, where the pages cleared themselves for the next owner of the book.”

The room was still. Then Myles burst into a fit of laughter, “You mean to tell me, you think this book has magic and now my daughter wields the power to create her own reality?”

Unsure of the cause of his laughter, Anita scoffed, “And how do you think you’ve become suddenly well? Your daughter wrote that you were better and here you are. Is that not evidence enough for you?”

“Look, I don’t know what changed within my body, but I know no magic book healed me. Ney, are you ready to go?”

LaNeya carefully retrieved her journal from Mrs. Rodriguez and fearfully eyed Maria. She didn’t speak a word, but turned to leave with her father.



That night, as LaNeya readied herself for bed, she heard a faint tapping at her window. Curiously, she walked over and discovered Maria was outside beckoning her to join her. LaNeya locked her bedroom door and rushed back to open the window. In a loud whisper, she called to Maria, “What are you doing out there?”

“I needed to talk to you when there wouldn’t be anyone else around. It’s important.”

LaNeya glanced toward her door once more before climbing out the window, “What’s going on?”

“Look, at school I had to pretend I didn’t know what you were talking about in case someone was listening. It’s not safe to have certain conversations out in the open.”

“Not safe? What are you talking about? What’s not safe?”

Maria darted her head to the left, then right before continuing, “This reality isn’t safe. I messed up bad with the book. I’m so sorry. I wrote that everything would be perfect with no complaints.”

“So what’s so bad about that? Except the obvious changes like the uniforms and my mom being a stay-at-home-parent.”

“You know how everyone seems so happy and polished?” LaNeya nodded. “Well, they have to be that way. If there’s any signs of imperfection, they disappear and then are replaced by...I don’t know what. It’s like they were cloned or something to maintain the perfection.”

“You’ve been in this reality just as long as I have. How would you know about any of this?”

Maria averted her stare again quickly, then finished, “I woke up in bed, just like you this morning. I don’t know what you saw, but while I was waiting on the school bus, I saw this man on the street corner peeing.”

“Gross.”

“Most definitely. But what was so crazy was that when he finished and zipped up his pants, he vanished.”

“Vanished?”

“Into thin air! I stared and rubbed my eyes, thinking they were playing tricks on me. But then after a couple minutes, he reappeared. Only, it wasn’t him. It looked like him, but he was sober, his clothes were ironed and crisp, hair combed, the whole nine. It was the most bizarre thing! He just walked away as if nothing had happened, and no one seemed to notice but me.”

If what Maria had said was true, there was something very strange going on that ran deeper than what she could have imagined.

## Heiress to the Sun (Preview)

One spring afternoon, Salana went for one of her barefoot walks in the open field near her and Ezekiel's home. She closed her eyes and opened her arms to welcome the warmth of the sun. Only this time, she felt herself drift into a daze. Salana opened her eyes but was unable to focus her sight; she spun around as a series of blurred visions appeared before her. Out of the field emerged four giant snakes; a spreading-adder, a copperhead, a rattlesnake, and something that looked more like a dragon than a snake. The reptiles terrified her as they hastily slithered towards her. Salana began to run but her body would not allow her to move. She all but forgot about her powers, as she hadn't used them in two years, and covered her head in panic while screaming. To her surprise, the snakes didn't seem to notice her and darted past her before vanishing into thin air. Salana breathed a deep sigh and rubbed her eyes, but the blurred visions weren't over.

In the distance, Salana heard a young woman scream. Finally regaining control of her limbs, she rushed towards the sound and found the giant rattlesnake had attacked and killed someone. Salana dropped to her knees in hopes of saving the young woman before noticing her somewhat familiar face. The sight of this woman compelled Salana to cry uncontrollably, though she didn't know why. The young woman disappeared from the field and Salana was left alone in tears, her sight restored.



*“The Sun hated the people because they would always squint when they looked up at her. She complained to her brother, the Moon, who expressed his delight with the people, as they would always smile at him. Jealous of the unequal treatment, the Sun decided to kill the people with a fever. Many of the people died, and the ones that remained plotted to kill the Sun.”*

“Mommy, why did the people never smile at the Sun?” an eight year old Nuri questioned her mother.

Salana paused folding the laundry and furrowed her brows, “Smile at the sun? Where did that come from?” She walked towards her daughter as the girl handed her a familiar purple book. “Nuri, aren't you supposed to be doing your homework, not reading Nana Iris's storybook?”

“I already finished my homework, see,” Nuri flashed a proud smile as her mother checked over the assignments on the desk.

Salana grinned and kissed her daughter on the forehead, “Very good. Now, speaking of the sun, wouldn't it be nice to get out in it and play before I make dinner?”

Nuri leapt up from her desk and went to put on her shoes.

Hand in hand, Salana and Nuri strolled over to the neighborhood playground. Nuri released her mother's hand as she spotted a friend on the jungle gym and ran towards her. Salana found a bench on which to sit and closed her eyes to bask in the sunlight.

“AHHH!”

A high-pitched scream forced Salana's eyes open as she smelled smoke in front of her. She ran towards the children, with the other parents, and grabbed Nuri. Once they were a safe distance from the fire, she placed her child on her feet and frantically searched her, “Are you hurt? What happened?” She held the girl tight and calmed her breathing.

“It was an accident Mommy,” Nuri whispered.

Before Salana could ask any further questions, she saw a crowd of angry parents coming towards them in a huff. Salana stood and shielded her daughter.

“I don't know how but *that* child is responsible for this!” One of the men pointed at Nuri.

Salana held her composure, “How does that even make sense? What do you think she did?”

A woman spoke up this time, “This is the fourth time a fire has started with her around. It can't be a coincidence.”

Salana was losing her patience, “And if your child was also there each time, who's to say your son isn't the one responsible?”

The woman gasped as if she had just been slapped. The crowd stirred at this new idea.

The original male accuser reshifted the focus back to Nuri, “Don't try to place the blame on someone else's kid, we know it was yours.”

Salana stepped forward and gritted her teeth, “So what did she do? Did anyone witness it?” She searched the crowd, “She doesn't have a lighter or anything flammable. What could she have possibly done to start a fire?”

The crowd murmured a moment before the male accuser stammered, “Well, there was someone who said he saw flames come out of her hands.” He looked around but couldn't find the eyewitness.

At this, Salana folded her arms, “Flames come out of her hands? What is she, a pyromancer?”

“Bu-but, he said he saw her! And, and where else could the fire have come from?”

“Perhaps somewhere logical. Maybe it has to do with these solar flares we've been having. You know, like they've said on the news.”

At this, the crowd realized their unfounded accusations and dispersed, leaving the man alone. He eventually gave up and left as well.

Salana took a deep breath and turned towards her child. She knelt down and held her hands, “It’s ok, you know I won’t let them do anything to you.”

Nuri held back tears, “But you know it was the truth, I did start the fire, and the other ones. I thought I had it under control but lately I can’t seem to stop it.”

Salana smiled, “I know baby. Thankfully, no one can prove it was you and we have the excuse of these crazy solar flares to cover you.” She hugged her and kissed her forehead gently, “We’ll figure this out. It’ll be fine.”

#### THE NEXT DAY

“And this never happened with her before?”

“Not since she was really young...”

*Salana laid her three month old baby into her crib and turned on the mobile. She turned to head into the kitchen when she smelled smoke behind her. She reentered the nursery to find the mobile on fire and her baby giggling with delight. The smoke detector blared its alarm and Salana quickly reached for her infant. She blew a gust of wind, which put out the fire and eliminated the smoke, and held her daughter close. Ezekiel raced into the nursery in a panic. Salana shrugged at her husband while nonchalantly rocking the baby. He kissed them both and left the room.*

“...like you said, I began teaching her early on and she had been able to control all of her gifts, and it hadn’t been a problem, until now.”

Asteria leaned against her desk, deep in thought. Recess was almost over and her students would be coming back inside with her TA. “You think it could be this craziness with the sun? I mean, you *were* the Sun at one point. Maybe that’s where her fire abilities come from.”

“I thought about that. And I’m sure it doesn’t help that Ether has domain over Fire as well.”

“I’ll see what I can figure out after school, ok?”

“*MOMMY!*”

Salana gasped as she telepathically heard Nuri call out to her, “Something’s wrong. I gotta go!”