

Thousands of years ago in a rather strange world, where the grass grows high, the skies are always blue, the streams are clear and clean, a tiny settlement called *Valda* rested. Valda's settlement included four opposing tribes. A special dragon guarded each tribe's gem, and each gem manifested a different power.

The first tribe symbolized fire, ruled by the Fire King. Their ability allowed them to summon fire. The Fire Tribe inhabits the far end of the island.

The second tribe represented ice, ruled by queen Grace. Special people in the Ice Tribe could freeze people just by staring into their eyes. They lived in a giant ice castle. Fire and Ice were archenemies. Ever since the Fire Tribe had attempted to melt the ice castle, the Ice Tribe has continuously sought revenge.

Although Fire and Ice were enemies, Queen Rebecca from the Earth Tribe and Queen Harmony from the Wind Tribe joined together. Their combined abilities allowed them to change the shape of the earth and control the weather. They lived altogether in a big dirt house.

Cassandra, a master locksmith and expert fighter, was once one of the people of the Ice Tribe, before the night of the mysterious fire. On that night the whole tribe was gathered to celebrate their dragon's hatching. The celebration had continued for three consecutive days, but, on the fourth day, something went terribly wrong. Fire attacked bringing their full-grown dragon. They burnt down everything. Queen Grace hastily tried to protect the tribe from destruction, but it was too late. The tribe members were devastated.

Cassandra, bruised and scared after this ordeal, looked terrible. "Kyle, where are you?" Cassandra called to her best friend, both adoptees of the same parents. "Where is he?" she mumbled under her breath. "Shadowmere," Cassandra called into the darkness. "Shadowmere," she repeated. Her black stallion cantered towards her. She swung onto his back and took one last look at the burning village. Then she began to search for Kyle.

Cassandra saw a figure limping towards her. Defensively, she drew an arrow and aimed. "Wait, Casey. You are going too fast," Kyle said out of breath.

"Oh, oops. Get on. You look beat up. Come let's find any other survivors," Cassandra gushed in her relief. Together they found only five survivors, including themselves, Queen Grace, Leo, and, of course, the newly hatched ice dragon with the gem. They all went together, each with their own horse, into the forest. They found a trail and followed it.

"Um...Queen," Cassandra spoke nervously.

"Yes, Cassandra, speak" Queen Grace said, not even glancing at her.

"Where are we going? I mean do you know where to go?" Cassandra asked.

"Yes, of course, I know where I'm going. I wouldn't lead you into a forest at night if I had no clue where I was going. And I'm not telling you where we're going" Queen Grace said keeping her eyes on the trail

"Please tell me," Cassandra pleaded as she put on her best puppy face.

Queen sighed then said, "We are going to an old friend of mine."

"So... who is this friend? And are you sure she will take us in and let us have dinner? The world may never know!" Leo said

"Leo, that was so uncool man. It is a serious moment. And you just ruined it," Kyle said

"Dude, it was just a joke, gosh," Leo mumbled.

"So?" Kyle retorted.

"Enough! Stop acting like little kids bickering over a piece candy," Queen Grace commanded in a loud stern voice.

Both Leo and Kyle started blushing in embarrassment. They trotted on their horses until they came across the Earth and Wind dirt house.

"We come in peace and seek your aid. Fire burnt down our tribe. Please help us," Queen Grace pleaded, holding back tears. There was a long pause both Queen Rebecca and Queen Grace were studying each other.

Queen Rebecca spoke, "Very well, Herminie, take them to a room, and tell the chief to cook double the food because we have visitors," said Queen Rebecca

"Yes, Queen, come this way please," Herminie told them.

Herminie led them through a long hallway hung with hundreds of pictures. The pictures were of past kings and queens of the joint tribes. Finally reaching the rooms, Herminie directed them to the rooms they were to occupy. Queen Grace was given her own room, a huge one. Cassandra, Kyle, and Leo all shared a small, stuffy humid room. The room was papered in a faded navy blue color with white trim at the bottom. One tiny window in the top corner of the room allowed a single shaft of daylight into the room.

Herminie provided each refugee with clean clothes to wear. There was no closet or bathroom, so they had to take turns changing in a corner while the others close their eyes. Cassandra changed first into a black dress that went down to her knees. Cassandra wore white

tights under the dress with high black boots. The dress made her electric blue eyes stand out. Cassandra tied her hair up in a white ribbon. She looked absolutely perfect. Kyle wore a black suit, a white dress shirt, and a scarlet tie. He combed his hair back and put extra gel, which just made him look like he had greasy hair. Leo dressed last; he put on a navy blue dress shirt with a white bow tie.

Together they managed to find their way to the dining room. They ate to repletion. Cassandra consumed steak and potatoes; she was from Ireland after all. Leo inhaled his food right when it touched his plate; he was obviously hungry. Kyle, on the other hand, ate neatly and calmly like a sophisticated person. The group was nearly done when Queen Grace and Queen Rebecca entered. They sat down on opposite sides of the table, making eye contact as if they were communicating with only their eyes. A lengthy silence ensued as tension mounted.

Finally someone spoke, breaking the unnatural calm, even if it was random. "Can I have more food? That was delicious!" Leo asked as his voice echoed through the halls.

"Yes, help yourself, please" Queen Rebecca replied.

"Well, I have a quest for you, Cassandra. Queen Rebecca and I discovered that the fire gem is in the villager's bank. If we can acquire it, then we can gain revenge on them, and together we can rule. So are you in?" Queen Grace explained as she stared at Cassandra waiting for an answer.

"Um...y-yes, I'm in, but when should I go and where is it?" Cassandra said as stoutly and confidently as she could, for she was very nervous.

"You may leave in the morning, and the bank is on Pillar Street. Got that?" grilled Queen Grace.

"Pillar Street, tomorrow, yup got it." Cassandra answered in a slightly shaky voice.

"May I be excused? I need my rest."

"No, you may not. We need to discuss the plan; you two leave us. Cassandra will be up shortly," Queen Rebecca ordered. Kyle and Leo did what they were told and left the room. The only people remaining in the dining hall were the two Queens and Cassandra. Both queens were staring at her.

Queen Grace and Queen Rebecca took turns telling her what not to do or what to stay away from. When they finally finished, Cassandra was half asleep. They dismissed her.

When she returned to the room, Kyle and Leo were awake, so she commenced telling them everything. Somewhere in the middle, however, Cassandra dozed off into a deep sleep.

She slept peacefully through the night. Cassandra awoke to the sound of Leo and Kyle having an argument about which game was better—*Call of Duty* or *Ray Man*. Cassandra rolled out of bed and put on her original outfit, black armor, black boots, and a black mask. Only Cassandra's electric blue eyes could be seen gleaming. Cassandra buckled on her belt and attached her black bladed sword. She grabbed some homemade lock picks and threw them into a small bag and tied it to her belt. By then Kyle and Leo had stopped bickering and dressed too.

The three companions went down to the dining room to eat breakfast. Cassandra ate slowly, lost in thought. When she finished eating her breakfast she saddled Shadowmere, mounted, and rode to the village. The villagers took one look at her and ran away like she was contagious. Cassandra spotted the bank. She dismounted and snuck in the bank. Cassandra edged behind the front desk and into the room with all the safes. She searched through every safe until she noticed a random picture on the wall next to the safes. "How could I be so stupid," she berated herself. Cassandra slid the picture to the side, picked the lock, and opened the safe door. The fire gem glowed from its nestled location within a velvet bag. Swiftly Cassandra seized the bag and ran as alarms started ringing. She bolted out of the bank.

"Shadowmere! Come here boy, oh... it's no time for grazing" Cassandra called to him in disbelief. "Come on!"

"Stop that thief! Don't let him get away!" the bank owner screeched while pointing at her, he watched Cassandra ride out of sight

She sighed, "Oh great, just great! Now that dude is after me," looking back at that screaming bank owner. On the way back to Queen Rebecca's dirt house Cassandra saw a trail of fire. She instantly thought, "**Bad**; the Fire King is here." She kicked Shadowmere's flank and he started galloping. When Cassandra arrived, Shadowmere was extremely tired and weak, so she let him rest. As Cassandra entered the dirt house, this woman heard a noise coming from the dining room. She slowly crept up the stairs. The Fire King and his army cornered Queen Grace, Queen Rebecca, Leo, and Kyle.

"STOP!" Cassandra hollered at the top of her lungs. Everyone turned toward her, and the Fire King spoke, "Who are you?"

"I am Cassandra and you are the ugly king flame" Cassandra said trying not to make eye contact with him.

"Rrrrraaaaaarrrrrr," the flame dragon screeched, "Oh, what is that boy? She has our Gem?"

"Foolish child... now you must die!" the Fire King said grinning.

"Ok, if you let them go" Cassandra said as she pointed to Leo, Kyle and the two Queens. "If you release them, I will give you your fire gem, and the ice gem. I promise."

The Fire King thought for a moment then said, "Release the girl's friends, and give me the gems."

Cassandra handed over the gems and ran to Queen Grace. "Are you okay?" she asked.

"Yes, I think so. Thank you for coming, Cassandra," The Fire King slowly put the gems together, and backed away. The room went silent; everyone stared at the gems.

Something was emerging from the gems. Was it? Could it be? The demon dragon? "No, it can't be," the Fire King frowned in complete fear. His eyes were dark; his face looked stunned. The demon dragon and the demon tribe emanated from the combined gems. Their purpose was to vanquish all the tribes, one after the other. No individual tribe was strong enough to stop these monsters; they had to join forces—if that was possible. "We must join together to beat them. It's the only way, please."

"Yea, let's do this thing!" a soldier from the fire army enthused. The whole fire army started cheering. The ice and fire army marched side by side toward the demon tribe. They fought and fought until they were bleeding like a waterfall. Only one person could locate and separate the gems, that person was Cassandra. Ever since she was a baby she was always gifted in strange ways, such as locksmithing. Cassandra always had a key hanging on her neck. She had found it on the ground when she was five.

"Cassandra, we all tried and failed, you are the only one left. You can do it; I know you can," Queen Grace encouraged.

"Okay," Cassandra said confidently. The whole army cheered as she slowly approached the gems. Sweating she grabbed them and started to pull them apart, but the demon dragon swooped in to attack her. She hurled the gems at the dragon. Instantly the demon dragon turned to dust. The dust started to swirl around and around until the gems sucked the dust storm back in along with the other demon tribe members. "They're gone," Cassandra said in disbelief.

The Fire King spoke to her "He's gone for now, but he will be back. Mark my words."