

Destiny of the Soul

PROLOGUE

Ka'ala walked along the rocky trail she had come to know so well. It led her to the place she felt most safe, yet away from the people she loved most.

She had failed in so many ways, mostly she had failed her people. She tried telling her clan what she had learned. Her people believed Wa'han instead. They remembered the old man as he used to be, before he had the infant killed. The fools. Could they not see how Wa'han misled them? She hated Wa'han, hated what he had done to her mother, to the baby and to herself. And she hated the hunters even more – especially Meti – for standing behind Wa'han.

Yes, her people were fools, but she could not blame her clan for their failures. They had not seen what she had seen, had not heard or experienced what she had. Regardless, it was too dangerous to leave her secret cave and go back home until she could figure out a way to make her people – and her mother – understand. ✨

No one except Hana knew how to find her hiding place, and Hana would never lead Wa'han to her. She felt safe walking along the trail where so much had happened that changed her life, changed her.

She leaned against the sandstone bluff abutting the bison trail and closed her eyes, concentrating on the sounds of the nighttime birds calling to their mates. It was breeding season, and the mockingbirds' frantic imitations of all their feathered rivals made Ka'ala smile.

Hérons courted one another along the riverbed below, cackling and squawking, and then as if of a single mind, they rose from the wetland and began a raucous caterwauling. *Womp*,

Commented [CH1]: No indent.

Commented [CH2]: Note the quantity of information here:

- Ka'ala has learned a secret she tried to expose.
- Her people have sided with a person called Wa'han.
- That person has changed into a different version of himself.
- He had an infant killed.
- Wa'han has also done something to her mother.
- There are a group of hunters.

Each story element is intriguing, but it's a lot for just the second paragraph.

As yourself: what does the reader Need to know?

- Ka'ala is on the run.
- She tried to expose a deadly secret.
- Her village has turned against her.

The rest is added detail that doesn't change the context of what's happening: she's a good, honest person, running for her life.

womp. The sound of heron wings reverberated off the sandstone bluff as they took flight and relocated down river.

What scared you, graceful herons? Is there a long-tooth cat prowling around and hunting tonight? ☀

The noisy mockingbirds suddenly fell silent. Ka'ala wondered if she should start back to the safety of her cave in case Long-Tooth had been unsuccessful hunting herons and was searching for easier prey: her.

From somewhere above, an owl softly hooted, breaking the silence and lulling Ka'ala back into a sense of wellbeing. *You always make me feel safe whenever you are around me, dear friend,* she reflected as she looked for the owl and its perch on the rocky escarpment above her and saw only darkness.

She closed her eyes, breathing in the pungent aroma of sage and waiting for the night sounds to return to normal. Only the incessant “*hoo hoo*” of Owl broke the silence, and the hoots grew louder and louder.

“Why are you screaming? Is Long-Tooth coming for me?”

Ka'ala got to her feet and looked over the rocky ledge's rim into the river valley beneath her. With no moon to light the scene, she saw nothing. Owl's hooting turned into frantic, ear-piercing screeches, and she felt the large bird of prey's feathers brush her face as it swooped past her.

“What is it?” she hissed into the darkness as she crouched nearer to the rock wall.

Owl flew to a perch somewhere farther away and continued screeching its warning cries.

Owl is distancing himself so the attention will be drawn away from me, she thought.

Why? What is out there? ☀

Commented [CH3]: When reading this description what time of day do you picture?

For me, it suggested Ka'ala was sitting back and watching a big, glorious river scene below – even if that description focused largely on sound. Darkness is a great tool for tension. I would use it.

Commented [CH4]: There is an eloquence to Ka-ala's language and narrative perspective that seems a touch modern.

Commented [CH5]: Lulling sense of well-being, dear friend, graceful herons... Tone is a powerful tool. We could be following a character on a peaceful, contemplative walk who happens upon an accident, versus a young woman who's lost everything she cares about, and is being actively hunted. I would look to maintain her obvious connection with nature, but re-think the language. This is a woman who is bereft, banished, and on the run. To be actively hunted by her own people, she's done something Big, so we want to reflect that in how she sees the world around her.

Commented [CH6]: Would she risk speaking aloud, if she's being hunted by a predator and can't see the immediate area around her?

Commented [CH7]: Interior dialogue can become a touch distracting if we rely on it too much. The alternative is to format it as standard narrative.

For example:

Owl flew to a perch somewhere farther away and continued screeching its warning cries. The bird was distancing himself to draw the attention away from her. But, why? What was out there?

If we lose the internal dialogue her, the fool line below has room to shine with more impact. Use Internal Dialogue as a garnish, not a staple.

She heard something moving in the murky darkness on the trail behind her. Instinctively she reached for her knife, but the sheath hanging on her leather belt was empty. She had left her knife in the cave. *Who is the fool now?*

“You are not Long-Tooth,” she whispered. “He knows better than to make so much noise if he wants to eat. Are you Bear? You are big and do not care how much noise you make, do you?” *But there are no bears around here. I would have seen their tracks. Who are you? Why are you hunting me?*

Commented [CH8]: As per my earlier note about speaking aloud when tracked by a predator. I have been in the woods at night with strange sounds. You go stop breathing, you're so silent.

Legs trembling and heart pounding against her chest, Ka'ala pushed herself to her feet and ran away from the troubling noises and movements. She glanced over her shoulder to catch a glimpse of her assailant. She saw nothing in the darkness but thought she heard heaving breathing.

Was it her own?

Running blindly on the rocky trail proved challenging with no light guiding her. But she dare not stop. Placing her hand on the rocky wall next to her steadied her gait, allowing her to run faster. She heard voices, men's voices. Spinning toward the sound, Ka'ala saw Meti emerging from the night's shadowy depths. Behind him trailed six of the clan's best hunters. All had their spears raised as if to strike Ka'ala.

Commented [CH9]: Meti plays a pivotal role in this scene. Consider how you might place a little more focus on him earlier in the scene, to foreshadow this.

Meti! How did you find me?

Ka'ala bolted toward her cave with a renewed energy. Spears still raised, the men running behind her were getting closer.

“Stop, Ka'ala! You cannot outrun us,” Meti yelled. He had loved her once, but no more. He could not be trusted. She had to get away, had to make it to her secret cave if she wanted to live. ☀

Commented [CH10]: If Ka'ala's cave offered so much protection, drop a quick hint as to why she risked leaving it (i.e. to fill a water jug). Otherwise it seems she's risked her life just to get some fresh air, which is harder to empathize with.

There was only one chance of evading the hunters. She had to get past the rock façade's outcropping ahead of her before the men were close enough to see her leave the path.

She turned to see how close the hunters were when her sandal caught beneath a protruding tree root. Ka'ala plummeted to the ground face-first. Her head slammed onto a boulder, dazing her. She touched her head, feeling a lump made warm and sticky with her blood. She had to keep going. She had to reach the safety of her cave.

She attempted to stand, but her right leg would not respond. An unbearable pain shot through her, pulsing up through her back. She looked at her twisted leg and saw glistening bone branching out from an open wound, her blood visible on the ground beneath it. She cried out in agony and despair.

Meti and the hunters were upon her before the wail fully escaped her throat. She heard Meti calling to her but his voice grew fainter, as if he were moving away from her.

Will it be as promised? If death closes my eyes in this world, will I wake up in the other world?

Everything went dark, and she could no longer hear Meti calling her name. ✨

Commented [CH11]: I love the power of this devastating moment, but it seems like an extreme injury for a minor accident. If it's a rocky escarpment, we might show that a rock comes loose and partially crushes her. For bonus points, we might show her moving over these rocks earlier in the scene, and touch on the fact they're not totally stable, allowing this moment to feel more believable.

Commented [CH12]: The first time I read this, I assumed they were killing her. But they might have been helping her. Was this deliberately ambiguous? Would she die from a broken leg so quickly? Could have more clarity here.

Commented [CH13]: If this character is part of a prophecy, it could make sense to reference that she is 'special' in some way a little earlier in the scene, so it's not popping up here out of the blue, and getting lost amid all the action.