

### III. AJ ĚUK +BIL Salome Solčániová The pact of our Youth

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#### *The pact of our Youth*

'And where do you think you're going? '

'Hell, most likely. ' Zenobia grunted as she played with the silver bracelet on her wrist, which was slowly getting a blueish tint, deep in thought. She felt the stares of her two friends, burning like fire on her back. She already regretted her sarcastic tone.

'So quick-witted,' an amused voice of a boy sounded from behind her, getting closer, and soon she was staring into the gray-blue eyes slightly covered by black hairs falling into Caspian's face, 'so quick to act alone. But aren't you forgetting a little something, Zen?' Zenobia lowered her gaze, avoiding her friend, only to notice Delilah slowly making her way to stand beside her on the other side.

'Remember the pact of our youth?' Delilah's soft voice whispered in silence, making Zenobia's eyes water.

'Where you go I'm going,- ' Caspian's hand rested on the red-haired girl's shoulder, followed by Delilah's hand on the other one. '-so jump and I'm jumping,- '

'-since there's no me without you.' Zenobia's voice cracked in sadness as the words escaped her mouth. She looked up to see her two best friends, pain stabbing her right in her chest as she felt a void in the group, darkening her eyes, but she saw the very same sorrow in her friends' gazes. Caspian stretched out after a moment of silence, breaking it with a confident voice, just as Zenobia's bracelet shone in bright robin's blue.

'So let's fix this mess, shall we? '

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Golden rays graced the leaves of trees and bushes, turning the sunlit fields and meadows into a breath-taking scenery as the sun slowly set on the horizon. The birdsong was cut by laughs of four teenagers making their way through the tall grass, all focused on each other's company a bit too much, but that's how it always goes, when you meet the right people. Two girls, a blonde and a ginger, and two boys, pale brunette and raven-haired, were making their way down the path towards a forest after a day spent on a picnic, which they have planned long ago, but never seemed to find the time, until now. Caspian rushed to Zenobia, picking her up, catching her off-guard. The two almost flung each other to the ground, while the pale-haired kids watched in amusement. Delilah and Achilles were so alike, you could mistake them for twins, which is why it was so astonishing to find out they weren't related. The group was perceived as outcasts, four kids which seemingly had nothing in common with nothing to hold

onto but themselves. Thus, they made a pact, a promise to always stay together. But it wasn't like that long before.

Zenobia and Delilah both came from families which had high expectations of their daughters, but each chose a different path to follow. While Delilah was known as the kind, caring girl everyone could rely on, the one that had a seemingly perfect life with no problems, Zenobia was brought up as a woman of a bigger purpose, which resulted in her becoming a bit of a stuck-up, acting hot and cold with people around her, and most of all, she became unreadable, but intuitive. There was no way anyone could fool her. Maybe that is why one day, she understood how many wrongs she has done because she kept on following those expectations, and how those wrongs could never be forgiven. She realised that she has never been true to anyone, not even herself, but that was when she met her closest friend.

Caspian was a guy known for never letting people in. He never intervened, always stayed in the corner and observed the life around him, which made him dangerous to some. Although he wasn't like that before he lost his family, the trauma scarred him so much that he realised it was easier to live alone, than fear the rejection. It wasn't until he met Zenobia, truly met her, that he let his guard down for the first time in years. The two became close, maybe because they related to each other, it is always easier to trust someone who knows a part of you that others just don't understand. Delilah joined them soon, and lastly, Achilles, a boy who had a void in his heart nothing seemed to be able to fill up, decided to give the three a chance. Their bonds became so strong, they decided they never want to be apart again. And that is how their, so called, pact of youth, came to be.

As Zenobia dusted the sand off of her dress, the four friends continued on their way into the forest, which by now was getting darker and darker with approaching dusk. Not long into their trek, Achilles noticed an oddly-shaped beech tree, richly wrapped in green and yellowish leaves. He rushed towards it, soon followed by the rest as they noticed their friend has gone. Achilles studied the beech, its elegantly twisted branches seemed strong enough to hold the weight of a boy, so he scrambled up the thick trunk and sat down on one of the branches, looking down at his friends with a sneer. 'Are you coming or what? '

The three stood below, hesitant. Delilah suddenly rushed up to sit next to Achilles, but the rest stayed behind. 'We should get going guys, unless you want to sleep up there.' Caspian called out to the two on a branch, while Zenobia's attention was pulled toward the very root of the trunk. Something glowed softly from behind, and her curiosity took her to the other side of the beech tree, where she found a hole in the trunk. 'Guys, the tree's hollow. There's something in

here thought- ' her voice was cut off by a gasp of amazement. Right in the hole, she found three silver bracelets. Her gasp brought her friends' attention to her, and as she reached out to grab one bracelet, she saw two big hands poking into the hole next to hers, each grabbing one. 'Hey! Personal space highly appreciated, thanks!' she snapped as she turned around to find Caspian and Achilles both holding one silver bracelet. As they stared at them, all three putting them on their wrists, they saw each start changing their hues. Soon enough, there were a greenish-blue, golden and copper-red bracelets instead of the original silver ones. Zenobia looked at her robin's blue one, scanning it. 'It looks so old.. almost like from the Victorian age..' ' her words were cut off as darkness flooded over her.

Zenobia woke up in a long, flowy, thick dress, not the one she was wearing a moment ago. Her eyes flew open, only to find her three friends dressed as if they came from the past. 'What happened to us?' she breathed, shocked. But none of her companions seemed to have more of a clue than she had. 'Take us back, Zen!' Delilah cried out, and as if on command, the group found themselves back in the present day.

'What in the name of the Lord was that?' Achilles muttered, confusion clouding his gaze. Realisation that through the bracelet, Zenobia transported them through time, hit her. She stared at Caspian's and Achilles', wondering what those could do.

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Zenobia woke up beside her friends, on a treehouse which they used as a hideout. She remembered getting there after they found the bracelets. She quietly stretched out, noticing Achilles playing with his silver bracelet. She stared at him for a moment, and but his voice still made her jump as he noticed her. 'I found out their powers,' he whispered, showing her Caspian's, 'this one shifts you into anything you think of..' He passed her the bracelet, then stood up.

'W-where are you going, Achilles?' Zenobia struggled to keep her cool. 'What's the last one's power?'

Achilles ignored her, focused on something ahead of him. He walked toward the ladder, his eyes unmoving.

'Achilles? Achilles, stop!' Zenobia shot up, reaching out to grab Achilles' hand. Suddenly, a strong field formed around her, and she gasped. Achilles slowly turned around, staring coldly into her wide eyes. 'You wanted to know what power it has, didn't you?' he sneered, stepping close to her. 'I guess I can make anyone do anything I please.'

Zenobia's eyes watered as she tried to grab Achilles by his wrist, but the more she fought against the energy field, the more pain she felt. She noticed that his bracelet was now copper-red, and spiky. She looked up, desperately, only to find Achilles eye-to-eye with her. 'Take me back to the past,' he ordered, mercilessly staring at her, 'now!'

Caspian woke up as he heard Zenobia crying next to him, her wrists marked with scars that somehow resembled handcuffs. He woke Delilah and rushed over to his friend, comforting her. 'What happened? Where is Achilles?' he asked, horrified to notice the marks.

Zenobia's eyes were blank, tears streaming down her cheeks. 'I don't remember what happened. All I know is that Achilles found out the powers, and he wanted to run away with his bracelet.. I just woke up with these.' she looked at the marks on her wrists. Delilah wrapped her friend's wrists in fabric, preventing it from possible inflammation, since the marks were pretty fresh. Suddenly, Zenobia stood up, gathering her stuff. 'This is all my fault, I should have stopped him..' she muttered, 'I have to fix it.'

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'So let's fix this mess, shall we?' Caspian stretched out after a moment of silence, breaking it with a confident voice, just as Zenobia's bracelet shone in bright robin's blue. All three stared in astonishment. 'So he's back in the past-' Zenobia breathed.

She looked up at her friends, who looked as ready to bring their friend back to his senses and she was. They nodded at her confidently, and she closed her eyes. *Take us back to Victorian age.*

As they arrived back in the era, they didn't stop for a moment. It didn't take long to find traces of Achilles' bracelet's powers – there were people with eyes blank with pain and marks that looked just like Zenobia's. Soon enough, they approached a city which seemed to be overcrowding with people under Achilles' spell. And once they joined the crowd, they found the source. Achilles stood high above the crowd, dressed like a lord, and satisfaction painted a smug smile on his face as the people worshipped him. The three couldn't believe what they were seeing. They agreed to lure him away and thought of a plan to do so, and to get the bracelet back. All that was left was to put the plan into action.

Zenobia realised that if they were to win, and free the people, they had to take him to the present day, where he would have no control over them – and thus, no backup. That's why Delilah was meant to get Achilles out of the crowd's reach, while Caspian prepared himself to ambush him and get his bracelet. Thankfully, Achilles didn't forget to mention the power of Caspian's bracelet. As Delilah rushed with Achilles toward the very edge of the city, the light-haired boy

sensed something was off, but as he was too focused on arguing with Delilah, he didn't realise that Zenobia created a time tunnel, and they rushed into it. They found themselves back in present. Achilles, now furious as he understood, reached for his bracelet with a grin on his face. That is when a falcon swooped down and snatched the bracelet, and shifted back into Caspian mid-air. Caspian flung the bracelet to the ground and landed on top of it. As the sound of cracking split the silence, Achilles descended onto his knees in despair, and he let out a loud cry. 'No! You ruined my only hope!'

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Achilles stared blankly ahead of him, on his knees, miserable. His friends didn't understand what happened, but they gathered around him and sat down on the ground. Tears streamed down his cheeks as he softly spoke.

'It was the last chance to feel valid... to have someone consider me special.'

Delilah put a hand on his shoulder in reassurance. 'What do you mean, to have someone consider you special? We consider you special and important.'

Zenobia nodded in agreement. 'Remember why we made that promise? Because we stick together. Who we are just becomes stronger when we are among the right people who help us grow, but if we let loneliness and past mistakes consume us, it tears us apart.'

'You can't fix what was been broken, Achilles,' Caspian continued, 'but you can learn from it and try again. And we are here to help you. We help each other. No one else in this world knows us like we do, we can't tear a bond like this. If we do, we sign ourselves a life of misery.'

*Just like you can't change the past, but work on the present and future, you can't keep your invincible fronts up forever. Maybe, just maybe, you'll realise that first, you need to be true to yourself and you'll find out that everything else goes hand in hand with it. Power in the hands of wrong people – broken people, leads to chaos and pain, but you can't fix a broken person unless they want to be fixed. Sometimes, all they need is a push in the right direction, because what is a man, when he's never known the right company.*

~ 2267 words