

\*\*\*FIRST LOOK\*\*\*

Alycia has authorized us to be the first to show the Prologue of her novel, *Winterphoenix*, to be released next year. A website exclusive- *copyright Alycia Ripley 2005, reprinted with permission from the author.*

There are some things we cannot possibly know.

At 2 pm on a cloudy afternoon, the day before Thanksgiving, a man in a green hunting jacket stood on the edge of a bluff, looking toward the masked sun. With his hands outstretched, palms up, dried blood crusting along the sides of his thumbs, he frowned and closed his eyes.

She would happen soon, he thought. The rest of them were rehearsals, mindless exercises to calm the upcoming excitement. He was finally ready for her and it was only a small amount of time until she made her way to him. He smiled, thinking of how he would recognize her. His toes clenched in his brown boots, subtly speckled with red. Everything would happen as it should. She was coming and he was ready. Anything else was irrelevant.

At 2:35 pm a young man of the Scajaquada tribe held his peanut butter sandwich between callused palms and breathed deeply, smelling the depths of the forest the way his grandparents taught him. Dirt was smeared across his jeans and high-topped boots. The sun disappeared behind a batch of clouds and the harsh glow of these disturbed him enough to re-wrap his sandwich and replace it into his green lunch pail.

It would happen soon, he thought. The clouds were telling clues at twelve, three, six, and nine o'clock stations, the sun flickering behind them, dark like a human heart. He smelled blood and dreamt at night of dead babies and red-eyed crows. He wished she

would hurry. The cold was coming and even the graze of the wind against his cheek felt wrong. He pushed his shaggy hair behind his ears and eyed the ground. The snow would fall and blanket the dirt and dried leaves, covering the clues and any hope he had. But she was coming. The air and the sun and the whisper of the trees, the stir of the rocks all told him so. He would recognize her before she came from the snow. And when she did, when she came, she would fix everything. There would be nothing to fear anymore.

At 3:33 pm a young girl scooped a pile of red and golden leaves, crispy at the edges, into a yard bag. Her back hurt but she preferred raking to the leaf blower that bludgeoned her ears with its deafening scream. She had complained about the other pre-Thanksgiving chores until there wasn't a choice left. Everyone was coming for the holiday- aunts, uncles, even cousin Alison was flying home from New York City. Everything needed to look right, she and her mother agreed, but yet an argument broke out anytime something needed to be done.

*I mess everything up*, the girl thought. Grocery shopping, laundry, errands. She always did things just a little bit off and a little bit wrong no matter how hard she tried or what attention she paid to details. Regardless of her degrees or intelligence, when it came to anything practical- faxing, cooking, raking the lawn- the girl was a terrible dunce. With graduate school over there were no more classes to excel at or awards to win. The girl cursed the housewives, interior decorators, and bank tellers who appeared content while she was her own constant reminder of lack of purpose. *I think too much. I want something successful. Something simple. Whatever it is I'm meant to do*, she thought.

The girl dragged the yard bag into the garage and glanced toward the shivering treetops. She rolled a stone back and forth under her gray sneaker. She had no way to

foresee that in a matter of months she would become many different things to several different people. There are just some things we cannot possibly know.