

## **Llyria**

*By Donna Lyon Rhose*

The waters were fairly still along the Island coast as Llyria stood upon the rocky beach looking out, nearly as still as the waters themselves. The long, almost white silvery strands of hair upon her head gently swirled about her face and form; her intense, brown eyes in a look of prolonged study. She seemed far too serious for a girl of nine years, yet she lived in a world surrounded by study and contemplation. The Holy Isle was the Island of the Healers off the coast of the Cymric mainland, a place where they came to learn and study, to become Healers by walking through the Flame and then to either become teachers themselves, or go out into the world to Heal. Llyria's mother, Dori, who was also often referred to as Bright Star, had been asked to become Librarian on the Island; a high honor, although it also required years of more study and a profound dedication to the whole of the Healer's world. Llyria's father, Tamlynn, was Bard to the Island, a title that had not existed before him for his appearance had involved the Flame, altering the knowledge of Its functions forever. Llyria did not completely understand all of what it involved; yet, she grasped that somehow her father had been caught in the Eldritch and that her mother had rescued him through the Flame; a mighty battle had ensued which included an evil Elven lord who had wanted her father's soul as well as Llyria's and was only overcome when her mother learned to use the Flame in Its full powers. As Lyria grew, it was with great pleasure that her father noted her sweet, melodic voice, encouraging her to join him as he played upon a harp and sang himself. Indeed, she loved to sing, but, she also loved to dance, joining in with the Sacred Dancers who had come to the Isle to make a small Bardic faction for her father. Whereas not as well as he would have liked, Lyria could play the harp competently, and Tamlynn contented himself that she was still very young. Besides, she was a joy to watch as she danced, her understanding of movement nearly equaling those of the Sacred Dancers themselves.

What was interesting was that Llyria also had a great fondness of herbs, often staying with some of the Healers for hours helping them to plant, to pick and prepare. She was always full of questions, pestering a young and talented teacher named Manora, who had also become fast friends with this inquisitive girl. In time, Manora came to suggest to Dori that Llyria ought go ahead and begin some actual lessons in Healing, for no matter what direction she took, what could it hurt? Even Tamlynn agreed as long as it did not impede with the possibilities of her Bardic traits. In all honesty, neither mother nor father knew exactly how to take all this, yet, it had to be admitted that it was rare for a full rank Bard and Healer to have joined together, so who could say what the offspring might well be like? And as Llyria began to pursue her herbal studies, she also gained some interest in general healing as well. Frequently she would go down to the shores in contemplation of the various questions that had come up in her studies. Sometimes Manora would find her there and they might talk for long stretches as movements in the heavens passed over them.

But, this day, Manora had not come and Llyria was left to contemplate on her own. It seemed to Llyria that Manora was not as well as she usually was, though she knew that sometimes the pollen on the Island could irritate her friend to some degree. As she looked upon the waters, Llyria felt a peculiar disturbance that caused her to turn about and gaze around in some confusion for several moments. For an instant she thought

she saw the flash of light glinting off clothing, and the afterimage of a tall woman with long, red hair. As Manora was not that tall and had ash blond hair, Llyria knew it was not her friend and frowned. A soft breeze floated up about her and for a moment she could have sworn that she had heard her name being whispered upon it. But the image of the woman was gone and she could not even make a semblance return to her mind.

That evening, she went over to see her friend, who assuredly, was not doing well. "I don't think it's pollen." Manora remarked simply as Llyria sat on a stool next her companion who was seated by the low fire brewing an infusion of tea for herself. "I am too chilled for this time of year." She smiled wanly, "Sing a bit for me... your voice is so warm... perhaps, it might warm me." Llyria smiled tentatively, then started a low, soothing song that her father had taught her for quieting people and getting them to relax. Manora smiled thoughtfully as she poured herself some of the brewed liquid into a simple mug. As she quietly stood up when Llyria finished, she remarked, "I've heard your father sing that, haven't I?"

"I sing many things that he's taught me... why?"

Manora went over to recline in her bedding, setting the mug beside her to sip from, "Sing something of Llyria... Your father sings of travels, the Bardic Council, Cymru, mountains and valleys, power and wind. He sings of Tamlynn. You are Llyria... you are the Holy Isle, a place of Healing, of the Flame and the power of the Elves. I wish to hear who Llyria is."

For a few moments Llyria pondered, then with a slightly faltering voice began to sing once more. After a moment it grew strong and steadier, and Manora was quite unprepared for what it was to produce in her. Suddenly, she felt as if she were flying through the clouds above the island, looking down and wide as she flew. The sight was so beautiful, she gasped a time or two before finally returning as the song itself wound down. Not knowing what to say of it, Manora regarded her young friend with some puzzlement, "Do you know what you just did?"

"I sang of myself." Remarkd Llyria quite simply.

For a long moment, Manora contemplated, "Llyria... are there healing places... 'in' Llyria...?" After a moment of consideration, Llyria nodded affirmatively. "Take me to one of those places... sing to me of a healing place in Llyria."

Again Llyria pondered that a moment before starting anew. This time, the song was very quiet, very soothing, as Manora found herself stepping into a warm flowing stream where she knelt within the waters to immerse herself inside its assuaging flow, even venturing to drink a little of the imagery. Afterwards, Manora basked for a time, watching her friend with glowing green eyes and earnest smile as she sipped her tea. "I suppose it's time you went home... tell your father, I would speak with him tomorrow... Come here, young sister." Llyria went to the bedding and knelt by her comrade where Manora took her hands and kissed her cheek. When Llyria left, Manora felt the cold again, wrapping her clothing about her and thoughtfully sipping her tea once more.

"Are you sure?" Tamlynn said to Manora as he sat beside her in her dwelling in quiet conference. Tamlynn noted that Manora seemed rather frail, though he was uncertain to what extent it might be. "You were pulled 'inside' the imagery, you flew? I believe she loves falcons... healing streams... and you 'felt' it? You drank it?" Manora nodded. "Umm..." Staring out into space, his long braided light hair shimmered,

contrasting his dark brown eyes. His daughter looked far more like him than her mother, though Llyria's mien was Dori's by far. A long sigh finally escaped him, "She's a Bard." He said at last, then looked directly at Manora, "A 'true' Bard... And 'you' are very sensitive, my friend... I 'ought' send her away to the Bardic Seat. To be trained, to be formally granted her standing."

"Don't do that." objected Manora as Tamlynn's eyebrows raised. "She's a Healer, too, you know that... I am ill, Tamlynn. My childhood life has finally caught up with me. It was hard and mean, and something inside of me has never really healed. But, I might be comforted... really, I begin to believe, even more. Let me teach her what of healing I can; for I believe, this is what she is meant to be."

"What about the Flame? If this is so for you, can not the Flame assist you?"

"The Flame purifies us and makes us ready to become Healers. The powers your wife now taps into are patterns between realms, knowledge. Perhaps in a sense, Llyria is part of that 'new' knowledge... Perhaps Bright Star ought to be working with her daughter some in that area as well... Do not send your daughter away, my dear friend... her work is here. Let me be her tests... I accept the role gladly."

After a moment, Tamlynn smiled, "What can it possibly hurt? I rather hope it can but help. Alright... But, there are things I am bound to teach her, too, now... now that I know. You and I... and her mother... I hope we all prove adequate in those roles."

A friend of Manora's came to the Holy Isle to visit awhile, then decided to stay on when she realized that all was not well with her friend. Though not a Healer, Manora's friend, Caron, was a Wise woman from a village where Manora had received her early training. Whereas Caron was easily well disposed towards Llyria, Llyria found herself rather shy of this new personality so that often Caron kept herself to the background as much as possible as student and teacher proceeded their quest. It was with some relief that Caron was able to see her friend move around again more freely, as Manora and Llyria investigated Llyria's natural talents. Soon long and quiet walks were again granted Manora as she took Llyria with her to point out herbs and their uses. These walks, too, provided times for internal investigation as Manora probed into a mind somewhat foreign to the sort she was used to. Tamlynn was very reserved outside the presence of his wife, a Bardic mind whose inner workings were relaxed only with others of his kind. Llyria was another matter entirely, she wanted Manora to understand her, and she wanted Manora to help her.

As much as the herbs interested Llyria, Manora had to admit that music held more of her young student's enthusiasm. So Manora began to ponder how she might begin to weave these two fascinations together. It was when Llyria began to intuitively sing to the herbs as they were picking through them that Manora brought this to Llyria's attention. "Llyria," asked Manora quietly, "Does that herb have a tone to it?" For a moment Llyria was startled by the question and did not know what she ought possibly to say.

"Tones, Manora? I see colors about the herb... the colors are like music... I sing the colors I see."

"Ahhh..." responded Manora gravely, "Are there no words? You have been singing just tones and sounds..."

Llyria shrugged, "Perhaps... but I would have to ask them questions, they would have to tell me about themselves."

"Can they do that?"

"Yes... but, most of what they'd say, we already know."

"I see." smiled Manora, rather amused at Llyria's surety of that, "Well, then, can you see the colors around me?"

"Yes..." smiled Llyria, "Always..."

"Then sing me... without words, like the herbs."

For a moment Llyria looked away, "I don't know... I'm not sure I ought to."

"Please... my friend... you have my permission... and my love... please sing 'me'."

For several moments, Llyria stood looking at her older friend, not truly certain; yet finding herself beginning to concentrate on the auras of colors that she was seeing around Manora. It didn't take long before she found herself getting caught up in the colors themselves, letting them weave within her thoughts until an interpretation of them began to swell inside coming forth as musical sound and tone in an eerie sort of singing, both beautiful and lonely. Manora immediately felt a sort of painful backlash from it, emitting a long, sorrowful sigh as she sank slowly to the ground. As Llyria continued, Manora found herself weeping uncontrollably as if the sounds were releasing every emotion she had ever had. Neither Llyria nor Manora seemed to be able to stop, so interwoven were they as Llyria persisted in her singing and Manora felt all her emotions streaming through her endlessly.

Sensing that the pair had been gone longer than Manora ought, Caron went to look for her friend as dusk began to hang about the corners of the skies. Startled to hear both the eerie musical sounds and the intense weeping, Caron rushed to find both the women entrapped in what Caron interpreted as a circular woven pattern between the two that neither seemed able to break. For several moments she stood totally uncertain what might done, finally deciding to stand between them as she threw her own energies about Manora like a shield, knowing Manora would be the most vulnerable as the connection broke down. Holding Manora tightly, Caron also heard a snap, then a sharp wail from Llyria as the linkage did indeed break. "Sister, are you all right?" Whispered Caron in Manora's ear as she looked over at Llyria worriedly, knowing she needed help as well. Yet, Manora continued to breath heavily and sob, though not as intensely as she had.

A rustle from leaves on the path found a figure rushing in. "What has happened?" Said Tamlynn as he ran to enfold his daughter, "I felt this most eerie energy pattern, singing and weeping, and I realized that it was Llyria." He enfolded his daughter and began singing softly to her, songs of healing that Bards sometimes sang to Bards.

In a moment she, too, quieted, sinking gratefully in her father's embrace. "I was singing Manora." Llyria finally managed to whisper, causing Tamlynn's face to furrow. "I did not know I could get so tangled."

Manora also began to come around, "I am sorry, it was my fault. Though, to tell the truth, much in me has been released. It just was so overwhelmingly powerful, neither one of us knew how to separate."

"This is potent medicine." Reflected Caron, "Something that ought be looked at deeply and studied... and something that ought be discussed with Bright Star, don't you think, Tamlynn?"

Tamlynn looked off into the distance and sighed, "This is Bard and Healer magick combined... I'm not sure just what to think... But, you're quite right. It ought to be discussed. With Bright Star, especially."

Gathering in Dori and Tamlynn's dwelling the next evening, both Manora and Caron sat with Llyria's parents as did Llyria herself. Though soft spoken, Dori was sparkling and quick, her wonderful dark brown curls drifting about her face in free reign as her green/hazel eyes glinted from firelight. She embraced Manora with some sadness, aware that not even the Flame Itself had been able to halt the slow growth of disease that moved there. Manora was a gracious and gentle teacher, a true maker of Healers herself; no-one there was not touched who had begun to realize that Manora was softly slipping from them. Fussing about Manora, Caron wrapped a blanket about her friend carefully. Dori was thankful for Caron's presence, though Dori realized that the woman had a mate and children at home. And although as a Wise woman the village would be certain to see to her home's needs, it was certain that she also missed them.

"Mama," said Llyria as they all finally settled, "do you know, I saw a woman on the shore some while ago... but, she disappeared."

Frowning, Dori looked at her daughter very puzzled, "One of the teachers?"

"I don't think so... I'd never seen her before... She was very tall... and had red hair, almost like red gold."

Dori tapped her chin a moment, "What made you bring that up?"

Llyria shrugged, "I just remembered... it was the day I started singing to Manora a little while back. I had forgotten... she was very beautiful."

Dori and Tamlynn looked long at each other, "Gwyniffar?" Asked Tamlynn, then shrugged, "That could be quite possible, I would think... She is the Lady of the Elven on this Island, she is a friend to both your mother and myself. And rightly, to all here. I expect we ought not be surprised. She's probably very curious about you."

Llyria blushed a little, leaning closer to Manora who she had chosen to snuggle up by as if impulse told her to offer comfort to her friend in any form she might.

"Well," said Dori gazing at her daughter fondly, "what exactly are we going to do with you?... We are doing our very best to teach you; yet, your abilities are quickly out pacing us. You are very difficult to out guess, dear one. However, I hardly wish to halt you or really slow you down... I think, what we might propose... is that, there always be another party... or even two parties, if it's possible; but at least one when you and Manora 'experiment'. And I think the best would be Caron, Tamlynn or myself... which is part of why we're all here, I think...? It just appears that a monitor is essential in this student's case." Everyone nodded assent as Llyria looked about at the adults, not totally understanding everything that was going on. "Why would Gwyn...if..ar? be curious about me?"

Tamlynn watched his daughter a moment, smiling slightly to himself, "I know you don't remember... but, perhaps someday... I highly suspect, you were once of her Court... so, I expect, she thinks of you as 'hers' as well."

Interrupting, Caron remarked to Dori, "Have you done any work with the Flame and your daughter?"

Dori sucked her breath in, "Nnnn... not really, not to any great extent... It is still the Healer's Flame and one needs a proper amount of training to even consider Its approach. Obviously, my daughter shows remarkable ability, but something on this level must be approached with knowledge and training. I could encase her and shield her as I do Tamlynn at times, and there may be some affect; yet, that's very slow and may simply

not produce anything. I shall consider it... and if anything makes sense I may do something, but..." she shrugged, "The experiments with Manora seem to have born the most fruit, in this case."

"All right." Caron agreed.

Manora, who had said virtually nothing since they had gathered, sat staring at the flames in the small fire of the dwelling, "I know this shall mean so much to those who come to our Isle in the future." Her words seemed to be directed to the glinting sparks as they crackled in the air.

Putting a hand to Manora's brow, Caron whispered, "I think I better take you back... You've become flushed. I have something I might give you that may improve that."

As they rose to leave, Llyria followed the movement of her friend as Manora and Caron left and walked down the path back to Manora's dwelling. Large tears caught in her eyes as she turned to her mother, "What is wrong?... I keep thinking she ought get better... the songs I sing, she says they help... But... she is not better... There are Healers everywhere... but, she is not better. I felt it, when I sang her." Tears streamed down her face as Dori, herself teary eyed, came up and hugged Llyria. "She's my favorite teacher."

"I know... she is a good friend... You do your best by her, my love... there is always hope."

Laying a hand upon his daughter's head, Tamlynn softly spoke, "Now you've become overtired, little one. It's past time you ought be asleep."

Rubbing her eyes fiercely, Llyria looked up at her father and tried to smile, "Will you sing to me, Papa?"

"Surely." he said as he took her from Dori to lift her up in his arms and carry her to her bed. For some time he sang to her, the healing songs of Bards as Dori sat listening by the fire, feeling the soothing strains lifting her as well as his voice carried pleasantly throughout the corners of the dwelling. Soon the gentle, slow breathing of sleep could be heard from Llyria's form as Tamlynn softly finished and drew away. Dori yawned and stretched as Tamlynn left his daughter's side. "I see you've had enough as well." He whispered.

"Ummm... I would that I could give more solace." She said hugging Tamlynn.

"None of us is meant to live forever... Not here, anyway. And the timing is a choice the soul must make."

"I know... You sing so beautifully."

Smiling, Tamlynn led his wife to their own bedding, "So, you wish me to sing you to sleep as well?"

"The thought passed through my mind."

Chuckling, Tamlynn laid them both into the bedded warmth, "All right... but, who shall sing me to sleep?"

"Umm..." was the final sound Dori emitted as she closed her eyes and began to drift. She could just hear the quiet strains of Tamlynn's renewed singing as she finally lost all sense of consciousness.

The scene was bizarre and unfamiliar to Llyria, the sky a bright, deep blue as she had never seen before. The rocky cliffs off a shore line rose in white and vivid greens above her as a pearly grey sea foamed and dashed upon the shore. In some ways, it

seemed as if the ground shifted and blurred from her sight to reappear in its brilliance once again. It was confusing and rich, much as waves of pungent scents turned into sight as deep tones welled up through her like vibrating billows of liquid smoke. As she moved, she seemed to move slowly, in many ways as one might move through water. Thinking she had heard her name called, Llyria turned to look out over the sea, searching for the source; then startled when she realized that someone stood in back of her. A tall, red-haired woman with dark green eyes smiled in cryptical amusement. "Gwyniffar?" asked Llyria.

"Who?" The woman asked, then shook her head, "No, that is not my name. I am Arionrhod... of Gwynedd..."

Llyria frowned, "Is that Gwydion's sister? The Priestess...? I've heard of you... my parents have spoken of you... You are a great Wise Woman."

Arionrhod smiled, "Ohhh..." she shrugged, "I sort of do this and that... I care about my People, I care about the People of Cymru... Do you care about the People of Cymru, Llyria?"

"Of course..."

"Good... Then, someday, I shall teach you all I know. How would that be?"

It seemed like a peculiar conversation to Llyria, so that she frowned and backed away. "Why are you here?"

"Because... because you are special... and your specialness called out across the wind and came to me. I listen to the wind, I acknowledge his wisdom. It was he who told me. The child of a Bard and a Healer, you are something new, and Eldritch blood runs through your soul as well. The wind proclaimed that you could become one of my best loved and finest students."

Llyria shuffled, she was still a child and did not really understand what might be happening to her, "Where are we? Can you help me heal Manora?"

Arionrhod paused to regard Llyria gently, "I am being very perplexing to you, aren't I... I forget that you are still very young. Forgive me... We are between the realms... your body sleeps. From here are many entrances, many exits, many doors. It is the world of the sorcerer, the priestess, the magician. From here one can weave dreams and bring them into reality. Here, we do indeed, walk the wind."

"How would I weave dreams?" spoke Llyria in sudden curiosity.

"You already do... You sing, you play... you are very aware of energy in its wonderful colored forms... but, you can do more... you can dance... and by dancing, you can control it better... and in time, you would learn to control well with all your talents."

"Oh..." Llyria's eyes grew wide, "And I could dance for Manora!... would that heal her? Tell me, lady... would that make my wonderful friend well again?"

Arionrhod drew in a long and thoughtful breath, "I'm not sure... sometimes things are not for us to know... but, it would help her spirit to move in whatever direction it is meant for her to go." A strong, lovely smile took over Arionrhod's whole being as the glowing colors shifted all about her like some incredible rainbow that lit up the skies. "Dance for me, Llyria... listen to the music of the wind and dance."

An odd and blustery wind rose up about the two figures as exquisite tones seemed to swirl about within it, pulling on Llyria as if asking her to join it. After a moment she realized that that was exactly what it wanted, so she began to let it move her; first carelessly, then with more purpose. It was pleasurable and sublime, better than any time

she had let herself dance with the Sacred Dancers, feeling the energies stream through her. After a time, she could feel herself controlling it, almost changing the tones themselves as she redirected the energies into what-ever ambition she chose.

"Good." Said Arionrhod at last, as the wind died down and Llyria herself began to stop. "You learn very quickly... But, I must go now... the sun begins to rise and we have stayed here nearly overlong. Goodbye, dear one. There may be time and time before we meet again. But remember this realm... 'this' you shall return to."

"Arionrhod?" Spoke Dori as she stirred a morning porridge. "She has truly grown in power... I'm not sure just what to feel... Though, of course, I honor her deeply."

"I am addressing some Runners today before they leave the Isle... would you wish to come with me, Llyria...?" Said Tamlynn as he took a helping of the porridge, "You might speak with the Dancers some, if you like. Discuss ideas. As you know, Dancers and Musicians weave the energies between themselves... perhaps there might be a way... to draw out Manora's energies, reweave them via healing music and then 'dance' them back to her... What do you think?"

Dori looked up at her husband, "I think that's 'very' interesting. I like that... I think that's good, Llyria... what do you think?"

"I'm not sure I totally understand... but, I want to try. Manora acted so tired last night."

"I know, dear." Said Dori, "We all worry."

Getting up that morning, Caron realized her friend to be full of fever, "Ah, my friend." she said quietly to herself, as she went to start a low fire and begin some water to boil. Her rich, chestnut hair was sprinkled with streaks of grey that matched the color of her eyes and Manora smiled at it in her haze. Caron caught the subtle movement, "You best not be thinking of getting up, dear friend... Let me fix you something and maybe a bit later you might rise."

"Is it morning, then?" spoke Manora fairly weakly. "Just... there's only a bit of pink on the horizon..." "I've lost so much time with my students. I'm not even certain just how far along anyone is anymore."

Realizing that it was mostly fever speaking, Caron spoke, "Hush... there's plenty of time to be worrying after students. Surely others are filling in."

"But, Llyria..." said Manora nearly rising.

"Now, my friend... I can't allow you to do this." She sat on the edge of the bed, pushing Manora back into place, "I do not wish to fight you, sister, but I shall if I must. Now, lie back down. Llyria will be by... she loves you as much as you love her... she learns quickly from you... she wants desperately to heal you... we all want desperately to heal you."

"It can not be stopped..." said Manora with tears suddenly glinting in her eyes, "And now, I begin to feel pain... Only Llyria... relieves... some of it... But, I am wrong to do this, to let her experiment... I know she believes perhaps she can heal me."

"How do you know she can't." said Caron almost snapping, then softening, "Oh, Manora... let her try... And perhaps we may be wrong... Our arts have never touched this sort of thing before."

"This is an old wound, Caron... It is deep, it has grown. My system, my heart, they are weak. It would take great strength to rebuild such damage."

Caron kissed the top of Manora's hair, "I have some tea for you... and a little to eat in a moment. You'll feel better in a spell and perhaps we might take a short walk. The skies said last night that today was like to be quite lovely."

"You're a great friend, Caron... and wonderful to stay with me when I know your family needs you, too."

"They can well take care of themselves. A little space away from each other is not like to hurt. Besides, if they miss me so terribly... Then they can surely find me easily enough. I don't worry about them, they're hail and hardy, believe me." Caron heard Manora chuckle a little at her words, so she knew it fine enough to get up again and get her friend the tea.

Llyria spent a long while with the Sacred Dancers and Musicians as they played with various ideas. After he had spoken with the Runners, Tamlynn had also joined his daughter with the others as he kept a rather careful eye on how they proceeded, even giving some observations himself. After a bit, something occurred to him and he drew his daughter aside, "Let me play for you, daughter... I shall sing and play the harp... pull it into yourself, then let it move you... and dance..." Then, he looked at the Dancers, "I ask that you support her as I mean to allow her to pull everything that she can in. If I break it suddenly, be prepared to enfold her as quickly as possible. I shall take back over as promptly as I'm able... I also ask the Musicians to support 'me'." He said looking over at them. With that, everyone took up places in a circular format, the Musicians rimmed on the outside and the Dancers within. Llyria stood waiting in the center as her father sat with his harp at the western edge. For a time Tamlynn just sang as his daughter listened, her eyes closed and face intent. Then he began the harp as well and it seemed a warmth began to fill the circle clockwise, spiraling its way until it found Llyria. An intensity began to nourish her, slowly growing like the sparks of a fire. As she began to sway, the Dancers monitored fiercely as signals of alert seemed to fill them, dancing in a support sense, only making shielding movements about her. The Musicians also began support with quiet, mirrored tones as Tamlynn continued to feed the energy he was now startlingly aware of.

As Llyria continued to dance, sometimes frantic, sometimes slow, the energies she pulled from Tamlynn became hot and vibrant until it seemed an array of sprouting colors could be seen emitting from the circle. Just when Tamlynn thought it might be best to finally quit this test, Llyria herself collapsed to the ground, breaking her ties abruptly with him. Though he felt a slight tug of shock, nothing more came and he looked up to see the Dancers enfolding Llyria as she lay a moment on the ground. Yet, it only took her that minute to return and soon she was sitting up expounding about how wonderful it had been. Smiling, Tamlynn went up to his daughter and hugged her roundly, "That was incredible," he said, "I have never seen such before."

"Oh, Papa, I could control it! It moved where I wanted it to move; it was like I could build with it, form it."

"Yet," said one of the Dancers, his face flushed from the exertion, "it was wise to have the shielding, little one."

"I'll agree with you on that," spoke Tamlynn, "And until you truly 'can' handle it by yourself, Llyria, this is the system I would advise." Seeing a bit of a falling in his daughter's eyes, he kissed her forehead, "Ah, but you did so magnificently!... Believe me,

my one, even your mother would have been taken aback. The Bardic Council would scold me never ending if they realized what I kept here. But, I agree with Manora and your mother; you are both a Healer and a Bard. You belong here. However, I might want more time with this before we might try anything with Manora... you understand?" Llyria looked up at him widely for a space, though she shook her head, 'yes' and he answered softly, "Good."

One of the musicians came up to question, "So now... how do we proceed... what do we do with this wonderfully raised energy? When the Singers, Musicians and Dancers perform together, there is more an interplay of energy that passes back and forth between us; the energy gets woven and rewoven between us all... Llyria 'took' the energy you gave her, Tamlynn, and rewove it entirely by herself and refashioned it. I 'know' she is able to do the usual form of interplay, I've been involved in the workings she's participated in before. This is quite different."

"I agree," remarked Tamlynn, "This is something to ponder awhile. But, it was wonderful and it worked... we shall build on that." With that, they all began to break up as Tamlynn turned to face his child, "This is enough for the day... What do you say we go fishing?"

Knowing this would get her interest, he was pleased when she sparkled at him, "Let's go!" as she became a nine year old child once more, who jumped and ran to their dwelling to retrieve poles and spears.

Sensing a change in the air, Dori went to Manora's dwelling in the afternoon, taking a couple selected stones and crystals. The air seemed oddly shaded about the door and windows as Dori quietly knocked. Answering the simple door, Caron was not surprised to see Dori standing in front of her. "Come in... I wish I were surprised to see you. I don't quite understand what's happened, but, she's taken a sudden turn. I've given her what I know to give in hopes she might pick up a little... but, it's not helped as I had hoped."

On the bedding, Manora slept in a deceptively peaceful manner, the flush upon her cheeks too rose. Dori went up to her and knelt upon the floor as she ran her hand with the stones and crystals in it over Manora's form. It seemed as if there might be some flickering as she moved her hand back and forth and Caron watched in fascination. Then, Dori drew her hand away to hold to herself closely for a moment, her eyes shut in subdued contemplation. When she did come back, she quietly rose up and went over to the small fire to fix herself some tea. "Excuse me," she said, "I really rather need this."

"Whatever you like, Lady... I would fix it for you, if you'd wish."

Dori shook her head 'no'. "I need the motion for a moment as well." She looked up at Caron as the other woman squatted by her, "I'm not sure what to do..." She whispered, "What I get is faint, and growing distant rapidly. Llyria,..." she sighed, "Goddess knows... I'm not sure she's going to understand."

"Surely... here, on the Holy Isle... she's seen Death before..."

Sipping at the tea, Dori paused in contemplation, "Not like this... even I have trouble with this... It's hardly but a few months ago that Manora was a strong and vibrant teacher... A wonderful Healer... Perceptive... a better teacher for my daughter than even myself. And one has to ask... 'why' is she deciding to leave?"

"Perhaps Llyria can still do something... I have been more than surprised at what Llyria is able to do... for a time, Manora had changed."

"I don't know, Caron. What is meant to be, shall be... I think all that has been given Manora is a little space of time... perhaps she's stayed as she has to teach, to guide some things with Llyria. She made both myself and husband realize that Llyria was both Healer and Bard, and that she needs learn both. That alone was much to establish. We also know to stretch ourselves, experiment. I don't know. You've been such a wonderful friend, Caron. I know Llyria is a little shy of you, but be open for her, will you? She may honestly need you more than you realize... you are a dear friend of Manora's... there may come a time when Llyria shall wish to hear what you have to say, and your memories. I believe you know Manora better than any of the rest of us really does. And you love her. There is a bond you share with Llyria... remember that."

Caron smiled warmly, "I shall.. and I shall stay as long as you need for me to."

Dori nodded, "Thank-you." Looking over at Manora, Dori saw the woman slightly stir, moving Dori to set her cup down to take up her stones once more. "Let me do a little of what I can. When the time comes, the Gates of the Flame must be opened to her..." She stood and moved back over to the bed, "For now... I call a little of the Flame to comfort her... Do not worry, Caron... I am not pulling in that much and I shall shield you if needs be. In fact, you may sit by me, if you like. Send her peace and love and it shall serve to aid me..." With that, Caron sat down next to Dori as Dori again passed the stones and crystals over Manora's form, her eyes closed in silent concentration. This time, Dori's hand glowed as a twinkling sprinkled from it, flashing across the room. After a moment, Caron closed her eyes and simply concentrated thoughts of peace and love to Manora as Dori continued for quite some time. For a while, Caron found herself moving into a light trance, seeming to see Manora walking along the shores of the Island, smiling out over the waves and picking stray flowers that she might put into her vase at home. A stray, lone tear moved down Caron's cheek as she let out an unguarded sigh.

A hand touched Caron's hair as a voice softly wisked, "Thank-you." It was Manora and she moved to slightly sit as Dori had finished and sat back upon the ground. "I feel a little better... thank-you... thank-you, both."

"I shall go now..." spoke Dori, "Perhaps that shall help you a little... for a while."

"I'd like to see Llyria soon..." Said Manora.

Dori looked at Manora thinking, "Yes..." then bit her lip, "When she gets home with her father, I will send her... she may stay as long as you like... as long as you need." With that, Dori got up, "I must go now... Manora," she said as she came to the door, "We love you... Never forget that... and we stand by you... We shall not force you, or hold you... remember that." Leaving, Dori realized a certain sense of relief had been emitted from Manora and she knew she had given the woman permission that perhaps even Manora had not fully understood she craved.

Spending a few days with Manora and Caron, Llyria was distraught for though she took Manora back to the healing places she had before through singing, Manora would only find very temporary relief. It was also disconcerting to always be monitored by Caron, though she understood the need. "Why can't I dance for her now, Papa?" She finally burst one evening having come home from a long day with exceedingly little success.

Tamlynn looked over at Dori before responding to his daughter, "I'm not sure how wise that is yet, my one. Somehow I would have to key in on your healing places, sing them, and you would have to dance them... You would have to pull her in as well, would you not?... But firstly, how would I sing your healing places?"

Llyria looked at him simply as if he ought to already know, "I'd send it to you... then, you'd just sing it back to me so that I might dance."

"Hmm." Said Tamlynn raising his brows, but agreeing, "So then... where would Manora be? How do 'you' propose to bring her in?"

"If she's in the center, in the circle... then I would simply dance around her."

"Your daughter is out thinking you." Smiled Dori.

"Um hmm... well... It sounds logical enough... Though I might be concerned about the intensity."

"Let Caron be there... with Manora. She's gentle and firm... she could stop me if she needed to."

To that, Dori smiled widely, pleased to hear Llyria say as such about Caron, "You are getting on with Caron?"

"She's a Wise woman... she felt so different at first... she made me nervous... But she loves Manora, she's especially good to her and looks after her... and she's able to stop me when I work with Manora if something goes wrong." Llyria, who was only fussing with her evening meal, set her plate down to look at her father once more, "Please, Papa... let me dance for Manora... let me dance for her soon."

"Well," sighed Tamlynn... "It's but a few days to new moon... let's wait till new moon, then... that gives me time to think a little more and talk to the Dancers and Musicians. If we do this, I think we better try to do it right. We shall need to talk with Caron and Manora some about it, too."

"Thank-you, Papa..." said Llyria, finally deciding to eat a bit of her food.

In the night as Llyria slept, a restless Tamlynn turned to his wife, "You know, I am quite afraid what this may mean... this dance."

Dori looked into Tamlynn's eyes, a wistful sadness strewn about her features, "Be a gentle force and help its guidance... It's all that any of us can do."

"This is not a task for a child... Llyria is..."

"She has a great gift and there is no way to turn back with that gift... Caron will be there... And so shall I. I shall have to be ready to open the Gates of the Flame, if needs be... It is best... Manora shall have a wonderfully guided journey, if journey this shall be... Don't worry, Llyria will be fine. She'll be surrounded with protection, and Manora shall be with those who love her best."

Tamlynn looked back over at his daughter one last time before snuggling back into the bed by his mate, "I love you both so much; and you're both so strong minded!"

"Stubborn, you say... like an ox?... That's all right." She gently teased, then turned more serious, "Don't worry so. It shall be as it was meant. Just prepare properly..."

Tamlynn sighed long and hard so that Dori finally enfolded him to urge him to relax, which after a few moments of further struggle, he finally did.

By the new moon Manora had become so pale and wane even with Llyria's songs and Caron's careful attendance that there were many fears that she might not see it through. Yet, the day came as last minute preparations were administered to and a certain strange excitement filled the air. By evening, even Manora was in good spirits, speaking

her own encouragement to Llyria's efforts, pleased that Llyria and Caron seemed finally truly becoming friends. When it came near time for the ritual and the dance, several Healers came to Manora's dwelling, where they lifted her and carried her to the circle sight. For a long while the Healers came to see her, aware what this night might bring, hugging and holding her, offering her what positive energies they might. Though several eyes became misted, they maintained a spirit of good humor as they ultimately took their leave and Caron took her place at Manora's side.

As they had done at the beginning, Tamlynn and the Musicians formed an outer ring as the Dancers formed an inner one with Llyria, Caron and Manora at its center. For a long while, daughter and father stood facing each other, both their eyes closed, concentrating; Llyria calling up her healing places and sending them to Tamlynn, Tamlynn receiving and preparing himself to begin to sing.

It seemed a terrible, long time as the two stood still as the night itself, so that even Dori began to wonder at it. At last, Tamlynn drew a long, deep breath as if gathering every ounce of strength his being might have. His voice began soft, low and very slow as if continuing to try to hold some tenuous line, grappling slightly with it. Yet, after a moment, the sound became strong and rich as Llyria began to open up her own reception as the energies started coming back to her. Beautiful words formed; sad and rich, of marvelous forests and brilliant colored flowers where a river flowed sweet and free. A welling grew in Llyria as her father sang on, until her whole body began to sway and slowly move about in gentle, delicate movements that belied the power Manora suddenly could feel the girl weaving. It caught Manora's breath as she realized that she was being quickly drawn within, drawn not only into the song, but within the dance itself. With every move Llyria made, Manora felt herself fly as if she were ascending to some great height, then dip back again over magnificent terrain. As Manora rode as if enfolded within mighty wings, she saw a great river below that came closer and closer. At last they came to the stupendous river to land and Manora's eyes grew round as she realized that the river ran red. 'Drink,' she seemed to be told, and with cupped, shaking hands she drew the liquid to her lips as she heard in her heart, 'This is the river of love and death. Drink deep of the Mother's milk.' Tears streamed her features, knowing what she had done as she immersed her face and hands in it as well.

Suddenly, the wings drew her up again, where they landed on a long and winded path. This time, Manora was truly aware of Llyria's presence. "Little sister." she smiled as Llyria looked at her. "Shall you walk with me awhile?"

Llyria responded, "Of course, but... where is it that we walk?"

Manora pointed to the blue-whiteness where a glorious flame appeared to glow with marvelous intensity at the edge of the skies, "I have new duties now."

Understanding, Llyria's mouth dropped wide, "But you are a Healer! We need you... you are strong and powerful... how can we remain without your teaching?"

Impulsively, Manora smiled, a bright and healthy smile, "What makes you think I really leave you?... Can you not see? I leave a body tired and diseased, that is all... And... I shall be your Guide... yours and Caron. I shall 'never' leave you, either of you, ever. I love you more than I can say... Good bye, little sister... I'll be back sooner than you can imagine." With that, Manora turned, suddenly happier than she had ever been, her heart and mind fixed on the growing rainbow of fiery light in the distance. The gate of the Healer's Flame had been opened.

Instantaneously Llyria slumped from her dance to the ground as Tamlynn did his best to gently break off and begin a healing song of his own. The Dancers, like a single wave, moved in to encircle the three, well aware that Manora had indeed chosen to leave. Caron had broken into sobbing, though she gladly received the healing that was being sent all around her. For a time, Llyria lay motionless though her breath came even and normal. Dori, after reclosing the Flame's Gate, finally came up into the circle to gently enfold her daughter. "Arionrhod," whispered Llyria as she slowly began to move her eyes, "Manora." causing her mother's brows to arch as she picked the girl up out of the circle and brought her to Tamlynn, where he lay his harp on the ground, fully sat and received her, continuing to sing as she truly recovered. With that, Dori went back over to Caron, doing her own healing work, holding Caron closely for as long as was needed.

By the time the funeral pyre was built, Caron and Llyria clung to each other like surviving sisters; and though Caron accepted the knowledge of Manora's new status as Guide with glad emotion, she would not hide her sorrow of the loss. Too soon, Caron would need to leave to join family and home, though now her heart ached at her departure. She would have liked to take Llyria with her, but knew the girl had a life of her own to live and that their paths had different trails. But one. And that somehow, that one fact would never truly let them be apart. As the blaze caught up and smoke filled the skies, they hugged each other tightly and Caron knew they would see each other often in their dreams.