

Rhiannon – Child of Twilight

Chapter 3

The Lair of Serpent Dreams

The mountains stood tall near and far in the Cambrian region of Gwynedd, splashing deep colors in the sun's call for twilight as the moon began to rise. The cool breeze played amid the trees and grasses near the entrance of a cave as two young women, neither more than fourteen summers, played their swords in the fading light of multi-colored shades. Neither woman was very large; the one lithe, golden skinned with wheat-colored hair, the other more full-bodied with dark hair and fair skin. There was laughter in the dark-haired one even as they practiced. "You are far too serious, my love." She twinkled, jumping from the other woman's well placed thrust.

"Umm... it is hard not to be serious when one might just get their head cut off." Said the light haired woman giving forth several well skilled plays and making the other woman fall back in defense.

Finally the dark-haired woman motioned that they stop as she stood trying to catch her breath. "Ohhh... I think that is enough, Rhiannon. It is about to be dark and I, for one, would like my supper... I am very hungry."

Rhiannon regarded the other with a knowing glint to her eyes, "I see... always thinking of your stomach, Mab..." She raised her brows a bit and regarded her lover appraisingly, "I admit that you are very pretty, but you need to watch those curves don't get a little out of bounds..." With that she came up to Mab and hugged her closely though they both were sweated from their exercise. Kissing lightly, they turned back towards the cave, their arms softly wrapped about each other.

"It isn't food that would make me fat... It would be lack of exercise and lack of something to do. Somehow I doubt that would happen as long as I stick around you... then, of course, I could always marry, have several children, do a lot of cooking. That would be a way, eh?" She said playfully, kissing Rhiannon's cheek.

"And you would prefer some man to me? Just so you could eat to your heart's content?" The cave they entered was lit by many torches as it led back into an intricate pattern that connected it to many other caves throughout the mountainous region. The women came to an area where they retired their swords and changed their clothing. A great pool of underground water stood near by where they washed the sweat from their bodies before getting dressed again. "Sooo... Mab, my love, my dearest... Would you prefer some man to me?" Rhiannon asked with a straight face.

"You can't be serious." Remarked Mab as she rubbed her wet hair with a coarse cloth. Rhiannon shrugged as she put on a rough clothed robe causing Mab to laugh, "I came to this life for no other reason than to be with you... I have no other focus. Man or woman, it is only you I am here for... Should I say it one more time?" Dressed and waiting for Mab to finish, Rhiannon raised a brow again smiling widely, obviously amused. Realizing this Mab asked, "And what are you thinking?"

“Ohhh... I am just trying to imagine you... Pregnant, fat, eating... My, it’s not a pretty sight!... Please, I beg of you, dearest love... Do stay with me!” Rhiannon said as seriously as she could, though her voice echoed the sound of laughter in it.

“Can we go now?” Said Mab in mock disgust as she tied her robes with a red and white cord and throwing her hair back from her face. Taking their sweated clothes with them to wash later the next day, they walked along the lighted tunnels where Mab spoke again, “This evening... Umm, there’s a small group of Sacred Dancers that have come down especially to the Bardic Seat here at Waljanargel. They have some new ideas they want to show the Council here in Cymru and have come all the way from North Pictland. They’re going to practice some the next few evenings before showing it and have invited me to practice with them.”

“Umm... and leave me to amuse myself, eh?... Is this an all night date?”

Mab shrugged, “I ‘am’ a Sacred Dancer... and I ‘love’ to dance... that is my ‘Gift’... and I know well that someday I shall have precious little time for it.”

“Yes, my Mab, you are very gifted... You add just a bit of the faye to every move you make... Perhaps, then, I might come and watch, do you think?”

“Uh, uh...” Mab shook her head ‘no’, “Not until they show it at Council and it has been reviewed... they need to make certain of the balance of their energies without possible interference... they believe they might add mine... But, believe me, your influence by just being there would be much too strong.”

“Well... I ‘see’, then... Nobody but Sacred Dancers... Secrets, secrets, secrets.” Rhiannon shook her head good-naturedly. As they rounded one corner they ran into a young woman with long dark hair and black eyes dressed in clothes that showed she was near her time to go out to be a Runner. “Hey, Megan.” Said Rhiannon pleasantly, “How are you?... Is there any food left out in the kitchens? I know we’re a bit on the late side.”

“Would it not be made certain that ‘you’ had something to eat?” Though Rhiannon’s voice startled Megan, she caught her composure quickly, staring into Rhiannon’s eyes as if in dare.

Surprised at Megan’s words, Rhiannon tried to take on an easy posture, smiling pleasantly, “You’re studying with Kyle, aren’t you? I’m so pleased the Mother Danu called him back to Waljanargel. It’s good to have his friendship again and he ‘is’ one of the best teachers. I think perhaps even the best. You are most fortunate to be studying with him.”

It was difficult to maintain the stance Megan wanted to as she listened to Rhiannon speak. Something in Megan softened as memories of elsewhere touched her mind and she lowered her eyes. “Yes... yes... a fine teacher. Excuse me, would you? I’ve chores to do and then I’ve got to go study. I’ve a lot to memorize.” With that, she moved quickly away, rushing down the tunnel as if something might be after her.

Rhiannon watched her go quizzically, “Kyle says she’s very smart... But, he says she’s a bit too interested in power... She keeps asking about spells. Sometimes about how to use the voice and words to make people do things instead of how they’re supposed to effect positive changes in people... He wonders if she really has the right attitude and if her training should not be stopped...” She turned and walked with Mab thoughtfully, “She’s really quite lovely, though, isn’t she?”

“A real spell-binder.” Remarked Mab, “And perhaps that’s the point... But... if her training were stopped?...”

“It is feared she might go another route... and she’d ruin her chances of ‘ever’ being a Bard.”

“What do you mean? What other route?” Asked Mab putting her arm about Rhiannon’s waist as they were about to enter the kitchens and Rhiannon stopped before going in. “What ‘other’ route, Rhiannon?”

“You’ve known people like that, Mab... Enough knowledge, enough power to be very dangerous. I know Kyle tosses over it. He does think sometimes he ought just send her back home. Yet, she’s got the talent and the mind. If he could just get the ethics in her. Get her to realize just how important they are. If she doesn’t listen she could ruin herself for many, many lifetimes.”

They went in and one of the cooks saw to their food. “You needn’t fuss, Alma... We know well we’re late.” Spoke Mab, knowing Rhiannon tried to be careful to avoid speaking to anyone who were not actually part of the Bardic folk. As they sat Mab dug in happily, enjoying the food with a passion that only a good workout might give. “She likes you... you know?... I think she may very well be attracted to you.”

“Attracted to me? Likes me?... Who likes me?... You can’t mean Megan... May be jealous of me, I suppose... But, I don’t see how you’d get that she likes me.” Frowned Rhiannon as she gingerly ate.

“Ohhh... Goodness. She likes you, she’s jealous of you. I think there’s a little of both... and she ‘is’ quite lovely.” Mab poked a little.

“Ummm... “ Spoke Rhiannon, a little bored with the thought now. “I think I, too, shall spend some time this evening going over memorizations...” she sighed, “I must attend Danu tomorrow... There are a lot of court procedures she wants me to go over with her.... Ah, goodness, Mab... How am I ever going to be ready? I’ve had to live just about every situation a Bard must live in short order... and I must do this all by the time I am fifteen!... My mother was a great resource for basic knowledge... I am fortunate for her foresight and patience... But now the time grows so close and I must hone and refine that knowledge to a fine edge... How am I ever going to manage?” With that she sighed again, drawing away from her food in distraction.

“You chose to come, my love... I am here... Kyle is here... When your time for the Bonding presents itself you ‘will’ be ready. Choose your Advisors well. That will be the most important task.”

“Kyle...” Rhiannon said, her thoughts drifting inward, “Kyle will be my Advisor... He will be my Chief Advisor.”

“Have you told him?” Mab continued to eat happily.

“No... not yet... He’s enough to do. He teaches here and is an Advisor to Danu... Much of his teaching will have to stop, he will become an integral part of helping and ‘teaching’ me. I’d rather he’d enjoy the time he has without being concerned over things.”

“You know...” Spoke Mab thoughtfully, “I wonder sometimes... about what you’ve told me about Kyle and your father... Has he ever gotten over your father?”

“No... Mab... I really don’t think he ever will... But, I don’t see why he should... Kyle has always said that it was a very special time for him. A moment when time itself seemed to stop, if only for a little while... Why ask him to forget it? My mother is much the same.”

“Yes... but your mother has gone on to love another...”

“That is up to Kyle... Though... I think he’s tried in the past... I really just feel he enjoys his solitude anymore. And memories... And he loves to teach... In some ways I hate to take him from that... But, he’ll understand... You know, sometimes I think I may have usurped his position. And I don’t think he’ll follow after me. It would be too long from now.”

“Follow after you?” puzzled Mab.

“I believe had I not come, ‘he’ would have been ‘The Chosen’... He would have been the next Head of the Council... There is a greatness in him, Mab. A wisdom I do not possess. And I shall need his wisdom... his love and his strength. I shall grieve mightily the day he leaves this world.”

Mab raised her cup, “Then may he live to be very, very old.”

“Yes,” agreed Rhiannon sipping at her own cup, “Yes... Until I, too, have ‘real’ wisdom.”



“Words are clever vehicles... With just the ‘right’ inflection you can do a myriad of things with a word. You can give sorrow or pain, awe or pleasure with the same set of words. Yet, the right inflection with just the right words is a hundredfold more powerful... Remember your duty to use these powers in a rightful manner. Your words should be those that encourage peace. The only time they may incite is when battle is inevitable. Think politeness, think peace whenever you open your mouth and that is the thought you will induce with your words. A Bard has much political sway – it ‘must not’ be abused. They will listen to you because they realize the holy path you trod. And remember well, too – this ‘is’ a holy path. Do not seek to bend the mind of others...” Kyle sat with his pupils on the ground of the floor in a room of the many caves.

“What charge, Father, would we employ should we disobey what you have said?” asked Megan quizzically as her mind turned sharply.

“You shall become the Wards of a Mighty force. Magick will come from your very breath... Wrong begets wrong, Megan... Always... Any wrong you do will find its way back to you. Back to your heart... This is ‘not’ an easy path. Your mettle is tested over and over, life to life. True Bardic Gift is bestowed ‘only’ when the mettle is proved. What you do is carried on the wind.” He could see Megan’s eyes wandering, “Megan...” He said kindly, “Have I answered you well enough?” She nodded and he noticed a presence at the entrance of the room. Rhiannon came in and sat amid the other pupils as Megan narrowed her eyes. “Now.” Said Kyle going over to a corner of the room and pulling out a large flat wooden box that he drug over to place in front of the students. As the classes were always small, this one having only five now that Rhiannon had entered to join, they were all able to gather themselves around the box Kyle had brought. The box was full of sand and Kyle sat behind them watching their faces. “Let’s have a little fun... I’m going to sing for you... place your hands over the sand and close your eyes.” When they all had done as he asked he proceeded, “As I sing, I want you all to let your fingers trace in the sand... Don’t be trying to make images. Just let your fingers do as they feel.” With that, Kyle sang a little while, watching his students to make certain they all had at least drawn their fingers in the sand a little bit. When he stopped, they all seemed to automatically open their eyes. “Sooo... what do you see?” Asked Kyle “In the sand?”

“Squiggly lines.” Remarked a young man with dark hair called Caradowc, a little unsure.

“Yes... I guess they are.” Smiled Kyle looking in the box in front of the young man. “Why are they so squiggly, do you think?”

“It’s what you’re singing.” Said Megan who seemed almost bored. “He perceives your song as squiggles.” The others giggled some and Kyle smiled again though Rhiannon showed no reaction.

Then Kyle looked at Megan’s whose lines formed an almost crosshatch design. “And you perceive my song in straight lines?”

“They’re woven lines, really... an energy weave.”

“Ahh...” Remarked Kyle, “Yes, alright.” Then he looked at Rhiannon’s where delicate spirals formed in and out. “And yours, Rhiannon?”

“Stars... I felt like I was walking on a pathway to the stars. Colors everywhere. Flashes of light. Then the earth below beneath the night’s starry sky. I let my hands go to do as they willed.”

Seeing that everyone had become a little mesmerized as Rhiannon spoke, Kyle broke it quickly having realized his mistake. “Yes... well, perhaps we can take that into the next exercise... Everything you all did was correct... Even Caradowc’s squiggles... Not that anyone ‘could’ be wrong... There is no wrong... Colored lights, woven energy, squiggles of energy... sooo...” Kyle got up removing the box of sand and getting a bundle of colored fabric that he laid down in front of them all where he pulled out long strands of fabric, each strand one color. To each person he gave a group of these fabrics to put in front of them, then said, “We’re going to try two things... I’m going to sing again for you. As I sing I want you to look at the fabric a moment, but not too long. Then pick up the color that you feel drawn to. Wave it about if you like, but then pick up another color as soon as you feel drawn to it. Use both hands if you wish. Move the fabric, swirl it, wave it... Doesn’t matter... After a while I’ll ask you to get up with your fabrics and let your whole body move with them... And if you should feel inclined to get someone else’s fabric when you get up... well... that’s up to you, too.” With that Kyle began to sing once more and for a moment or so everyone just sort of stared at the fabric. Then Rhiannon smiled a little, beginning to pick at the colors, then taking them and swirling them. This seemed to relax the others so that they, too, began to do the same. Soon there was a joyous riot of colors streaming everywhere amid some pleased laughter as fabrics flitted in the air sometimes whipping across each other. Kyle never even had to tell them to get up for it seemed a rather natural progression. As they did, they found themselves dancing about, chasing after the fabrics and even weaving themselves about each other, grabbing for each other’s colors and laughing. Before too long they became entangled with one another falling to the ground in a delighted fit of laughter even Kyle could no longer contain as he broke his singing and chuckled along with them.

Finally they quieted, still grinning at each other, Rhiannon as much as the others as one of them blurt out, “I saw the colors, Father! In your singing... It was as if the fabric only echoed what I saw in my head.”

“Yes, Kent... Very good. Very good... Sounds have colors, colors have sounds.” Remarked Kyle, “And a Bard is aware of that... How do the colors make you feel?”

“They made me feel happy.” Quipped Kent.

“I felt free... Like I could almost fly.” Said a young woman with red-blond hair and freckled face.

“All good”, Said Kyle, “Of course... No wrong answers, as I said... Colors, sounds, smells, tastes, touch... All intertwine in the mind of the Bard... All are part of each other... Now... if we’ve settled back down I should like to hear some of what you’ve memorized in the last week. We can go over some inflection... And I do hope you’ve all been doing your breathing exercises... and next moon I’ll want to go over some gestures again.... And after this example we have just performed I do hope you will take advantage of the wonderful group of Sacred Dancers we have with us for a time from Pictland... I think it shall now make even more sense to you... They’ve shown their work to the Council, their door is open... And they’ve some fascinating new postures I think may help you... Perhaps you’ll even ‘see’ the energy they weave now. They have much to teach you.”

When everyone had left after the class Rhiannon remained with Kyle. “Well, my dear.” He said, “I enjoy it so much when you sit in on class... What did you think?”

“What I always think, Father... That you are wonderful... Very patient... And great fun, too.” She smiled softly.

“And have ‘you’ been working on your memorizations?” He smiled generously as he searched for some scrolls and put away the fabrics.

“Yes, Father.”

“Not that you need any lessons in inflection or gesture... Your ethics are superior, your mind a great harvest of detail... Are you ready to walk through the Serpent’s Lair?” He said facing her again.

“I don’t know, Father.” She suddenly hugged him seeking his warmth. “Sometimes I really wonder what I thought I was getting into by coming here. By being part of ‘this life’... Can I really accomplish anything?”

“My dear child,” He hugged back as he kissed the top of her head, “It is as if you were my own daughter, I love you so much... If you want to accomplish something, you ‘will’... You came here out of a love I do not totally grasp...” He shook his head, “You must have seen something in us worth your time, your effort... Worth giving up your world for.”

She drew away, “I need to work on my dream-time. Could you monitor me? I have nearly made it through the labyrinth, but there is one more barrier I must face. I think it is my fear of becoming earth-bound. Of remaining here forever... Strange I’d fear that, isn’t it? Since I chose to do just that.”

Kyle shook his head and smiled warmly, “I don’t find that strange at all... shall we remove ourselves to a smaller chamber?”

In the hall outside the class chamber Megan listened to the exchange. For a long while she pursed her lips wondering what she might do. She could tell they had left via a way she was unfamiliar with, but she dared not give any indication of her presence. When she was certain they were gone she peered back into the chamber trying to discern if she might guess where they went. Deciding she could not tell she finally gave up and left as well.

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“Caradowc... Have you ever wondered about the Mysteries?” Remarked Megan to the young man as they found themselves alone for once in one of the student chambers, seated casually on the beds.

Shrugging, Caradowc looked at his friend, “The Mysteries? How do you mean? What we learn are called mysteries.” He pulled some leaves of writing out and slowly went over the words a moment, “Whew! I remember writing all this stuff down and I didn’t think it was so bad at the time. But now as I look at it again, I don’t know if I can get all this memorized by next class or not.”

Not paying much attention to him, Megan nearly whispered in a conspiratory tone, “Mysteries, Caradowc. The passing of Power. Of Knowledge...Abilities, the weaving of spells... They say there is a well here. At the center of the Serpent’s Lair. To drink of its waters gives the knowledge of the Universe.”

Coming to attention from her voice, Caradowc looked at Megan quizzically, then replied, “Only the Chosen is ever given to the Lair... But they also say it is more a state of mind than ‘where’ it is. The real well is something one must find within oneself.”

“I’m not so sure...” She countered, smiling enigmatically, “And I think there is a way to win power from others. To ‘get’ someone to pass power to you whether or not they are aware.” Hardly being in the mood for study, Megan opened the small chest at the foot of her narrow bed each student was allowed that contained both a change of clothes and religious tools and gear. Many charms and talismans were scattered throughout her clothes and a smell of herbs drifted up.

“Why do you speak so much about power and enchantment, Megan? Don’t you think it’s hard enough to learn all the things we need to... Perhaps you ought to have apprenticed to a sorcerer.” Sighed Caradowc setting the leaves back down.

“No... too many of them deal in simple tricks. I’m interested in ‘real’ Mysteries. ‘Real’ Power. Like Rhiannon... Have you not wondered?... Why should she have so much being passed on to her? She is no older than you or I. I truly don’t believe she is any more intelligent. Yet, sometimes they fuss over her as if she were some great queen.” Taking out a ritual knife, Megan played with it to watch it flash in candlelight.

“She’s the Chosen, Megan... And rare, I hear... They say it was known before her birth. I mean, usually the Chosen is picked by the Council Head but a year or two before the power is passed in that the Head of Council will not live much longer afterwards. Usually only long enough to make all the final transitions from what I understand... Sort of sad, but, anyway... What’s even more interesting about Rhiannon... if my lore is right, she’s going through all the ‘final’ transitions before the Bonding ritual. Isn’t that curious?” Caradowc found himself sitting by Megan, intrigued by her despite himself.

“Curious, mmm... She’s not even fifteen, Caradowc... It’s not curious, it’s insane.”

She looked at him fully and he felt himself gazing into her large black eyes and for a moment Caradowc only continued to stare, being drawn into them; then finally found the strength to pull his mind away, “But Megan,” he nearly whispered himself, his throat having become dry, “Bardic Gift is often discovered in someone younger than she is now. There have been cases where a person was still but a child. Earthly age has nothing to do with it... Megan, you ‘know’ that... they whisper that she herself is a gift.

A gift from the Realm of Light.” He lowered his voice even more with the last sentence as if he were almost afraid to say it.

“Hmph... What do you know about ‘the Realm of Light’? Faeries, Elves? If she is truly from ‘that’ Realm she is more like some ‘trick’ sent to confuse us... If she ‘is’ from another Realm, how do we know that there might not be problems from it? Opposition, jealousy... from ‘that’ Realm. Or worse.”

“You speak almost as if you have experience.”

“My people have many legends that deal with that Realm... But the one I remember the best... was of an Eldritch princess. She was sent to this world, despite her being promised to an Elven lord. Her family feared him and thought that to put her into the material realm would effectively hide her. Yet, he finally discovered their deception and became so angry that he wrecked havoc on all around him until the Eldritch agreed to get her back, only to find that it wasn’t so simple. The material can lay claim on an Elven being’s spirit and it was fast laying claims on hers. The lord finally realized that the only answer to retrieving her was for himself to enter the material world and seek her out...” Megan’s eyes grew distant as if she were recalling rather than explaining something.

“Well...” hesitated Caradowc. He wasn’t certain that he liked all this but he didn’t seem to be able to make himself stop his curiosity. “But, Megan... if he entered the material world, would he also not be caught here as she was?”

“She wasn’t yet. And by taking proper precautions, he was able to retain strong ties to his people so that not only could he be here safely but he could also return once he had found her. That he might have the proper tools to return her as well despite what she may have done to try and thwart him. He thought he might try wooing her, that love would reclaim her fate... Or failing that, if he could find a way to ‘steal’ her power, that he might bind her to him that way and bring her back to her proper realm. Though, of course, he would have preferred her love.” She said as her eyes drifted slightly off again as if reflecting.

Caradowc shrugged, partly to try and shrug the feeling that he were being slightly mesmerized, “Well, well... that’s all very fine, Megan... But what does this really have to do with Rhiannon, anyway?... If you’re saying there’s some Elven lord after her for some reason, he’s going to have a bit of a tough time wooing her. No man woos Rhiannon... if that’s your point.”

Megan shrugged back as if almost imitating him, “I am only pointing out that the Eldritch are the Eldritch. And their reasons for doing things are not our reasons. If she truly is Eldritch I’d not trust this talk of her being a gift. Why would the Eldritch give ‘us’ a gift? They are not known for their great love of humanity. They are, however, very well known for their trickery.”

“I didn’t say she ‘was’ Eldritch. Perhaps the reference is to something else... She ‘is’ a wonder, Megan. You’ve got to admit that. Have you ever heard her really sing or recite? I have and she’s just incredible... Her training is intense; she has very little time to herself... Why, it was wonderful to have her in our class today!... And personally I can’t even begin to imagine what she must be going through. Trying to learn enough to be a good Runner and hopefully to be called to be a Player when I am of age is hard enough... I only have a little more to do, perhaps even less than half a year, and I’ll be sent on the roads. Surely you are also near your time, Megan?”

“Umm... It’s a trick, I know it is... Yes, I’ve memorized what I need to... I know the gestures, the inflections. I see the colors in the sounds, the woven energies in the songs... And I know that Kyle holds me back. I am a near-Bard. And I ‘know’ it. They would keep the power from me... They are afraid of me, Caradowc... Perhaps if I gained the Gift they know I might even challenge Rhiannon.”

Caradowc shook his head, “You’re receiving Bardic training from the best of the teachers. Not only that, but at Waljanargel, the Council Seat where we get warm beds and good meals. We ‘could’ well be sleeping on the floor and getting ‘whatever’ the teacher might manage from the villagers; and for that we’d have to work hard in their fields and flocks as well. When I was studying with a Healer I was lucky to get near enough to the fireplace to curl up on cold stone floors. She was a wonderful teacher, but we sure did eat an awful lot of greens and tuber vegetables. Sometimes some berries and nuts... I don’t even recall if we ever got meat...here we may have to work our time in the fields, do household duties or help with the animals; but it’s such a small price to pay for the excellent teaching we receive.”

“Yes, and when I studied music and dance I, too, slept on the floor...” She shrugged again taking out a scroll from her chest, a personal scroll with red strips of cloth, “I’m sure we’ve all had our share of ‘rough’ times, Caradowc. And yes, the food here is good... But, things are being held from us... Held from me, anyway.” She opened the scroll out and quietly looked at it.

“What’s that?” Asked Caradowc, looking at the scroll in her hands curiously, “How beautiful.”

“This contains secrets, Caradowc... The writings of my people... Would you like to know these secrets?” She said slyly.

“Umm... perhaps Kyle holds you back because he is a bit afraid of what you might actually ‘do’ with knowledge.”

“He is a fool.” She snapped, “They ‘all’ are... As I learn the proper inflections and gestures, I shall be able to unlock the secrets of this scroll and the writings it contains. I shall become powerful. More powerful than any of them could ever dream... And if I could steal the power they are deeming to give Rhiannon.”

“Megan! What are you saying?” gasped Caradowc somewhat horrified though he found himself scanning the images and writings of her scroll in fascination.

“Power, Caradowc.” She purred, “Real power... Not this piddling stuff about ‘lifetimes.’”

“Where could you have possibly gotten this scroll?... I’ve never seen writing like this... never seen anything remotely like this.”

Smiling at him and touching his cheek lightly, Megan proceeded, “Perhaps... perhaps I know a little more about the Eldritch than you think, um?”

Wide-eyed, Caradowc sat back from her finding himself catching his breath, “Are you saying that this is Elven magick?”

“Humph.” She said, sitting back from him a little, toying with him a bit, “I’m not saying ‘anything’ Caradowc... It was a gift from my people... Because they believed I would someday be great... Would you not be great with me, Caradowc?” She smiled and leaned back towards him again to smile closely in his face, brushing a slender hand through his dark brown hair.

“But why would you ‘do’ that?... Why would you wish to make ‘me’ great?” He found himself to be shaking as if from cold.

“I need your help.” She purred once again, “Much of this magick is the magick of man and woman. The right man, the right woman. And the doorways of eternity are opened.” She whispered in his ear, her hand lightly touching his face, “And if we gain Rhiannon’s power... We shall be as the Gods Themselves.”

Just then some of the other people in training who shared this room began to wander in causing Megan to withdraw from Caradowc. The others had been at sword practice and nearly bounded for their beds to lie down and rest for a spell. Megan watched Caradowc’s eyes intently for a moment, and then rebound her scroll to put it back in her chest that she then closed up.

Trying to bring himself out of it, Caradowc said a bit shakily, “Let me think on it, Megan... I need to think.”

“Of course,” she said magnanimously, “I can not rush you... Study your notes well... learn well.” Having shut the chest she got up and left the room in a rather stark move from his side, “I go to watch the Sacred Dancers Kyle spoke of. Perhaps after I shall walk a little while from the South entrance... You might join me there... if you like.” She gave him a conspiratory smile but he gave no response as he watched her walk out of the room.



In one of the deeper caverns a small contained fire burned with aromatic scents. Danu sat across the fire with Rhiannon as Kyle and another Advisor sat on either side in a circle around the fire. For a long, long while Danu stared at Rhiannon, the light playing across their faces in some endless dance. So ancient now, sometimes Danu’s mind was no longer well anchored in the World, though she still walked with strength and dignity. “Beloved... my Chosen.” She spoke finally, softly, as if she would not disturb the firelight dance. “Kyle says you went back through the labyrinth today... Did you get through all the passages?”

“Yes, Mother.”

“And the Star Gates?” She breathed in a hushed low tone, “Have you made it through each Gate? Do you know what gifts lie beyond each one?”

“Yes.” Said Rhiannon as she listed each gift she had found and Danu nodded as she spoke.

“Soon you will go down into the Lair of Serpent Dreams... Once you have completed that transition we will prepare for the Bonding Itself... You are ready...” She nodded to herself, “You are ready... Finally... finally.”

Both Kyle and the other Advisor looked at Rhiannon as well, Kyle taking her hand and squeezing it once firmly. Gently they all fell into trance, Kyle and the other Advisor monitoring as Rhiannon and Danu moved away from their bodies and found themselves walking through a flowering field. “Mother.” Whispered Rhiannon, taking Danu’s hand as they walked. The scenes began to change constantly around them and time became meaningless as it became apparent that they were passing through variant planes. The workings of their minds dramatically shifted, so dramatically that Rhiannon was terrifically startled, leaning heavily on Danu who steered her through it as if guiding

Rhiannon through water at sea. In time they stopped, having come to a clear point, feeling as if they had traveled many eons to get there. Merging for a moment, they became a single point, like a ray of fire, then released to find themselves back in their bodies.

In the darkness the fire had died long ago, the air having become chill and damp. Both Advisors placed either hand into a hand of Rhiannon and Danu to gently pull them back into the Realm of the Wheel.



Mab waited anxiously in the chambers she and Rhiannon shared. She could feel it when Rhiannon left her body, knew something of what took place between Rhiannon and the Mother. There were often times now that their minds nearly linked and she knew much of what Rhiannon thought and felt. Though a good deal was blocked from her, Mab knew Rhiannon's anxiety and rode with her fear. Mab shivered and paced their quarters deep within a cavern's womb. Sometimes now, even whole thoughts would come into Mab's mind; yet, in this secret transition she received no more than feelings. Rhiannon could close herself off when she chose to and though Mab felt she might also do the same, she had no desire to ever close herself off from Rhiannon, though she understood the times that Rhiannon must.

Feeling too much like the walls were beginning to close in on her, Mab left their area to go out one of the main entrances to walk down one of the wooded paths outside that she might breathe in the night air. As she walked along she sensed the stones call out to her as the leaves of the trees whispered secrets amongst themselves. Life moved about her and the scurry of animals paused to look at her with bright eyes reflecting the moon's glow. In the open Mab felt a great comfort at the expanse of the Mother's ever changing dance of continuous manifestation.

In the moon's brightness Mab noticed two human figures between the leaves of the trees a ways off up the side of another hill. She could not make out the faces at all, but could just tell their Runner's trappings and the feathers on their cords that indicated that they were still in training. Not that it might be so unusual for anyone to be out, yet it seemed as if the two were making moves to remain as unnoticed as possible. 'Lovers, perhaps.' Thought Mab, 'Looking for a little privacy.' As the student's area didn't afford them that, that would hardly be very unusual, either. Watching them a moment more Mab smiled, then became uncertain as an eerie feeling touched her. 'Lovers, maybe... but something else, too.' Mab would now have followed them but at that point they truly had disappeared and she was very uncertain what direction they had gone in. Trying to reach out to sense them a little, Mab felt herself closed off causing her to wonder for the gesture seemed almost aggressive rather than the simple closing off of someone intent on personal privacy. Mab thought seriously of going into the Trainee's quarters to see who might be missing, yet it was very late, most would be asleep and it might not net her that much information anyway. The best Mab could do was to try to keep some basic impressions of their energy and see if she might be able to match up what she felt later. Finally a tug came again from Rhiannon and Mab knew her lover would be coming back to their chambers soon. She turned from the wonderful sound of the breeze whispering through the leaves to re-enter the inner recesses of the caves.



Megan took Caradowc down along a wooded path, then headed through some underbrush stepping lightly along a hidden path that Caradowc could not really ascertain. “Be very quiet.” She whispered close to his ear as he breathed in her strangely liquid scent. Taking his hand she guided him through the brush beneath the trees, deeper and deeper into the entanglements of the forest. After what seemed to him like nearly half the night, Megan suddenly stopped in a small clearing ringed by tall trees. “A faery ring.” She said, no longer whispering, “A ring of power.”

Caradowc looked around, not able to note anything other than a clearing like that of many others in Nature. “What makes you say that?... I see no faeries here.”

Megan laughed a musical laugh looking at Caradowc as if in amused sympathy, “Dear, dear Caradowc... ‘We’ shall make it a faery ring... A ring of power... A secret place where we will build our foundation.” She led him to the center of the clearing, then raised her hands to the sky where the moon shone bright. “See us, Lady of Magick... Grace us with power and might... Show us the pathway to our deep desires.” Megan turned back to Caradowc, touching him lightly in a curious way that confused him as he felt little shifts take place within him. Finally he felt as if his whole being was bare and laid open before Megan as she began to move within him. Feeling connected to her but not truly one with her, they gently lay within the grass as human passion began to take hold. Caradowc had an odd sense of being used somehow in a way he could not trace, though Megan whispered that it was through their mutual union that power was being built. Power for both of them, power that could be utilized by the consent of them both. In his passion, Caradowc heard her chanting, chanting in a tongue he did not know, feeling a peculiar connection with an ‘otherness’ as if an energy were being raised that was separate from him.

Afterwards, as they lay in the grass, Caradowc felt spent and drained in a way that did not seem normal to him. It was almost as if something were taken from him and nothing given back to replace it. He stared at Megan a long time, her eyes peacefully shut as she lightly dozed as he wondered who she really was. Though he felt drained he also felt himself unable to sleep as if his energy were strung out to beyond being able to really relax. Caradowc suddenly had the odd idea that somehow Megan now possessed his energy and in her sleep wove it within the fibers of the universe like a caterpillar in its cocoon that later emerges as an altered being. He realized that magick had ‘indeed’ been done, but he was unaware just what sort of magick he was now involved in and as he thought on this he found himself to be very cold as he shivered in the soft breezes of the early morning.

When Megan awoke she smiled at her comrade, “You did well, my love... Soon everything will wake and we need to return before they miss us unduly. We do not wish them to have any inkling where we might have gone.” She kissed him roundly and passionately, causing him to forget all his misgivings midst the softness of her luxuriant mounds of dark, soft hair. But before he could go beyond a first kiss she pulled away, “We really must go... The transitions of Rhiannon are nearly complete. Soon she descends to the Lair of Serpent Dreams.”

“But what of me?” He asked as they finally got up. “You said we would share power together... What will happen to me?”

“Did you not ‘feel’ our power as we lay together?” She asked as if he might be a simpleton, “And yet... the true initiation is yet to come... be open, my love... receptive... and the Universe shall pour Herself into you.”

“I am a Runner, Megan... Perhaps I am not meant for this. My heart has merely been set on being a Player when I got older so I might learn the gestures and inflections in depth. Perhaps in a life or two I might be a near-Bard.”

“Near-Bard.” Smirked Megan as she began to lead the way out again, “I give you power at your fingertips and you worry if in a couple ‘lifetimes’ you might be a ‘near-Bard’? Near-Bard will be insignificant to you once our power is established.” Knowing the strength of her words, Megan briefly turned to him and kissed him, “Do you not love me, Caradowc?... For I love you.”

“Megan... You are intoxicating.” He whispered, “And you frighten me.”

“Frighten you?” she laughed as she pulled him through the trees towards the caves in a playful manner, “I am but a young woman... in love with a young man... Dance with me.” She teased, whirling about him as they walked. Somehow this comforted Caradowc greatly so that when she came back up to him to walk at his side he was more settled in the idea of their young love.



A couple weeks passed before Rhiannon would enter the Serpent’s Lair and during those weeks Megan seemed to grow quite friendly towards Rhiannon as if she had had second thoughts, revealing a certain amount of charm that rather surprised Rhiannon. “Perhaps you were right after all, Mab... Perhaps she does like me” Said Rhiannon to Mab as they walked on a wooded path one morning near the caves that looked out over the many fields of grain and grazing animals the Council Seat kept to keep it’s community going. There were even various huts and houses where some of the Bardic families and staff preferred to live as they helped with the work and received its benefits. Rhiannon always liked to get up early and watch the sun slowly rise over the fields, the streaks of color expanding like a pair of wings that might suddenly take flight in the sky. Though Mab tended to prefer as much sleep as she could possibly obtain, she had to admit that the rising sun was beautiful and that the quiet, private time they had together to talk was worth getting up for. “Although it seems to me she fancies Caradowc far more.”

“To be honest with you, I’m not certain what she wishes with Caradowc... Somehow I get the odd sensation that she uses him. I am shy of her anymore. I am leery of her friendliness towards you, though in her heart I believe she is attracted to you. She strikes me as a person who is quite capable of love-hate. I’d be wary of her, my love. Her friendship may very well come with a price.”

“You surprise me, Mab... You are not usually philosophical... Or, are you simply jealous?” Smiled Rhiannon as she knelt down to examine some stones along the path. Finding one that particularly appealed to her, she took it and brushed it off. A pretty blue stone, Rhiannon held it up to let it glisten in the morning light. “What do you think? Will it speak to me?”

“It looks like something from home.” Spoke Mab rather wistfully, “Of course, I’m jealous... But, I am jealous of everyone around you. I am aware of it and try not to let it affect my judgment... I do not own you... However, should you ever abandon me, my life is forfeit.”

Rhiannon put the stone in Mab’s hand and squeezed it, “I love you. Don’t ever doubt me. I ‘know’ the sacrifice you’ve made... But, you must learn to accept whatever I deem I must do... Swear you will, for my love is forever.”

For a long moment they watched each other’s eyes until Mab breathed, “I swear... With all my heart, I swear.” With that Rhiannon kissed Mab and it was a kiss that sealed something, something deep within the core of both their souls. “When do you descend into the Lair?” Whispered Mab as they drew apart, the tone in her voice an indication that she was nearly afraid to ask.

“At new moon...” Was Rhiannon’s soft reply, her eyes glinting strangely.

“How soon after the descent will the Bonding be?”

“At full, directly after.” She smiled in her tension, “It will not be easy. Danu is so removed, so much a part of other realms...” Absently, Rhiannon pulled some herbs from a pouch she always carried, offering Mab some that they both chewed, sucking on its juices before swallowing. After a moment Rhiannon chuckled, “Yet, perhaps it will help since I, too, am so close to other realms...” She quipped as she indicated the leaves they had eaten. “Yet, I think these herbs may well have done their work... Am I not now caught in the Wheel?” She remarked sadly to Mab.

“Ummm... I would not be so certain,” Frowned Mab, “And just because they have not given any challenge of late means very little that you are caught here, either... It may well be a ploy... Something to make you think that you are in order to surprise you when your guard is down. Though you have faced your own fear of being caught here, it is hardly like them to simply quit. There are those who want you back and they will continue to try until your fate is truly ‘sealed’. They are very like to surprise you with something quite fierce, something bold... You know well that they like to make ‘statements’.”

“Are you not caught in the Wheel?”

“Only when you are... But, once you are... It is final with me as well... We don’t really belong here.” She breathed slowly.

Rhiannon left Mab’s clasp to stare out over the fields, “There is more of the Wyrd to the Bardic folk in general than is realized... You are wrong, Mab... We belong... Simply because we have asked to... ‘She’ is our Mother, too. She has asked for help and I have replied. So have others.”

“It was long, long ago.”

“Megan.” Said Rhiannon abruptly.

“What?” Asked Mab turning, thinking the woman was present only to find that she was not. “What about her?”

“She’s like us...” Rhiannon whisked, “And she’s here... for me.” The last words were spoken slowly as if she were in a sudden recall. “I’m puzzled... why has ‘she’ risked the Wheel? What can she want with me?” She looked at Mab in question.

Mab furrowed her brow, “I do not remember her... ‘I’ am your lover.”

Rhiannon held up her hand shaking her head, “That’s not it. It’s something else. I’m not sure I am able to place her, either... but there ‘is’ something... familiar.” She

mused, then began to head back to one of the cavern's entrances, Mab following close behind her.



In another class Kyle had everyone go through various tones that he gave them, having them hold each tone for as long as they could having had them take in full breaths to do so. "At this point do not 'play' with these tones and do not harmonize... Though you will learn to do that in time, you must understand each of these sounds for themselves. Separately. I shall also want you to pair up in your spare time for one moon... Go somewhere alone in one of the small caves. Sit across from each other and take turns intoning these sounds 'at' each other. Write down any impressions you have for each sound when it is intoned at you. Do not discuss these impressions with each other at this time. At the end of the moon I shall meet with each of you and discuss what you have written... then we will share this all with the rest of the class... Now, let us go through each of the sounds again. Learn to open your throat... and 'do' your breathing exercises... which I suspect some of you are neglecting...?" Then Kyle started them off with another tone that everyone echoed as well as they could. He walked around and through the six young students, an expert ear catching every voice and making mental notes of their progress. After the class he had each student come up to him so that he might whisper a few words to them before they left for their studies and chores. He smiled at each one, for though he could be stern when needed, gentleness was often the key in most of those he dealt with.

As soon as that class was over, the class that Megan and Caradowc were part of began to come in. As they were nearing their time to be Runners, they were now well into ethics and gestures, often being asked to sing or recite in the evening that the rest of the Bardic folk might hear and appreciate. It was good testing ground as well and it helped Kyle review their work. Often other Bards and Council Members would come up to Kyle to give opinions, ideas, possible improvements and changes he was quite thankful for. He was greatly aware that part of the reason his students were known for advancing quickly was simply due to the wonderful atmosphere they received for their training. 'Besides,' he thought, 'I am really only sent the best. I work with just about every 'young' Bard for private tutoring before they are hit with other duties... Mother, is this compensation for my loss of Morgan, for I love my students dearly and have come to truly feel a father to them... and Rhiannon... My Goddess, may I stay close to her in Council the rest of my days.' As Kyle watched the next class enter the chamber, he thought about their ultimate trek into the outer world when their ethics needs be honestly firm in their minds. Politics would be the next subject that they would have to immerse themselves in and fully grasp so that they might take the activities of one village, put them into a basic rhyme and relate them to the next village they came to. It need not be all that good, but by giving them a variety of situations to build rhymes upon, Kyle hoped that he might at least get them to produce something workable and presentable. When they entered that stage, they would also sing or recite their own works at the supper fires to again give others a chance to review them. At that point, both clarity of the situations' activities and the political/ethical import of the report must be realized. It was very important that they learn to present themselves as a harbinger of peace as much as humanly possible. Most

villages, towns, courts would really be mostly interested in who died, who got married, was the fall harvest good of the last place visited than anything else, though there were times when other news was unavoidable and the students soon to be Runners needed to be able to convey whatever a situation might demand as diplomatically as possible.

Seeing Megan with Caradowc as they entered gave Kyle some pause for Caradowc did not look as well as he ought, seeming a bit pale and less robust than he had in the past. Caradowc had become deeply, if rather quickly, attached to Megan though that should hardly be cause for his health to fail. Kyle began to wonder if he ought not sit down with the boy and have a talk, yet he realized that such a thing would probably lead no-where. No one begrudged lovers their intent, even providing privacy for them when asked and as it was known by then that Megan and Caradowc went out into the wilderness of the surrounding area for privacy, it was generally assumed that they indeed were lovers. Still, Kyle began to pick up odd feelings from the relationship so that he had begun to keep an eye on them, debating if there might not be a proper time that he could speak with one of them, gently and alone. He feared that Caradowc was becoming obsessed with Megan and perhaps that might be causing some listlessness that could lead to some sickness in heart and body. Kyle had to admit that Megan did seem to have a strange charisma about her that Kyle had difficulty placing. Though it was obvious Megan was far beyond what might usually be found in a Runner, she was not really a near-Bard, either, let alone a Bard and in fact, Kyle was beginning to become very uncertain that she was really part of the Bardic Path at all. If that were found to be so, then it would have to be discussed in Council what ought be done. Frowning as the class sat and settled itself upon the stone floor, Kyle paced a moment before seating himself with them. Thinking that perhaps after this class he would seek out another Council Member and express his misgivings, he nodded to himself as he returned his thoughts to the students before him.



Preparation for Rhiannon's descent into the lair were begun early the morning of the new moon. A strong brew of herbs steeped in waters from the caverns was given her as she came from her three-day meditation in silence. Her features were drawn, seeming even worried, though she expressed nothing of her thoughts to anyone. A bath awaited her after she had drunk the tea, a bath of salt and herbs; warm, with a scent on incense filling the airs. Her hair was plaited severely upon her head as she dressed in scant, close fitting clothes. No weapons were given and she painted her face with personal symbols from coppery clay in a large pottery bowl in the shape of a coiling dragon.

Over the preparations watched the Mother Danu, proud, though faintly worried about her Chosen. Though she felt that Rhiannon would surely consummate this transition, a strange feeling came over her, putting her somewhat ill at ease. She was quite aware of Kyle's discussions with another Council Member about Megan and somehow it connected in her mind that Rhiannon might be in danger, though she did not quite understand how. She gently prodded the surface of Rhiannon's mind, growing a bit more concerned when she realized that Rhiannon felt the same sense of possible danger. For a moment their eyes met and linked as Rhiannon stood, clothed and ready for her journey. A great warmth of feeling passed through them, a closeness that had finely been

firmly established even before the Bonding. Danu was pleased by that as she feared that the Bonding might very well prove more difficult than anyone was presently aware of.

As Council Members came to take their places at the entrance of Rhiannon's descent, one Member said quietly to Kyle quizzically as they walked there, "Why has the Mother put Rhiannon through so many transitions when my understanding is that some of this is usually done after the Bonding?"

Kyle raised his brows at her and said softly, "I think the Mother fears there will not be time after, for the two of them are best 'on' this plane as the Chosen proceeds on these quests... I even suspect in my heart, the Mother fears she may not be able to remain after the Bonding whatsoever." The sadness in his voice was very apparent and the other Council Member was moved to put a hand on his shoulder as he looked back at her to say, "You know, Kayla... It is odd, but sometimes I feel as if something in me was passed over... I don't have a sense of regret about it... But I shall be very sad when the Mother leaves us."

"So shall we all, friend." Were her last words as they finally found themselves at the entrance where they seated with other Members. Soon they all began to gently chant in a low rhythmic manner that filled the air with its subtle vibrations.

A long time passed before Rhiannon entered accompanied by the Mother Danu holding hands, the Mother steadying herself on her staff. Rhiannon's foreignness was greatly accentuated by the red and white paint on her face and the sheen of scented oil on her skin. However, the Council Members were now so deeply in trance none even looked up to see. Aware that her presence had entered, they chanted stronger and quicker as she took her leave of Danu to crawl into the small entrance. Watching her go, Danu stood transfixed, finally letting herself slip to the floor of the cavern, guiding herself down with her staff.

Knowing she would see nothing in the tunnel or in the Lair itself, Rhiannon slowly picked her way in the darkness. There was no fear of any sort in her now, though in the back of her mind she was nagged by casual images of Megan. Having pondered on Megan for a long time, she still felt terribly uncertain and inconclusive about it. Neither she nor Mab could really place her or what her purpose might be, though they had become truly certain that she was of the same realm as themselves. In the tunnel Rhiannon was comforted by the subtle presence of Mab's tie and in some ways they made this journey together, though Rhiannon had quieted a real exchange of thought. The tie with Danu was there as well, though Rhiannon was aware that she kept her distance for this was meant as Rhiannon's experience alone.

After some duration Rhiannon could catch a faint aromatic smell besides the scent on her body. Oddly, the two scents began to weave together into a beautiful, intoxicating smell all its own and Rhiannon was struck by it as her mind began to slow down and she began to see woven colors in the air threaded by the scents. For just a bit longer she crawled following the wonderful colors in front of her. A breeze abruptly strew through her nearly bursting with the marvelous odor, causing her to become aware that she had entered the Lair Itself at last. Realizing that a large body of water lay in front of her that seemed filled with the intoxicating scent, she chose to sit down and wait awhile.

In time, the colors began to weave around her, her mind set in the smells as if it had become part of the same vibrations. It was like a serpent's dance as she was moved to

get up and sway with the weave to music unheard. A serpent's dreams, it was as if something coiled round and round her as she spun next to the water's edge.

With a great splash she finally fell in, breaking the strange spell in the cold waters. She came up sputtering, her mind clear, though she began to laugh in delight as she swam about the pool's perimeters. Finding herself drinking freely and deeply of the waters, she also became aware that at certain times and seasons the water was highly poisonous. As she came back out of the water she was surprised to discover something grasped in her left hand. She grafted it into her clothing, though tight, knowing it to be a gift. Now the water began to work its way through her, creating a strange sensation as she wondered if it had been so safe to drink of it after all. Then her mind suddenly expanded as she knew the great consciousness of the Serpent Itself.



Megan looked down at Caradowc as he lay beside her in the hidden clearing in the woods, his breath strained and his mind feverish. "Dreams of power bought you, did they not, little one... You... you do not even begin to guess what real power is." She rose from their spot and went to sit quietly beneath a tall standing stone. "But thank-you, thank-you for lending me your life-force. It was indeed the polarity weave I needed to accomplish my designs... Poor child... How little your kind seem to understand the real power of magick." She whispered as she fell into a deep trance that released her from her physical confines.

As the serpent watched through Rhiannon's eyes, an unusual event took place. Now able to see the cavern as if brightly lit, Rhiannon was made aware of a beautiful woman appearing at the water's edge. Dark and sensuous, she beckoned to Rhiannon in a low musical voice as she waded in the water towards Rhiannon. A song came from the woman's lips, a song very much like the weave of the scents that had coiled about Rhiannon earlier. Though Rhiannon was much struck by the woman's beauty and had become transfixed by the Serpent's consciousness, she was also acutely aware that somehow the scenario was wrong. Something in her suspected danger as the woman began to draw closer and the song she sang seemed to cause Rhiannon to become even more transfixed.

Somehow breaking through, Mab issued a fervent cry in Rhiannon's brain that broke the spell and shattered the imagery. Quickly gaining strength and purpose, Rhiannon began to sing herself; a song of terrible power and wonder, for it was also the voice of the Serpent that sang through her.

The woman's image quelled, momentarily causing fear to brighten her dark eyes. Then an anger blazed in her as her form melted and changed to that of a tall imposing dark-haired man, a sword girt at his side as if he meant to do battle, "Do you not think I know your 'real' name?... You do not belong here; these are not your People. The Serpent of the World is not your Father and the Opal of the Earth Your Mother... You are the Star's child and belong on the wings of the inner winds."

"I have many names," Rhiannon answered cryptically, "The Earth is my star. She is distressed, I have answered Her call. 'You' have no right to interrupt the bindings of my soul."

“You are bound to me!” He claimed, his hand moving to the hilt of his sword.

“Megan!” She suddenly realized, “Who is given you to believe such foolishness? I shall bind to whom I chose. I care not for what your standing might be... in this Realm or any other.”

Angered hotly by Rhiannon’s words, the man drew his sword and rushed at Rhiannon only to be blazed back by Mab’s unexpected imagery of fire and light that he had not thought to protect himself against. As he lay dazed on the cavern’s floor, Rhiannon sang again in binding, the Serpent’s binding of colored threads that weakened the man’s image, forcing Megan back into her body.

When the image had totally faded, Rhiannon found herself drifting to the floor as she lost consciousness to fall into a strange dreaming of beautiful serpents and their wonderful, terrible singing.

When Rhiannon awoke she was surrounded by Council Members as she lay in a lighted cavern that they had just found her in. Looking up into the torchlight she thought dazedly, ‘How could I see everything so clearly in the Lair when it had been pitch black?’ Loosing consciousness once more as they picked her up to carry her to her personal rooms, Danu made them pause temporarily as she took the object Rhiannon had tucked in her clothing.

Staring at it a long moment she remarked, “I wonder what this may bode. Now there are two Serpent’s Eggs where there has always been the One. And it is the twin of the first.” She opened her hand to reveal the egg-like opal to the Members about her. Exchanging long looks, no one gave any voice to speculation. Finally Danu smiled, “Take her gently, now... She is much Beloved...” As she watched her Chosen being taken carefully away, the opal placed back in Rhiannon’s hands, Danu turned to Kyle, “Bring me Megan... She is Serpent bound on the faery hill near the Southern entrance... Caradowc will need much attention if his mind is to be restored... You shall find him there as well.”

“Yes, Mother.” Kyle gave a slight bow and hurried to gather help to find the wayward pair.



Most of Rhiannon’s strength had returned by the next day as now the strange mental link between Rhiannon and Mab was complete, letting Mab literally speak for Rhiannon when Rhiannon chose to do so. The Council had been gathered in an inner chamber as they sat to decide Megan’s fate, her physically bound form brought before them. Caradowc would simply be sent to his birth home and people, his mind in enough disrepair to cause the rest of his life to be largely subdued, though Healers would be sent out to see to him from time to time. Still under a certain amount of the Serpent’s spell, Megan regarded the Council dully. Mab sat at Rhiannon’s side, her place confirmed as Rhiannon’s Speaker, a Council Member in her own right. “Just ‘who’ are you?” asked Danu of Megan when everyone was settled. “Are you Eldritch?... Do you wish to make some claim? If you do, make it and we will discuss what might be done about it.”

“Do you really think to ply me with such silly questions?” remarked Megan, her tongue a little thick, “Discuss? Discuss?... I ‘shall’ have what I came for, whether you

will or no.” At last the Serpent’s binding began to truly fade, Megan standing and straightening herself out as the physical bindings fell to the floor causing surprise in the chamber. “I shall ‘not’ answer your questions or bend to your decisions... I shall return, I shall claim my due. When you are not quite so guarded... Rhiannon, the ‘Chosen’, the ‘Beloved’... You play a foolish game, my dear, and you are wrong to involve these people in ‘your’ designs.” With that, Megan rushed from the area and though immediately sought, was never found again.

As she prepared for the Bonding, Rhiannon thought over and over about Megan’s words and deeds. Her mother, Genevieve, was said to be coming and would arrive a day or two in advance of the Bonding. Grateful for the closeness of Kyle, her mother and Mab, Rhiannon tried to finally shut out Megan’s memory, though she also knew that someday she would have to face the woman again. ‘Ah, Great Goddess, let the Wheel catch me, then... and Megan can surely forget any of her schemes... Yet, ‘who’ is she?... And ‘why’ is she so adamant?’ But soon in the excitement and stress of the events before and after the Bonding the memory of Megan dissipated and would fade into the wisps of some disturbing and unrevealing dream.