

# Rhiannon – Child of Twilight

## Chapter 4

### *The Singer's Gift*

It was early in the morning when Taliesin, the Chief Bard of Lord Sean's Court in Powys, came to the large open room where the Sacred Singers and Dancers were practicing a work that was intended for Mabon rites in the early Fall. As this was a fairly large and strategically important Court of Cymru, there was a full compliment of Sacred Dancers, Singers and Musicians of about six each (three men and three women were the preferred amount) that had permanent housing as well as a Player's Troupe that consisted of another six or so. Each had their own leader, sometimes referred to as a Chief, though they may or may not have true status as such. However, in the Troupe, that role was always filled by a Bard or near-Bard and at this Court, not only were they a Bard, but they were someone of nearly the same status as a Court's Chief Bard. As some Courts were lucky to have even a small Troupe of three or four and one or two of the Sacred Singers, Dancers or Musicians, Taliesin worked hard to see that his Court continued to deserve the compliment that they were bestowed.

Sitting comfortably on a short stool a little ways from the Dancers, Singers and Musicians, Taliesin watched them work with a look of pleasure in his eyes. Being fairly warm yet as Summer was only beginning to draw to its' end, the Dancers worked in the morning before the first lights glinted in the sky, still ending up stripping off nearly every piece of clothing on them by the time they stopped for the day. Taliesin was simply clad as well in trousers and a short, loose tunic belted with a wool and leather belt of gold-yellow and green as he listened to the singing in words he had written and melodies he had composed, being greatly and pleasantly pleased by their rendition. He closed his eyes and gently swayed to the sounds, sending out a gentle wave of energy that caught up in the Dancers' pattern without interfering with it. When the group had finished its practice, he nodded and smiled to them, showing he approved of their efforts. The patterns were strong and well balanced; it would bode well for the Fall Harvest. As Taliesin rose to attend to other business, the Chief Musician, who truly was a Chief, came up to him, "Lord, so what do you think?" she said, her light blue eyes sparkling like pale wine, her long yellow hair hanging free about the shoulders of her willowy frame.

Smiling, Taliesin pressed her shoulders, "Lovely... I'm very pleased, Kelyra... Would you like to come to my quarters to dine with me this evening? You've coordinated it well, though there are a few small things I think we still might discuss."

She looked at him shyly, then cast her eyes to the floor, "Brother... there is still much work I must attend to." Were her soft words as she drew away from his grasp.

"I see..." he said politely, "Perhaps some other time?... I think you are extremely Gifted. I had hoped we might spend a little time together. I know you've only been here but a Season or so, but you've really made a great difference."

She looked up at him again. He was fairly tall and handsome with dark hair and large, striking blue eyes that caused a tinge of feeling in her she did not want to acknowledge. "Thank-you, Taliesin... I had hoped you thought well of my work."

"Sometime... Would you come share a meal with me sometime?" He said gently and imploringly.

"I'll think on it." She whispered as she left to rejoin the others.

Thoughtfully he smiled as she left, then shrugged as he moved from the room. Coming out into a hallway, the Lady of the Court, Creirwy, met him having noted his exchange with the Chief Musician as she watched from without, "If 'she' won't come to dine with you, perhaps you would allow me?" she said sweetly.

Taliesin looked at her sharply, "My Lady... common Court is not allowed in the practice area."

"Common Court? Why, Maerdyenn, I did not know you thought so little of us."

Frowning, Taliesin looked away from her face, "I am surprised my Lady calls me that... That is not a name most folk use, other than some of my people." He said quietly and a bit deferential as he was becoming quite uncomfortable but did not feel it wise to be too abrupt.

"Ah, but your little Kelyra calls you Taliesin... I call you Maerdyenn because I like you. I don't think she does." Lady Creirwy was tall and fine featured, her thick, reddish hair braided and curled about her ears. A robe of blues and golds hung softly upon her supple frame as an enticing scent of incense clung to her. "Why are you not well disposed toward me, Maerdyenn? Surely I am every bit as lovely as your little Kelyra... and I know you better."

Sighing, Taliesin walked a little further down the hallway, "I think Lord Sean will be awaiting us. He said there were many disputes from the East Villages he wanted to see settled the next day or so. Though Dylan is there, he will wait anyway.... Besides, he will be wanting your advice."

Though Lady Creirwy started to make some retort, a little girl of about ten with strands of golden-yellow hair rushed down the hallway to be caught up in Taliesin's arms for a hug, "Papa!" she cried delightedly, "I am here to watch the Mabon dance! Kelyra said I could."

"Oh, my darling, you came too late. They have just finished and are only discussing possible changes... I don't think they'll practice again today." Angrily she stamped her foot though it only caused Taliesin to smile, "Now, now, pretty daughter. As she invited you to see it, then come again tomorrow, as I'm sure they'll be working on that one yet until the Rites themselves... Come; come with your Papa for a while. It is good for you to start to understand the work I do." He grasped her hand to take her with him, but she drew away. "Branwen?" He asked of her.

"Papa..." she squirmed, "You told me you're judging today. I don't want to sit and listen to a lot of old men and women complain... Doesn't that bore you?"

"Branwen... It's part of my duties. As I hope it may one day be part of yours. It is good for you to be there, if just for a little while."

"Oh, but Papa, I want to sing... Why must I be bothered with such stuff?" she said scrunching up her face.

Though he thought perhaps he ought be annoyed, he laughed instead, “All right... I see I’m not going to get much attention from you today... go see if Kelyra and Olwen will let you sing with them for awhile. Will that satisfy you?”

She rounded into his arms and hugged him fiercely, “Thank-you, Papa, thank-you!” Laughing merrily, she rushed down the hallway into the room that Taliesin had just left. Shaking his head he chuckled at her twinkling merriment.

For a few moments Lady Creirwy and Taliesin walked down the halls in silence, then she finally broke it with, “Why on earth did you bring that peasant’s daughter to Court?”

A little amazed, he regarded her with a look of mild shock, “I believe it has something to do with the fact that she is also ‘my’ daughter. And she’s very gifted. I hope to see her being trained to be a Runner next year... She stays with the Runners. I can hardly see why ‘you’d’ be upset, my Lady... Besides, her mother is a very good woman; I have great affection for her. She has married well, to a carpenter, I believe; has great herb craft skills and is training to be a Wisewoman. I have nothing but praise for the way she has brought up Branwen. Now I simply wish to make certain my daughter receives the heritage she is due and deserves. Will you object to my son, Korwyn, when he comes of age in a year or so? He shares the same ‘peasant’ mother... I loved her very much, once, my Lady.”

“Then why did you not bring their ‘mother’ to Court?” snickered Lady Creirwy.

“You were not here then, how would you know that I did not?” He sadly smiled, “I asked her to... she had no interest in this life. And one day she finally fell in love with a man who could share with her the sort of life she wanted. I do not pretend to understand why she’d prefer that life to this, but it is wrong to try to dissuade someone from their personal happiness. Perhaps it is much as the Wandering Bards are wont to say, that they prefer the Villages as the folk are closer to the Mother there.”

“So... if you can love a ‘commoner’, why can you not come to dine with me?” she quipped as they neared the Court Chambers.

“You ‘know’ why... Have we not discussed this all before? My Lord Sean loves you. It is never wise to impede on another’s happiness.” He explained, though he also wanted to say that he was simply not interested.

“Maerdyunn! I don’t believe you said that! Husbands have never stopped you before.” She looked him fully in the eyes, daring him to gainsay her.

He sighed, “A lot depends on the relationships. Lord Sean loves you very, very much. And I know he’d be very, very jealous and hurt. I have no desire to estrange the two of you... If ‘you’ wish to cause estrangement, it will be of ‘your’ doing. I shall have no hand in it... If you do not love him, then be honest with him... Or at ‘least’ take a simpler lover who is not so much in evidence. The Chief Bard of his Court is not wise, my Lady.”

“But I love you.” She said as sweetly as she could.

“Now it is I who do not believe what you are saying... I know too well that I would be entertainment, my Lady. Nothing more. Is that something to risk your marriage over?”

“So... when will you put the glamour on Kelyra?” She snapped as they were about to open the doors.

Making no reply, Taliesin simply stared at her a moment, then pushed the large wooden doors open wide, nodded his head to her and went to sit by his Second, Dylan, behind a long, low table that stretched a long one wall. Towards one end would sit Lord Sean, Lady Creirwy and Lord Sean's Advisors as on the other end sat the two Court Bards. From an entrance opposite where Taliesin and Lady Creirwy had come in was where the common folk were admitted to bring forward their pleas and arguments. As Taliesin sat he realized the long array of villagers and he sighed deeply, softly breathing so that only Dylan might hear, "Thank the Gods this is but once every three moons." Looking at Dylan he wet his lips before saying more directly, "After a bit, you can leave and see what the Runners might be up to. It may well be time for one or two of them to be sent off with a Wandering Bard as they pass through before Fall really sets in. I'd like to know what you think. I also believe the Players might be working out the play for the Mabon Rites, too. Why don't you have a look at that. Seems to me it's coming along quite nicely and I know you'd enjoy putting in a thought or two. You obviously have some strong propensity in that area."

"Thank-you, Tally!" Dylan whispered almost too enthusiastically, his hazel eyes wide and hopeful that his stay would be very short.

"Well, what can I say... It is 'my' job. There's no point in 'making' you stay the whole day when there's other things that ought to be seen to as well... Ah, Gods, looks like I've got a long day or two, uh?"

"Ah, yes, Brother... looks like a lot of fun." Dylan shook his young head, his brown, wavy hair misplacing itself as he moved so that he had to smooth it back as he sat up again, before smoothing out his tunic as well. "But..." He indicated space behind them, "There's some ale, bread and cheese behind us... I remembered this time... Sooo..." He looked at Taliesin imploringly, "Just 'how' long do 'I' have to stay?"

Taliesin gave a quirky smile and shook his head, knowing this was definitely not one of Dylan's favorite duties, even a good deal less than Taliesin himself. "A little while, Brother... eh? Let's not make it look like abandonment, alright?"

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As the Sacred singers sang out a couple phrases, Branwen, oblivious of custom, began to string some notes of her own with them. Stopping after a moment, the Singers giggled as Olwen smiled, "Hello, Branwen. You missed the practice this morning. We had hoped you'd get to review it with your father."

Kelyra came up to Branwen and hugged her. "Did you oversleep?"

"The Runners did not wake me as they promised." She pouted.

"Ah." Exclaimed Kelyra. "You know, I sort of like some of the notes you were beginning to add to our piece." She said somewhat out of patronization, "Perhaps we ought do a little more and see what else you might offer?" Looking at Olwen she winked to indicate 'Let's indulge her a moment,' to which Olwen nodded good-naturedly.

"What should I sing?" asked Branwen, suddenly shy.

"Whatever you feel... Only... no words... As you were before." Kelyra pulled Branwen to sit by her as she played a beautiful stringed instrument inlaid with bits of silver that befit her rank as a Chief Musician. Then she nodded to the Singers to begin again. Happily, Branwen began her voice once more, filling the spaces in the pattern with

amazing ease. Rather startled, Kelyra and Olwen looked at each other deciding to proceed through the entirety of the song. Afterwards, Kelyra dismissed everyone but Olwen and Branwen so that they might have a space to talk before the Players came in to practice. “You have quite surprised me, my dear.” Remarked Kelyra, “I have surely heard you sing before and your voice is lovely. But, I did not know you might possess the ‘Gift’.”

“The Gift?” Puzzled Branwen.

“Yes.” Said Olwen concurring, “The Gift of Sacred Singer... Of course, there are tests that must be made... But... I think you just may pass them.”

“Sacred Singer?... Oh, no, no... My Papa says I am to train to be a Runner and that I may prove to be a Bard.” Olwen and Kelyra exchanged looks. “My Papa would know, wouldn’t he?”

“Your father is a wonderful Bard, Branwen... and he well knows many things. But, Sacred Singers are not the same as Bards and I really do believe you may very well have ‘the Gift’.” Spoke Olwen softly.

“Would you trust us? Would you let us test you?” Asked Kelyra.

“Shouldn’t I ask Papa first?” Frowned Branwen uncertainly.

“Your father will be very, very busy all day. We would like to test you now... Can you trust us, Branwen? We want to find out as soon as possible so we might add your voice immediately.” Kelyra did not also say that in her heart she feared Taliesin might very well refuse it. She knew he was a good man, but she had also come to realize that he could be a very stubborn and willful man as well. Especially when it came to something dear to his heart. She thought, ‘You want the best for your daughter, I can see it in your eyes... Then let your daughter ‘be’ the best she is. Not ‘all’ your children are destined for the Bardic Path, Taliesin... there ‘are’ other Paths. And, they’re just as ‘good’ as yours.’

After a long moment of hesitation, Branwen agreed, suddenly eager to find out if she had such a wonderful Gift.

When Olwen and Kelyra were satisfied that Branwen really did have the ability, Kelyra took Branwen aside just as the Players began to enter the room, “Now, Branwen.” She said lowly so that the others coming in would not hear her, “I want you to keep this a secret... I’ve got an idea for you, so I want you to come to my quarters to practice that we’ll be ready with it on Mabon. I want this to be a big surprise.”

“Surprise? For Papa?”

“Yes, yes... for your father. For everyone... So... Let’s keep this very, very quiet. Okay? Just you and me and Olwen... Oh, and Damon. He’s the best Dancer. We’ll work out a bit of a dance with him... Can you do that, Branwen? For Mabon? A bid surprise?” Branwen nodded happily, the prospect of surprising her father pleasing and exciting her causing Kelyra to be satisfied with the little girl’s agreement.

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Tired and a bit dazed from the day’s long Court, Taliesin dragged himself into the Court Bard apartments that he shared with Dylan. Entering, he was a bit taken aback to find Dylan greatly agitated, nearly throwing things here and there in their main room.

Looking at the other man a bit sideways, Taliesin commented wryly, “Having fun?” as he sat heavily into one of the chairs that sat about a low central table.

Flustered, Dylan gestured largely, “Every time I tell Kymon to put something away, it never gets done.”

Taliesin raised his brows in mild question, “Yes, and where is Kymon... ?”

“Probably hiding under one of our beds.” Dylan nearly snarled.

Nodding, though he rather doubted that one, Taliesin quipped, “I’m not sure I blame him... whatever ‘are’ you looking for?”

Dylan stopped a moment and looked at Taliesin intently, though rather unfocused, “I am looking for the scrolls of records on Lady Creirwy’s family. Though I have it fair memorized, I really still need to see the scrolls to check a couple things and let her know everything is all right. Least I promised I would... ‘Now’ they’re nowhere to be seen and I ‘know’ I told Kymon to put them away.” He said angrily, then turned back to grapple with various things in his reach, though it was obvious there was nothing there for him to find.

Rather amused, Taliesin retorted softly, “They’re under your bench.”

“What?” Dylan turned back to him startled.

Taliesin shook his head and slightly rolled his eyes, “They are in your room. Under your bench.”

“How do you know that?” Dylan asked, always just a bit unnerved when Taliesin would seem to just ‘know’ things out of the blue.

“I saw them...” Taliesin shrugged trying to dissipate Dylan’s look of mild intimidation, “And ‘you’ forgot all about them last time. You told me this morning that you wanted to review them a bit. But... then you forgot.” Thinking a moment, Taliesin regarded Dylan a bit shrewdly, “What’s ‘really’ bothering you, uh, Brother? I can hardly believe the displacement of ‘Creirwy’s’ records would upset you. Not to this extent, anyway.” Though very weary, Taliesin got up and crossed over to Dylan, suddenly wondering, receiving a bit of ‘knowing’. “Gil didn’t leave, did he?”

Looking off and away, Dylan said rather distantly, “A new Runner came in today... with messages... need to be carried South... messages that could wait on a Wandering Bard... but Gil is old enough to be carrying messages so far... New Runner still too green for such a journey... Gil decided he would go... even though I said the messages could wait... I mean... they weren’t much more than ‘letters.’” He grumbled.

“The experience is good for him... Surely, he’ll be back soon enough.” Offered Taliesin, though he watched Dylan’s face closely.

Turning fully away from Taliesin, Dylan said, “It’s far away... Near to Cymru’s Southern Borders in Gwent.”

Trying to coax more, Taliesin remarked, “Perhaps when he comes back we ought do something... He’s of age. It’s time he be stationed somewhere and we could request his presence here... as a Herald or Player, I should think. What do you think? What is he best suited for? Herald... or Player?”

Wrenching his hands, Dylan nearly shouted, “Don’t you get it, Tal? I don’t know if he even wants to come back!... I think he was happy for the opportunity... to go far away... to get away from here... to get away from me... Just leave me alone, alright?”

“Hey, hey, Brother.” Spoke Taliesin melodically like the softness of the air about them as he carefully stepped up to Dylan and gently pressed the other man’s shoulders

with his hands. Slowly he moved close to Dylan, finally hugging Dylan's back noting Dylan was restraining tears of anguish. "I know you loved him, Brother... Perhaps he will rethink things. Perhaps he will be back in time... Turn around... give me a hug." As if spell bound, Dylan mechanically did as he was bid, though he refused to let loose his tears as Taliesin encircled him closely and kissed his hair softly. "Do you want to stay with me tonight? It would be all right... I care about you." Taliesin whispered, "You've come to be my dearest friend."

A little afraid, Dylan pulled away shaking his head 'no', trying to put a little distance in his now confused emotions. "You are not one for male love and I do not wish to be caught up in your glamour."

"Glamour?" asked Taliesin rather incredulously, "Not you, too... Good Goddess, Dylan... If I have such 'glamour', why do I seem to be having such a problem getting anyone into my bed?... Oh, except Creirwy. And believe me, I've not put the glamour on her. If I could, I'd do something to try to 'stop' her from attempting to get into my bed." At that Dylan chuckled a little despite himself. "So, Dylan." Said Taliesin playfully, pleased that Dylan was showing signs of relaxing a bit, "If you've decided I can put the glamour on people, why don't you call me Maerdywnn like much of 'our' other folk do?"

Shaking his head a little Dylan offered, "Perhaps I ought to, eh?" then watched Taliesin's eyes intently.

Suddenly laughing pleasantly, Taliesin pulled Dylan back into his arms, "Maybe you should... In fact, I insist... don't be so sad, Brother... If you need a little healing, you know my door is open... You are my friend, Dylan... You 'know' that... not lovers, perhaps, but surely friends... And I promise you, I swear to the Goddess, I'll not put a glamour on you."

"I don't know... Maerdywnn..." Dylan sighed heavily as the tears finally came in great sobs so that Taliesin rocked him slightly. "Maybe you're right..." He said slumping, "Gods, I don't want to be alone tonight."

"Then don't be... don't be." Taliesin whispered softly.

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Early the next morning as Dylan thought he'd go back to his room to find his clothes for the day, he caught sight of Lady Creirwy with two men in the main room. Startled that their servant, Kymon, would not have alerted them before letting someone in and being found in such a state of undress coming from Taliesin's room so early in the morning, Dylan still gathered enough repose to ask. "I did not hear you. Where is Kymon? Why has he let you in like this? Do you wish to speak to Taliesin?"

"Do not blame Kymon... I did not see a problem with our being in your main room... Besides, Kymon was just about to 'fetch' Taliesin, yes... But, I guess, now 'you' can... Tell him I'd like him to meet someone, will you?... And, oh, please tell him to get dressed first."

A little ruffled and staring at her a moment despite having little on, Dylan chose not to respond to her and stepped back inside Taliesin's room closing the door firmly, if a bit loudly.

"What sort of man are we dealing with, my Lady?" said one man rather suspiciously looking at the door Dylan had retreated back into.

“A faye, a changeling... Eldritch.” She nearly hissed, pleased, “I guess not even his Second has remained immune to his whims.” Though she well knew Dylan’s temperament, she enjoyed being able to throw more evidence of Taliesin’s enamoring prowess at him. She was quite satisfied when she could see that the two men believed her as well.

When Taliesin entered, brushed and combed with some of his better summer robes on, the men with Lady Creirwy were a little more awed than they would have liked to admit. His dark, full hair lightly brushed his shoulders as he gave a disarming smile that lit his beautiful eyes. “Would you care for something to drink? Kymon...” He said, looking over at his servant who stood near the outer doors, “I would have some tea and bread. I know the kitchens will be open now...” Then he looked back at his unasked for guests to ask, “Tea? Bread?” They all assented as Kymon left for what was asked. “Sit down, sit down. There are chairs enough for all.” Being the Chief Bard of a large and strategic Court, the main room of the Court Bards’ apartments was large and spacious with some chairs and a low couch that were easily set about the low central table. Taliesin chose to sit as much ‘across’ from the others as he could, also seeming to indicate a chair left open next to him for Dylan to sit. Shortly after they had all sat, Dylan finally came back into the room wearing some of Taliesin’s less significant clothing that he was able to find that reasonably fit him. Being that Taliesin was taller and larger than Dylan, the clothing still fit him rather loosely no matter what he had found. Having noticed, Lady Creirwy smiled largely at his discomfort though he sat at Taliesin’s direction with dignity. “I am Taliesin, Chief Bard of Lord Sean’s Court and this is my Second, Dylan, as I’m certain my Lady has probably informed you. So, how might I help you this morning so early?”

“I came early, Taliesin, so I might introduce the fathers to you before we go back to Court today... They came late last night, so there was no chance before now... And I would like to think we could get off to an amiable start.” Lady Creirwy smiled sweetly if a bit insincerely.

“Fathers?” Questioned Taliesin, looking at Dylan quickly who frowned back. Gazing back at the two men, Taliesin noticed the symbolic medallions on chains about their necks. “I see... Eastern Priests... Christians, they say?”

“Yes, yes...” said one nodding his head trying to keep an open face, “As the Lady said we came to the Greathouse too late to ask admittance to Court yesterday... We will do so today to ask Lord Sean’s and your permission to let us dwell here a space.”

“Umm... for what reason?” asked Taliesin with some displeasure in his eyes, watching Lady Creirwy’s face closely realizing she likely had a hand in this.

“Why, we simply wish to offer the People here a choice... We have heard that you are a very fair-minded person... We finally thought it worth the risk to come to your Court...” said the other trying to sound reasonable.

“Frowning and narrowing his eyes, Taliesin regarded all of them with suspicion, “I’m not going to say I am pleased by this... We’ve done well enough without the presence of your kind and I see little interest in it now... Yet... if Lord Sean does not oppose you I suppose it would not be fair of me to do so if he says you may remain... However... I shall be very mindful of your presence...”

With that the door to the apartments opened, the servant carrying a tray of the tea and bread with accompanying mugs as a young girl pushed around him to gain access as

well. "Papa, Papa." She laughed as she ran into his arms seemingly unaware of anyone else but her father.

Taliesin hugged her back but softly shook his head, "Branwen... You need to knock first and gain admittance. Your father is rather busy right now."

"Ohhhh... I'm sorry." She said wide-eyed, noticing Dylan's clothing, "Are you wearing Papa's clothes?"

Dylan cringed a little, but Taliesin chuckled roundly, "Why yes, he is! Poor Dylan. All his clothes were eaten by wolves, you see."

"Really?" She gasped, then saw the look in her father's eyes and began to laugh as well guessing it to be a joke, though she really had no idea how.

Shaking his head indulgently and smiling merrily Taliesin said, "Daughter... You really must go now. Unless... you wish to sit at Court for awhile with me..." He said hopefully.

"I want to see Kelyra... I want to see the dance I missed yesterday." She said as she danced a bit herself beside her father.

"Oh... well, then... I think you better get going, don't you?" He patted her head and sent her out the door.

"Your daughter?" Asked one of the priests with vague disapproval in his voice.

Taliesin shook his head 'yes' with pride, "Someday I expect she may be a Bard like her Papa."

"Really..." Spoke the other without thinking, "Surely womenfolk ought not be doing such things... I mean, can you really trust them?"

Rather taken aback and frowning again with some sudden displeasure, Taliesin took a couple swallows from his mug then got up, "Gentlemen, gentlewoman... I think this concludes the interview... I now wish to repair to go to Court... Surely you would like to do the same... So, if you'll excuse me, Kymon will show you to the door. Take something to eat with you if you wish."

"But I thought perhaps we might all go together, Taliesin." Spoke Lady Creirwy in sugary tones.

"You presume too much, my Lady... I'll allow them space if I must. But, it doesn't mean I like it." Taliesin said as if the two priests were not really present, then looked at Dylan, "You don't have to sit at Court today if you don't want to... We'll just be finishing up, anyway. Get some sleep, go bathe... Watch the Dance or the Players... Let me know how those things are going..." He smiled kindly at his Second as Dylan gratefully left the main room for his personal one.

"Eaten by wolves, you say?" Quipped Lady Creirwy watching Dylan leave.

"My Lady." Nodded Taliesin with lidded eyes as he left as well to go back to his own room letting Kymon see them out.

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"Tell me what to do." Sighed Kelyra as she paced her modest room in the area accorded Sacred Musicians, Singers and Dancers. The Leader or Chief of each section lived in a small room to themselves though the rest stayed in an open area that fanned out around a large fireplace where curtains were drawn across spaces for some sense of privacy.

Olwen watched her friend from a chair near a window. "To do about what, lady?"

Kelyra turned to face Olwen and said as she exhaled softly, "About Taliesin... I think he likes me."

"Oh, really?... And how long has it taken you to notice that?" Plump and merry, Olwen was quite amused with her friend. "I think he's had a bit of an eye for you ever since you came here."

"He's asked me to dine with him several times now... I don't know if I should keep declining or what... Just tell him to go away?" She looked at Olwen with imploring eyes and sat on her bed. "What should I do?"

"Well, Kelyra... " Said Olwen frankly, frowning a bit at Kelyra's consternation, "First I need to know... do 'you' like 'him'?"

"How should I know?... I'm afraid of him. They say he's got the glamour. They say he's a Faye... He can have anyone he wants." She nearly wrung her hands.

Tisking a bit, Olwen shook her head, "You're afraid he's going to find out about his daughter before you're ready for him to, aren't you?... You're afraid he's going to accuse you of turning his daughter away from him... Uh?... You're headstrong is all. And so is he... You don't fear his glamour. I don't believe that for a minute, Kelyra... You just fear butting heads with him." Olwen picked up a swatch of crewelwork that she had been playing with and seemed to study it, "It's simple my friend... If you like him, then see him... If you don't, tell him to leave you alone. I've been around Maerdyenn long enough. He's a gentleman. He won't continue to press you if you tell him not to."

"Why do you call him that name, Olwen?" Kelyra said, suddenly a bit unnerved.

"What? Maerdyenn, you mean?..." she shrugged, "He likes to be called that, especially by Bardic Folk and the likes of us. Singers, Musicians and such... I don't really know who or why it was started..."

"When I was a little girl in the South... in Glamorgan... the people whispered of a Maerdyenn. Maerdyenn, they said, was the son of an Eldritch wizard and his sorceress wife. They had crossed over to the human realm to birth their son so that he might bring all sorts of mischief to the world. They left him on the doorstep of a childless couple who marveled at his beauty and his unusually quick mind as he grew." Said Kelyra in rather hushed and hurried tones.

"Well, now, how curious... And whatever happened to this 'Maerdyenn', friend?" asked Olwen suddenly genuinely intrigued.

"The stories are not certain after that... Some say the Bards hid him in their Council Seat of Waljanargel. Some say the Elvin came and retrieved him a few years after he had been left. No one knows for sure... Ever since I heard the rumors that surrounded Taliesin and knew some people called him Maerdyenn, I have been fair afraid of him."

"Well, my lady... I can say this much. Even if the rumors be true and he is Eldritch, which I really doubt, to be honest with you... He's certainly the kindest, gentlest Elf I know. And fair minded... Like as not, someone heard all the tales you know and decided he was just the right game to tag it on. Perhaps he himself knows and enjoys the joke. His sense of humor is well known... I'll say this, too... If he is meant to work mischief in the world, I hope it's mischief for those 'Christian' folk. They could do with some Elven sorcery." Olwen pulled a thread or two through the material and pursed her lips. "You 'do' like him, don't you?"

Before Kelyra could respond a sprightly knock came at the door, “Kelyra...” Called the young, happy voice. “Can I come in?”

“Branwen. Yes, yes, of course.” Kelyra opened the door to let the girl bound in. “You always seem so happy. No wonder your father loves you so much... Shall we practice for awhile?” Kelyra pulled a harp from the corner of her room.

“Moon will be new tonight... Be a good night to start things.” Remarked Olwen to Kelyra as if disinterested, pulling a few more threads through the cloth. Then she set it down to smile at Branwen, “You’re sounding wonderful, my dear. It won’t take much more practice to have it nearly perfect... does Damon join us today? Mabon is in just a few weeks. We need to have this ready.”

“Yes... he’ll be here in a little bit... New moon, you say?” Kelyra bit her lip as Olwen smiled.



Lady Creirwy had seen that the priests whom she had convinced her husband to allow at Court have a small private area of their own where they might conduct religious ceremonies and preach to those who might be interested. Besides Lady Creirwy and her ladies, there were three or so lesser sons from surrounding Greathouses and Towns who were drawn by curiosity and had started to attend from time to time. They found themselves attracted to some of the ideas that the priests espoused. Especially the idea that broke the prevailing thought that it took lifetimes to achieve true spiritual understanding and progression. Being lesser sons of their respective households, it seemed that this new religion, called Christianity by many, gave them more immediate control and power over their lives. Perhaps somehow it might even give them the opportunity to break out of their role and status, or at least they began to believe and hope as such. With the religion’s tendency to push women into a submissive role, it also seemed to offer a decrease in competition over the things of value in life or the need to always confer with one’s mate or love interest about things. They felt this Christianity offered some true control over one’s life as it only espoused that one lived but one life, not as the prevailing belief that one lived many. The idea that one lived many lives, that one needs be constantly alert to one’s ‘lessons’ meant a lot of spiritual responsibility, reflection and study. Christianity seemed to release one from all that and to these young men it meant release to live their lives here and now without the reflection of what might have been. And what was the most attractive of all was the inferred idea that one could always be forgiven transgressions, that the eternal reward could still be theirs no matter what they might do or what mayhem they might inflict, as long as they simply asked forgiveness.

Through all this, these men also sensed a tremendous amount of bitterness toward Taliesin. Though the priests had managed to get into the Court through Lord Sean’s desire to please his wife, Taliesin had made certain that their movements were greatly limited, especially politically, and making certain they were excluded from any official Court functions. The influence Taliesin exerted not only on the Court that he resided with and its’ towns and villages, but also on several neighboring Greathouses and their peoples, was well known, respected and rather feared. The priests delighted in the rumors of Taliesin being Eldritch and did try to perpetuate them to their attendants, comparing

the Eldritch to demons and trying to entice the idea of evil intent on Taliesin's part. To try to show themselves above Taliesin, the priests began to ignore and snub Taliesin when they could, testing Lady Creirwy's influence. Sometimes the young men would do the same, though with more care.

Soon these young men began to think it might be interesting to plan some ideas of mischief in hopes that the Lady Creirwy would see to their well being. They were quite aware that Taliesin's daughter was at Court and they wondered what they might do to not only make a statement against Taliesin and the system he represented, but about the place of woman as well. Deliberating, they thought perhaps Mabon might present some intriguing opportunities with the festivities and the natural confusion.



Kelyra was surprised how much she really enjoyed being with Taliesin when she had finally consented to spend a little time with him. He was funny and smart with an incredible memory for detail. When he would ask her to play his beautiful harp, he would sing with mesmerizing clarity, the voice of a Chief Bard and so distinctly different from that of a Sacred Singer. Kelyra noted that, thought about it, thought about how she might tell him about his daughter. Or, should she truly wait until the Mabon Rites? She wanted to tell him, she knew if he'd just bend a little he would be so proud of Branwen. In fact, he did begin to question why Branwen was hanging around the Singers and Musicians more than trying to get to know what the Runners were all about.

"But, Tal... the Runners come and go so much. The Singers are here every day, just as you and I are." Kelyra had put back the harp in the far corner of Taliesin's room one evening as the stars shone brightly through his window. It was a large and comfortable room with a low couch on one end across from a double bed. A chair and pillows filled in much of the rest on that side, with a chest at the end of the bed for clothes and personal items. A table sat by the right side of the bed with candles and washbasin next to the window that had a low bench beneath it. On the left was another small table and chair where some more candles were lit, and where it was obvious Taliesin might sit and write. Though the only fireplace in the Bardic apartments was in the main room, it served to keep all the rooms warm enough in the Winter, though with the Summer's heat it was rarely, if ever lit; and even with the advent of Fall, it was still too warm to consider such an idea. Kelyra had to admit she was impressed with the comfort of the Bardic rooms, though at the same time, it did not seem overtly showy, either. Just very comfortable and delightfully private.

"Then why doesn't she stick around with me? Or Dylan?... She will 'need' to do so before too long." There was a disturbance that flashed through his eyes as he sat on the bench beneath the window and she sat on the chair across the room. He had let her play without his joining in that evening as he seemed to want to listen without disturbance of any sort.

"Now Tally... She just wants friends... I mean, she's barely ten, for the Lady's sake. Give her a chance... I know Dylan's good with children and you are her father, but she wants for those closer to her own age as some of the Singers and Dancers are. Why, I think there's one who's barely twelve, if I'm not mistaken. Not everything is work, you know... they are children and like to play when there is time." Kelyra came over to sit

with him on the bench and gingerly put her arms about him. Her long, pale hair glinted on the deep blue colors of her robes like fiery rain in the candlelight.

Gently reciprocating, he held her very closely enjoying her willowy warmth. Carefully, he suddenly breathed, "Will you stay with me this time?... I have not pushed at all as I have sensed a terrible nervousness in you... I wanted you to know I would not harm you, or rush you... If there are any questions you may have..." he shrugged, "Ask them... I am here."

"Questions?" she breathed softly, her head gently placed across his chest, "What sort of questions?"

"I don't know... But it took you such a long time to accept my offers to dine... Do I disturb you?" He felt her body tense a little. "What about me frightens you?"

"I do not want to be pregnant." She said somewhat matter-of-factly, though her body had become as tense as a tightened rope.

"Pardon me?" Taliesin said, greatly surprised by her statement, as it was hardly what he had anticipated.

"I have never taken a male lover because I could not deal with the possibility... I know there are means, but I am too afraid it would happen, anyway."

Greatly taken aback, Taliesin drew away, "You mean to say that you have never slept with a man?" she shook her head 'no' finding herself suddenly shaking as if she were very cold. "Oh... oh, Kelyra, I... I'm sorry; I'm not trying to... Would you rather go?" He began to move away, looking at her face, trying to see her eyes.

"No." She said so faintly he wasn't certain he heard her though she wrapped her arms around him again so tightly it seemed as if she were trying to become part of his side. "Perhaps it is your Elven nature that has caused this awful need... And I've hurt too many times when I've let love pass me."

"My Elven nature..." He shook his head, but decided to sit again and hug her back, sighing, "Must you think something like that?" Then he kissed her hair and cheek very gently, "Kelyra... I wish I could erase your fears, my sweet... But perhaps... if you wish... there are precautions that could be taken." He offered, seeing now that she had no intention of leaving.

"No, no... I do not want to mitigate the depths of our actions... I want your love, Maerdyenn. I 'must' not be afraid anymore." Slowly she touched the contours of his face and hair, kissing him intensely once before he carefully picked her up to move her to the bed. Her strange, quavering fear shot through him making him catch his breath as he tenderly removed her robes. There was empathy between them; Taliesin taking on a strong sense of her hunger and anxiety as he very slowly kissed her.

"I will not hurt you, my darling, my love... If it is any comfort at all, I am so very rarely fertile. And I would never, ever desert my child." He tried to allow her to pull back his clothing, but she was shaking so badly he tenderly took her hands away, holding them cupped in his own for a moment as he simply lay beside her awaiting for some of her fear to dissipate. Breathing very slowly, moving his energy down, he found her energy finally followed suit until she actually lay sleeping in his arms. He smiled wanly, wrapping his clothing about them both. It was later as she gradually awoke to his gentle caresses that she found her body willing to meet his.

Waking to the sound of birds in the faint morning light, Taliesin softly pulled the covers around them. As he settled back down to encircle Kelyra once more she murmured the name Branwen.

“Branwen?” He whispered, very perplexed, “What about Branwen?”

Still nearly asleep, Kelyra breathed, “Sacred Singer... She’s a Sacred Singer... I want to tell you so badly... Maerdyynn, Maerdyynn.”

“Sacred Singer?” He sat up in the bed confused and rather ill tempered. “What can you mean?... My daughter is Bardic. I’ve known it nearly since her birth.” Fully waking, Kelyra realized what she had said and drew herself up to put on her robes fearing Taliesin was about to become greatly angered. “Was that what all this noise about being a virgin was all about? Seduction, Kelyra? The fear I felt from you was about what I’d do if I found out about Branwen, wasn’t it? You were no virgin, were you.” He said harshly.

Gasping, tears glinting her eyes, she spluttered, “How can you say that?”

Suddenly a bit nasty, he quipped, “If you’re a virgin, where’s the blood, Kelyra?” He quickly glanced at the bed and her robes satisfied to see there was nothing there.

Defensive and hurt, Kelyra responded, “My hymen was broken years ago... It is my people’s custom... You ‘know’ I was virgin. You ‘know’ it. Oh, please, Maerdyynn. You’re hurting me, don’t do this to me.” Tears streamed her face and though Taliesin had a great desire to take her into his arms to comfort her, he restrained his actions, as he also felt used and manipulated.

“Tell me, Kelyra. Tell me you’ve not been helping to train my daughter to be a Sacred Singer behind my back... You, you and Olwen, I’d imagine.” He looked at her squarely, watching her sob to herself as she drew her robes about her. Making no answer to him, he knew what he feared was so. “Get out, Kelyra... Get out of my room, get out of my life... I may have to work with you, but right now I don’t wish to deal with you any more than I can help.”

As she got up to go she looked back at him once, her lips quavering, “What about Branwen, Taliesin? What about your daughter?”

“My daughter?... Right now I’m just too angry... It would be better right now if you kept her out of my sight... I will see her and I will remember you...” His face was bitter and a look of betrayal was drawn across his eyes, “It’s not fair... but for her sake... Not right now... I’m just too angry...I have asked you to get out, Kelyra... Now go!” So frightened she didn’t know what to feel, Kelyra ran from the room, her face wet with emotion. When he was sure she was long gone, he got up and stood at the window watching the sun move into the sky. Curling his fingers around a favorite mug, a simple mug Branwen had made for him when she was seven and yet lived with her mother, he stared at it a moment. A sense of impotent rage filled him as he took the mug and threw it at the corner of the room where it shattered into tiny fragments. “Daughter, daughter, daughter.” He sighed as he shut his eyes in the morning sun.

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“You mustn’t go to you father right now, Branwen... Just stay with us here and get ready for Mabon. It’s only a couple days.” Spoke Kelyra, her mood shaky as she tried to repress her tears.

“But ‘why’ can’t I see Papa?” Branwen spoke sullenly. He was big and warm and she loved his patient hugs, his warm doting voice.

“He’s very busy... He’s got lots of preparations to see to... And so do you. There’s no time, love. I want this to be very, very special.” ‘Maybe it will work,’ she thought, ‘Maybe if he hears her, see her interacting with the Dancer and the music... You said you’d never desert your child. Prove it, Taliesin. Because if you can’t deal with this, then how are you to deal with the other one I know still isn’t grown?’ Though she tried hard as she could not to let any of her feelings show, her movements were shaky and sporadic. As she played her harp to let Branwen sing, her mind kept going over and over the times she had played for Taliesin as he sang. Listening to his daughter she heard him through Branwen’s voice, so that in the middle of the song she abruptly erupted into a great burst of tears. Almost dropping her harp, she put her hands to her face to cover her sobbing. Branwen ran up to her and hugged her though Kelyra refused to respond. For what seemed an agonizing amount of time, Kelyra wept as Branwen stood powerless to move her.

When Olwen came in to join them after having gone through some points with the other Singers, she too rushed to Kelyra though she shooed Branwen away to the other room. “Oh, my sister... What can possibly be wrong?”

“He’s right... You know, I think he’s right. I tricked him. I seduced him. And I’ve paid so dearly for it.”

“Oh, my.” Said Olwen, sitting beside Kelyra and wrapping her in her arms. “You can’t possibly mean Maerdyng?”

Kelyra wiped her tears with her hands. “Oh, but I did... I did... Perhaps I thought by loving him I could get him to accept his daughter’s Gift.”

“What, Kelyra?... You didn’t tell him... did you?” Was Olwen’s concern.

“I... I slept with him.” Kelyra stumbled.

“I sort of assumed you would... Actually, I sort of assumed that’s something ‘he’s’ been after for a long while... If there’s been seduction, I think you have the situation backwards.”

Kelyra wet her lips and whispered, “I’ve never slept with a man before.”

Taken off guard, Olwen looked at Kelyra closely, thinking a long time before responding, “You surprise me, Kelyra. I’ve always gotten the impression that you liked men very much... But if it is not your usual inclination, how can you even begin to say ‘you’ seduced ‘him’?”

“No... no, you don’t understand... I... I... I’m afraid. I’m afraid of children. I’m afraid of being a mother. I’m afraid of being tied down... but then he was here... always here... and he’s sweet, and he’s gentle... and ‘now’ I’ve made him hate me... I’m so afraid I may have made him hate Branwen, too... I told him. Yes, I told him... I counted on his love. I counted on him loving me. Loving Branwen.”

“Why, that selfish boar... I have half a mind to go to him and knock him along the side of his head!... My poor, poor Kelyra... Shh, shh, now.” She rocked her friend tenderly and sang a couple soothing strains. Though she could not penetrate into the deeper layers of Kelyra’s hurt like a Bard would do, her voice was soothing, bestowing an air of peace within the room. A peace that Kelyra eventually responded well to, laying her head on Olwen’s shoulder and closing her eyes. “He’ll come round... He’ll come round or I’ll set his rooms on fire.” Olwen spoke determinedly.

“Olwen... don't say that... I tricked him, I tricked him. He's a right to his anger.” She said sleepily, exhausted from her emotional out burst.

“Now I 'can' believe he is Eldritch... 'You' gave him your vulnerability; you gave him a piece of your soul... And 'he's' made you believe you tried to take his... Son of sorcerers, son of the Eldritch. It's not hard to believe, anymore... I hope you pay for this, Maerdynn. I hope you pay.” Olwen said softly into the air for Kelyra was now fast asleep.



Mabon was a wonderful affair as the people made the major harvest from the fields. It was a good harvest, so that there was much rejoicing and a real sense of magick filled the air. Kelyra and Olwen were very careful not to let Taliesin or Branwen ever see each other, afraid of the effect the meeting would bring between them. Branwen was still under the impression that she was keeping a great secret though she did not understand why she couldn't see her father or why Kelyra was now always so emotional and jittery. But, she had quickly come to love Kelyra and Olwen and thought it best to go with their judgment.

Lady Creirwy, who had found in the Eastern Priests an interested ear, looked on the festivities with some newly found disgust. Though she still fancied Taliesin, she also took great delight in defaming him to the priests. They took in her attitude so well to heart that as well as snubbing him when they could and sometimes flatly ignoring him, they also tried now to make his actions seem trivial and superstitious. Because Taliesin cared little about the priests and was confident in his status, he usually found himself shrugging his shoulders and going about his business.

Late on the evening of Mabon, when the procession left from the Greathouse to proceed to the village that had been chosen for the festivities, Taliesin had conceded many of the Bardic duties to Dylan, as he was still greatly heartsick about the recent events concerning Kelyra and Branwen. Though he made the pretense of both ignoring Kelyra and only dealing with her when he had to, he often caught himself watching her when he was unobserved. Was he right to be so angry? Yet, he hated the feeling that he had been manipulated and it stung him to the core. 'Who knows how long she's been training Branwen? How do I know she's not been using magick? Yes, it seemed so much she really was as she said. I wouldn't have thought she could've hidden that from me, that she could have fabricated that sense of need and anxiety. Goddess, I don't know. I just don't know... And my daughter... Gods, I am so angry...' "Branwen." He murmured quietly and shook his head as they walked in the procession.

Next to him, Dylan quickly looked at Taliesin when he had murmured, but Dylan made no comment and kept his thoughts to himself. Dylan had tried so hard not to pry from Taliesin the emotions and thoughts he clammed into himself, though Dylan was hit with a sense of turmoil despite it. Though he had been Taliesin's Second for over two years, the one night they had recently shared together had greatly deepened Dylan's understanding, respect and love for the other man to such a degree that Dylan's natural empathic abilities could barely stand the mental torment that Taliesin emanated. For all his apparent openness, Taliesin was actually a tremendously private person who could lock someone out as if he had simply shut a door. "Brother." Said Dylan, offering

Taliesin the space to speak. “Are you sure you wish me to take the lead tonight?” Taliesin simply glanced at Dylan shaking his head ‘yes’ as he sighed deeply. No more words would come from him and Dylan knew it best to leave the matter alone.

The three young men who had become part of the little group that attended the new Christian priests’ services had conceived of some ways that they might humiliate Taliesin and with those plans had gone out to the designated village earlier in the day. They brought a change of clothes and wonderful masks, much as many folk would be wearing in the night. Though their plans were not fixed, they scouted the area for a place where there might be an empty shack or hut. Finally finding something a little distance from the main village site, they were pleased as they changed and awaited for the festivities to begin.

The rituals were both grand and simple as the villagers brought in offerings from the harvest to be blessed and used in the rites. Pleased with how Dylan handled himself, for he was not much older than many of the Runners and still fairly new to so much ritual and duty, Taliesin allowed himself a smile or two for his friend as the night moved on. Then it came time for the people to settle themselves into a great circle where they sat or stood to watch. First, a beautiful mystery play was performed by the Players. The timing was good, the Players had practiced hard and everyone enjoyed the colorful spectacle they had come up with. Taliesin stayed and watched the play, but when it came time for the Sacred Singers, Dancers and Musicians to perform, he moved away into a grove of trees as his emotions had become too unsettling to him. Having noticed the movement, Olwen watched him, making certain she knew exactly where he had gone off to.

When the singing and dancing were finished, Olwen went out to approach Taliesin. “Taliesin.” She said, rather demanding, “We need to talk.”

“What do you want?” He said bitterly, turning to face her.

“I want you to come down to the circle. Right now.”

“Why? Why should I? So you and Kelyra can play some other game with me?” He said rather testily.

“I’m tired of ‘your’ attitude, Tal... You’ve no right to act this way... You’re a stubborn old ass and sometimes I don’t think you deserve much from any of us.”

“Well...” He began, his face beginning to flush.

“Oh, hush... You come down to the circle right now. If you don’t, I guarantee you’re going to have problems with ‘all’ the Singers, Dancers and Musicians... Do you understand me?” She threatened.

“If this is some trick...” He replied slowly and deliberately, “You’ll be sorry you ever entered the Mother’s domain.”

Olwen sighed but looked at him pointedly, “Just come, Taliesin... That’s all I want from you.” She turned and left. For a moment Taliesin just stood there shaking and angered once again, but then cooled enough to decide that he might as well go back. What difference did it make; though he found it curious that she had been so demanding.

Just before he got back to the circle he heard singing and his heart stopped. It was beautiful, it was sublime, it was the voice of a young woman with full Singer’s Gift. “It can’t be.” He whispered as he drew near.

“Oh, yes, it can, yes it can, Taliesin.” Said Olwen as she came up close behind him. Finally he could see into the circle, see Damon dancing, Kelyra playing and Branwen singing. It was incredible how well Branwen could play her voice between the

harp and Damon's steps. "Your daughter, Taliesin... Your wonderful, gifted, beautiful daughter. You ought to be bursting with pride, you selfish boar." Taliesin's breath caught as tears welled in his eyes. "And you hurt my Sister, Maerdyenn... You hurt her so badly, I don't know if it will ever heal."

Turned from her, she could not see the slow tears moving down his face, "I'm sorry... Oh, Goddess, I am so sorry."

"I don't know if sorry will do, Maerdyenn... But, it's a start... At least your daughter isn't really aware of your foolishness. We've seen to that... You better act the father now and tell her how much you love her when she's done."

"Thank-you, Olwen, bless you." He sighed, his hands and body shaking. But just as the three people finished their wonderful performance and folk were coming up to gather around them, three young men with masks saw their chance and grabbed Branwen roughly, dashing back out through the confusion as Branwen screamed. For a moment Taliesin stood aghast, his mouth dropping open, "Oh, my Gods!" He cried, running to the space she had been taken from. "Branwen!" He cried, looking through the crowd.

"Papa!" She screamed, "Help me!"

Taking a sword from one of the guards from Court, Taliesin ran after his daughter with Kelyra following fast behind him, though he was unaware, with her a sword she, too, had gotten in much the same way. After her last scream, the youths put cloth about Branwen's mouth to stop her noise as they rushed through and past the crowd to the staked out house in the dark. Young and quick, they had somehow managed to elude the people in the confusion of masks, colored cloths and the dim of a new moonless night. Realizing he could no longer see or hear her, Taliesin stopped at the edge of the village of houses and huts, the rustle of a light breeze playing as the sound of domestic animals in their pens served to complicate his senses even more. His breathing was quick and faltered and he nearly fell when Kelyra ran into him in the dark. "Maerdyenn..." She said, "Where is she?"

For a moment he looked at her in the shadows with some sense of anger returning, "what are you doing, Kelyra?"

"Don't, Maerdyenn. Don't say a thing. Your daughter's in danger... We've both got links to her. I think it best we join minds and find her... Hurry!"

Her firmness of carriage and the urgency in Kelyra's voice were much too great for Taliesin to dismiss. "Alright, alright... Here... take my hands. Join with me. Find my daughter with me." As they joined their energies, Taliesin was stunned by Kelyra's hurt that hit him in a full blast before he rose back out of their mutual state to seek his daughter once again. Once they were firm on where his daughter was, he looked at Kelyra wide-eyed, an echo of sorrow in the timbers of his voice, "I didn't know, Kelyra... I didn't know." Then he rushed away as she followed after him. Behind them the villagers, Court and various other people began to search as well, though they hadn't been able to trace Taliesin or Kelyra in the profusion of disorder.

Fortunately, when Taliesin and Kelyra pushed inside the hut, Branwen had not been hurt yet, though it was obvious the youths had every intention of doing so. The young men were so stunned at the ease of their discovery, for a long moment they simply stared. Realizing the horrible trouble they were now faced with, they tried to rush the hut's entrance to escape. However, Taliesin was strong and greatly skilled, and with Kelyra to back him, there was hardly a contest to be had. Hearing the noise, the rest of

the searching people came up to the hut to unmask the youths and drag them away. Taliesin quickly released his daughter from her bonds to hold her tightly in his arms. "Oh, daughter, daughter, daughter... Your Papa has been so vain. Can you ever forgive him?"

"Forgive you?... Forgive you for what? You rescued me... I was so frightened." She said still shaking.

"I heard you... I heard you sing..."

"Was it a surprise?" she asked, beginning to calm down and smile up at him in a hopeful anticipation.

"Oh, my love... It was a wonderful, wonderful surprise..." He picked her up in his arms, hugging and delighting in her as he carried her back to the circle as the crowd was beginning to calm again as well and where he decided he would resume his status and give the closing rites.



A few days after Mabon when the three youths had been banished from all of Cymru for their foolish stunt, Taliesin opened the door to the Bardic apartments as Kymon was cleaning out the fireplace in the main room. Pleased and surprised to see Kelyra standing in the room, Taliesin had been uncertain whether she really would respond to his request for her presence. He watched her closely, though she avoided his eyes as she stepped in. "Thank-you for coming." He said quietly and respectfully.

"Well, I have my own reasons for coming, Maerdynn..." She said, finally looking up at him as he closed the door. "I'm leaving, Maerdynn."

Surprised, Taliesin said nothing as he watched her. Swallowing, he nodded once, then indicated that they ought sit as Kymon left back out of the apartments realizing that his presence was not wanted. As they sat, Taliesin asked, "When do you go?"

"I sent a message to the Bardic Council with a Runner this morning who promised she would go directly to them... I know where I wish to go, but I await their acquiescence... I guess, whenever I receive word. I'll go."

"Winter will be soon."

"Then I hope the message will be answered promptly."

"Grant me something, Kelyra...please."

She looked at him a long time, thinking on what he might ask. "Well?" She said finally as he did seem to be awaiting some signal from her.

"We shared mind, Kelyra... I know how wrong I was and it hurts me. It hurts me a lot... You gave me so much. Of yourself, of my daughter." He looked off for a moment trying to find the words that would make what he wanted actually come to pass. He decided on simplicity. "I love you, Kelyra... Give me the chance... Give me the chance to try to heal you... Let me fulfill what ought be my responsibility... Once... That's all I ask. Stay with me one more time." She got up and walked to a window on the side of the room to look out over the landscape where the trees shown in an array of brilliant colors. Taliesin deliberately went up to her, slowly encasing her from behind, snuggling his face into her hair and neck, "Share mind with me." He murmured sensuously.

“I wish to take your daughter with me when I go... It would be good for her... Yes... I’ll stay with you.” She turned in his arms and let him hug her warmly. “You ‘better’ heal me.”

Starting to chuckle, he responded, “You drive a hard bargain, my sweet... My daughter, eh? With you?... We’ll see... I suspect you may be going a long ways from here... and I would have to consult such things with her mother, too... and I don’t truly know you, now, do I?” He arched his brows at her and tilted his head, “And if you would have my answer, then you will have to stay with me ‘till Summer-time to get it... And... you must let ‘me’ have the time to heal you truly and completely.” He said, kissing her with gradual passion.

“And you say I drive a hard bargain... Alright, then. ‘Til Summer... my love, my love.” She said giving in totally to his embraces at last.