

RHIANNON – CHILD OF TWILIGHT

Chapter 2

To Cross Over

“Having been angered by foolish accusations aimed at him from the Eastern Priests of Lord Ian’s Court, your father went out to the stables to mount his horse and ride into the countryside, hoping to settle his intense emotions. No Bard likes to have their emotions disrupted to a point that would not let them control their speech. Therefore your father tried to remove himself for a time that he might not have converse with anyone.

“It was still Winter and a great storm quickly blew in as he galloped, turning into a blizzard. Soon being forced to slow down to a walk, he finally dismounted, and as he had ridden the horse bareback, he took a handful of the gelding’s mane to try and guide him though Morgan could barely see himself.

“Quickly he realized that he could no longer trace or recognize his whereabouts so he decided to stand still and quiet as a great whirl of wind rushed around him so that he might calm his mind and reach out to your mother. Just as she began to respond by slightly tugging at his mind to help guide him homewards, your father’s thoughts were broken by the tingling of strange, melodic bells. Opening his eyes he peered out into the blizzard to see a quiet place near a frame of evergreen trees. Feeling no sense of danger and curious to see what this might be he guided the gelding with him as he carefully stepped towards it.

“As he got to the edge he was suddenly stopped by an odd looking little man that made your father frown with speculation, “You may come no further, sir.” The man spoke with courtesy, “You are as yet bound to the Wheel’s touch. Yet, we honor you and yours much. It is of that honor that our Lady and Lord would come speak with you. Please... wait here.” With that the odd little man seemed to virtually disappear and your father was left standing to stare at the beautiful glassy calm beyond the trees.

“After but a moment or so a man and woman clothed in white and green seemed to appear as if out of nowhere walking towards him in the calm. The woman was stately and beautiful with great cascades of pale moon colored hair that seemed to sparkle with countless star-like jewels that winked in and out from some unseen source of light. The man was tall, handsome and grave with the same pale hair and he signed in friendship to your father who bowed slightly in deference as response. The woman’s gaze was fixed and intent as she spoke, “You are the Bard my people whisper of. You... and your Lady... Whether blessed or cursed you bear a fate. Not often are the doors between the Worlds severed... yet, by quickening your Lady’s womb you have allowed for the entrance of a child of wonder. For somehow she choose to bypass my Lord and I, choosing instead to enter your world. How and why, who helped her and what she wishes from this we are unsure. However, someday you may well replace the favor.”

“Your father drew his face into a perplexed frown, “If this is so, why my Lady and myself? Why now?”

“The tall pale man looked off beyond your father, sadness in his light blue eyes, “When the Mother Danu’s time to pass into the Summerland draws near, your daughter will be called to serve in her stead. It is a fault of some of our best that they still feel

desire to move upon your lands and assist in your future... and sometimes find the means and will to do so... But never forget, beloved friend, she is our daughter, too... and we fear for her.”

“Suddenly the vision dissipated and your father stood again amidst the blizzard as he had before. Yet after but a moment, your mother’s bond resumed its quiet tug within him and he slowly and carefully made his way home. Shaken by this revelation he also found that he could not tell your mother anything of his experience when he returned to his hearth. Not until the day of his death did he ever speak of your destiny for he often thought it might be but a hallucination brought upon him because of the blinding storm.” Kyle paused a moment in his rendition and sighed long before continuing his last comment as if thinking it over first. “Or so he told me in dream the night before the day I now know he died.”

“Was my Papa handsome, Father?” Spoke Rhiannon softly as she played with a toy in the shape of a horse before the fire. Though but a child of five summers, her voice was so beautiful it took Kyle’s breath a moment before he could respond. She was an ethereal looking child with wheat colored hair, darker than normal skin and great brown eyes that bespoke an elder wisdom as if she played the part of child rather than truly was one.

“Ah, handsome enough... with a strong, wonderful voice.” Kyle’s smile was sad with memory seeing the image of his once friend and lover in his inner eye.

“You miss him.” She said in a frank and candid way.

“Always... But, I shall see him again someday.”

“Then... is he with the Faeries?”

Sometimes it seemed difficult to keep listening to her voice for it could be as if millions of brilliant colors and images rushed within his brain. Kyle bent from his large fur covered chair to pick the little girl up, hug her and seat her on his lap. “Who can say, my love... who can say? Perhaps he stays with your People... Perhaps that is how he now returns the favor... by harping and singing for them in their halls...”

From out side Genevieve entered their small cave through a leather door to keep out the weather. Their cave was part of many interconnecting caverns throughout the North Western Mountains they named Waljanargel (Chosen Refuge) of Gwenydd, where Members of the Council often came to meditate, study, teach and help administer. For three years Genevieve had stayed with the Council, mourning her lover’s death and allowing Kyle to help her raise Rhiannon. She carried fruits and bread, smiling at the two of them as she drew closer. There was a long gray streak through her walnut hair that she liked to braid separately enclosing a raven’s feather between the strands in personal reminder to herself of her widowhood. Yet she still loved to wear bells and they tingled softly as she moved offering some of the bread and fruit to Kyle and Rhiannon. Then she sank softly to the floor before a small fire near Kyle’s feet. She sat and watched the fire a long while before deciding to speak, “Father... There is something I must say to you.”

“Sister... you are always free to say whatever you like.” Was Kyle’s amiable speech.

“I must be leaving... It is time I resume my life and do the duties of my rank and standing. I have pitied myself long enough.”

“And you would take Rhiannon...?”

Genevieve turned and looked deeply in Kyle's eyes, "Yes... yes I would, Father... She is my daughter. And I am a Bard... To be on the road... It is something she must learn in time... may she not learn that with me?"

"Genevieve..." He whispered and closed his eyes, a slight glint at the edges though Rhiannon brought him back by tugging at his long gray beard. Though he shook his head 'no' at her, he opened his eyes and smiled down at her as well. Then he looked off at the walls of the cave before he felt he could go on, "I can not help but fervently wish that you would stay. It keeps my memories of Morgan strong and happy ones, for I can rejoice in his beautiful offspring and take comfort from the kindly company of his lovely lady... Yet, Sister, I know you are very right... We both have duties we've been neglecting for the sake of assuaging our own sorrows. For we are very much alive and ought get on with the realities of living... I ought go out and teach somewhere if not here at Waljanargel... And the Council would hardly stand in your way should you take Rhainnon with you. The lines that lead into your future speak that there is no one more excellent than you to take her through this time in her life. For she will learn to 'live' our life as well as our philosophies and ethics. And that is the most important thing right now." He set his hand upon Genevieve's shoulder and lightly squeezed.

She drew a hand to his, "I thank you and the Council for its protection in my unsettled state..."

"When do you leave?" Asked Kyle almost afraid to hear.

"As soon as possible lest I change my mind. Perhaps in the morning. if I may." She got up and smiled gently as she looked at Rhiannon who had relaxed and now slept in Kyle's arms. "We love you, Father... We will think of you often. Someday she will return... May you be here to greet her."

"If the Lady wills... You 'know' I shall."



A few years passed as the young child, Rhiannon, traveled with her mother and though a serious child, Rhiannon was deeply happy and content with this fairly vagabond sort of lifestyle. She liked meeting all the various levels of people and knowing about all the different things around her, benefiting greatly from her travel as she got to know all the nuances and manners of the Bardic Path as they were played out in front of her. Though they never stayed long in any one place, they did always make certain that they weathered over the Winter at someone's Court and Greathouse. Though some Bards and Runners might continue to travel during lighter Winter weather or stay at a village or town that could house them, Genevieve deemed it best to seek somewhere more suited to a woman with a precocious child, for the Courts would have their various Players, Sacred Dancers and such that Rhiannon could learn from as well during the couple months away from the road. The Court Bards all guessed something of Rhiannon's uniqueness and were always more than pleased to have the two of them at any time, especially a rather young looking Chief Bard who had distinguished himself for his diplomacy in one of the more Eastern areas of Powys in North Cymru. They had only passed through once before and finally found themselves there one Winter, but the young Chief Bard was more than happy to show the child about and help, even taking a good deal of time to explain various intricacies of Bardic life at Court to her. Genevieve wondered if he might not

make a good Council Member someday as he really did have some propensity for teaching, for that was the main function of a Council Member, and was awfully patient for one so seemingly young. Yet she was hardly in the place to make such decisions, though she thought she might just mention the Bard to Kyle if ever she might see him again to make the suggestion. Though there were pockets throughout Cymru, it was in these more Eastern regions that in some places Christianity was truly taking hold as a force and though this young Bard held a strong stand at his Court and a good bit of the area around him, Christianity was still seeping into the countryside bit by bit. It was after that one Winter that Genevieve thought it would be good to skim even closer to these places where the new Religion was taking hold thinking it good for Rhiannon's knowledge and information. Though the Chief Bard was a bit skeptical, he wished them both a warm sending hoping they might return that way when they had the chance.

It was in the Summer after as the flowers bloomed in many hues across the hilly countryside with the sun glinting in its warm haze as it drifted over the land like a strange sluggish river from another dimension that Genevieve and Rhiannon were riding alone without any Runners. Often Genevieve preferred it as it enabled them to move quickly through these areas if there was a need and felt it caused less attention to them. They were at the edge of a thick wooded area where the soft, gurgled sounds of water indicated that a stream was nearby. There were also the slight sounds and smells in the air that indicated to Genevieve that a village or town was likely close by, or at the very least a few houses. Though Rhiannon was now but ten years, she sat her own horse with particular ease beyond her years and her face was keen and watchful as her mother's. They were fairly uncertain what sort of community these smells indicated as they could decipher no signs one way or the other and Genevieve had decided it wisest to avoid it and was turning she and Rhiannon to go in a direction away from it.

A falcon flew high overhead for several moments and Genevieve smiled at its aerial show of grace as she thought about how both she and her deceased lover, Morgan, had once been avid falconers. As she watched a displaced sound suddenly reached Genevieve's ears and she turned her head quickly noting that Rhiannon had stiffened into an alerted stance. From the ridge of the last hill they heard the quick pace of several horses so that Genevieve pushed at Rhiannon's horse. "Take her into the woods, Rhiannon... I don't know what this bodes... Do not let them see you." Looking once at her mother in some perplexity and fear she obeyed melting into the greenery with near feary stealth.

Though Genevieve thought to try and follow her daughter after a moment so that one could not trace that there were two of them, three men leading two other horses halted a small distance having seen her before she could manage to leave. With that she turned her own horse and watched them carefully and though she had thought the territory they had been in were mostly within Bardic boundaries, now she felt deeply uncertain. "Christos!" Remarkd one making Genevieve's skin crawl with nervous anticipation, "What is the likes of you coming here!... The Bishop had several troublemakers hung last spring for aiding your kind in escape!" Hearing these words a drop of fear sweated at the nape of Genevieve's neck. "And aren't you the pretty one."

Another smiled wickedly, "The Bishop would be pleased at your demise and it would not matter how it was accomplished."

Gritting herself, Genevieve immediately drew her sword and flashed it at them. “Do you think me so defenseless just because you don’t teach your own women how to fight?” Her words were terse as her nostrils flared and her great dark eyes dared them with a deadly edge that caused the men to pause for a moment.

“You witch...” Said the tallest one with dripping venom as all three drew their swords as well. “We’ll teach you just ‘what’ ought be taught women like you.” In a moment they all engaged her and though at first the men were cruelly playful, their attitude quickly changed for Genevieve was excellent with both her sword and in maneuvering her horse. However, their numbers alone eventually overcame her though she did manage to kill one and severely wound another before they had unhorsed her and continued to attack and fight her on the ground. In the end they did finally beat and rape her brutally, leaving her to die in a large pool of her own blood.

Frightened, Rhiannon had watched everything from behind the leaves of bushes that concealed her and her horse, wanting to attack and help her mother yet realizing it unwise and that she too would likely receive the same fate. When the men had left, their dead companion across his horse and one other looking as if he, too, might find death receive him if they did not acquire help before long, Rhiannon carefully and quietly came out towards her mother leaving her horse in the bushes. Saying nothing, she bent down to Genevieve and touched gently over the body trying to sense her mother’s life force. Satisfied that Genevieve’s life force remained, Rhiannon connected with it and though it was very low, Rhiannon clasped it and began to move it forward. Staying in place a long time, Rhiannon went deeply into trance moving Genevieve’s life gently and slowly with the careful touch even a Healer might envy. So deeply in trance was she that a startled voice was the first that she realized of anyone approaching them and she forced herself to an abrupt stop to turn and meet the newcomer.

“She’ll live. But she needs help.” Said Rhiannon in a peculiarly adult manner to the village woman who had come upon them.

When the village woman noted the badly ripped and mangled clothes that Genevieve wore she raised her brows, “A Bard...” she whispered a little shaken and concerned, “How is it she crossed over to this area?”

“They hurt her... Please, might you help her... She needs water, she needs rest,” implored Rhiannon with a voice that seemed to move the woman whether she willed or no.

“Yes, child... But, first let me get her other clothes... I’ll bring her water, too. But you must understand, she can’t be seen in Bardic gear... I’ll be back as soon as I can. Get rid of any Bardic trapping you have on you, too... the belt especially.” The woman hurried off as Rhiannon resumed her healing of her mother though she did as the woman asked removing her belt and some pieces of jewelry. By the time the woman reappeared Genevieve was conscious again and many of her worst wounds were beginning to show signs of healing. The woman regarded Genevieve with some surprise as she knelt down with the water and clothes. “My name is Kyra, lady... I come from Addienglyn, a small village a bit south from here...” she put a hand to Genevieve’s brow with a wet cloth, “I’ll clean you as best I can and you must change into the clothes I brought you... Is this your daughter?”

“Give her something to drink.” Said Rhiannon and the woman obeyed perfunctorily. “Yes, she is my mother... and I’ll help you with her.”

“You have a very brave daughter.”

“Have I... Have I crossed into Christian territory somehow?” spoke Genevieve weakly uncertain what was going on.

“Yes, lady... but... you’ll be alright. We’ll burn these clothes and you can come stay with me for the time being... I’ll just tell my husband you were stranded. Your husband fell to robbers though you and your girl escaped... He’s a good man, my husband. He’ll not question too close... It’s happened before, I’m afraid... been some bandits about of late and I’m sorry that you may have run into such evil men.”

“Are you Christian?”

“Yes, lady... But I surely don’t understand the attitude of so many of my brethren. I will not turn you away, lady... I don’t believe Jesus would have done so, either.” Rhiannon and Kyra had nearly finished washing Genevieve off as she found herself strong enough to pull herself up into a seated position and began to change clothing. “You will have to say you are Christian.”

“I understand... My name is Genevieve. This is my daughter, Rhiannon... I am deeply thankful for your kindness... I am certain you can find plenty for my daughter and I to do at your home in thanks.” Genevieve’s words were slow and measured, indicating that she was still in shock. After burning the remains of Bardic clothing, Kyra, with Rhiannon’s help, slowly and gently pulled Genevieve to a very shaky stand. Being that Genevieve was a fairly small woman to Kyra, Kyra found it relatively easy to steady Genevieve. “Where is my horse?”

“Mine is hid in the leaves and bushes,” said Rhiannon matter-of-factly, “They took my mother’s. They also took her sword.”

“Can you get your horse, then?” said Kyra, “If your mother can ride, so much the better.” With that Rhiannon easily retrieved her dappled mare that had been so quietly waiting in the brush and trees rather surprising Kyra, though she didn’t know what to say. Though Genevieve’s child, Rhiannon’s horse had no Bardic trappings of any kind and Rhiannon had had very few that she had already removed. Carefully they helped Genevieve upon the horse’s back. “My lady, are you all right?”

“Yes, I’ll be steady enough. Cassie is a good mare... She’s been with us for years. She was a present to Rhiannon from Kyle. Rhiannon loves horses.” Genevieve’s mind wandered some, “I don’t know how I made such a silly mistake. I’m sure I’ve been all through this territory before... But, then again, it’s been quite a while ago now.”

“Shhh, my lady,” said Kyra as they walked towards the village, “you’re confused and ill... You must stop talking about Bards and such. For your sake and your daughter’s.”

“Oh, yes, yes. Sorry.” Genevieve stopped speaking altogether as she clung strangely to the horse, but remained firmly on top as they walked. However, she looked often at her daughter in a slight perpetual frown as Rhiannon walked quietly beside the mare as her mind began to wonder painfully at what affect the episode had had on Rhiannon even though her daughter had remained so cool. ‘Her spirit is very old.’ Kyle had often told her, ‘Never be surprised by her actions for they will be a mixture of human youth and spiritual depth. She is truly only your daughter by blood.’

At Kyra’s little two story rectangular house of mud brick and straw thatched roof, a bed of sweet grass was made in the corner of the large open room of the bottom floor. The second story was really just a loft overhead that appeared to serve as the man and

woman's bedroom. A simple kitchen-like area formed one end by a small chimney and hearth with a small low table and chairs. No children seemed in evidence and the house was clean and orderly if fairly simple and crude. Kyra laid blankets over the grass, and then bid Genevieve lie down as she went to put tea to brew over a fire in the fireplace. Rhiannon sat down by her mother going back to doing some healing as Genevieve allowed herself to drift back into unconsciousness.

In a little while Kyra's husband came home having worked a long day in his occupation as black smith and Kyra had fixed him a hearty dinner. Though surprised by the unexpected guests, he was a big-hearted man and welcomed the strangers graciously. Though somewhat disturbed by Rhiannon's blond hair and somewhat dark skin, he never the less felt deeply sorry for her mother's plight. "Perhaps we could help them build a small house next to ours... they were looking for a nice place where they might settle when they were fell upon. She may be small but the mother seems like she's fairly sturdy. I'm sure she'll be a great help in the fields. And I could do with a child around." Said Kyra hopefully.

"I suppose... why not." Remarked the man as he settled in a chair next to the fire. "Without our help a young widow like that is likely to have all sorts of vile problems beset her... Christ would not want to see her abused... So I will not."

Rhiannon looked over at the big and hearty man. "Many blessings to you." Her beautiful voice struck him quieting all his possible misgivings about the mother and her child like a warm comforting breeze.

"And to you, little one. My name is Owain. I am the Black Smith of Addienglyn. Is that your horse outside? She could do with some new shoes, eh?"

"That would be kind of you... My name is Rhiannon. My mother is Genevieve. We are both more than willing to help out in any manner that you might feel appropriate."

"And how old are you, girl?"

"I was ten not long ago..."

"You're a small lass, then... So's your mother. Sometimes the priests have not been kind to Picts. But don't you worry. I think it might be best to say you're of my family. Cousins, I guess. Just a throwback of some kind, but hardly Pict. Frankish blood, perhaps... Came to live with us, lost the father and belongings on the way... We'll get more help out of the neighbors if you're my relatives." Owain stroked his beard and smiled pleased by his story that the rest seemed more than willing to agree with.

Kyra then began to pass out the food she had made for dinner as Genevieve slowly regained enough consciousness to receive it though she remained seated on the bed of grass. Rhiannon sat and ate beside her mother, gratified by the kindness and warmth the village couple was showing them.

In the next several weeks a small simple house was erected for them with the help of the neighbors as Genevieve found her strength again to help Kyra out in any way she could. Rhiannon proved to be greatly strong for her size, doing all her mother or Kyra might ask of her with spirit and grace. Though deeply grateful for the house and tender care, Genevieve let Kyra know that she would probably leave once she really found a way to gracefully do so. "I hardly want to shed any suspicion on you, Kyra... But, you know I don't belong here. I'm doing my best to play your religion, but, I'm sorry, you

know it is not something I can subscribe to. I am a priestess in my own... and that is where I truly belong.”

“I beg you not to be hasty, my lady. My husband and I have come to love you and your child.”

“We will stay at least a turn of the Seasons, friend. For your kindness, if for no other reason. You have helped me escape what would have been an irretrievable bitterness to anyone of your religion and helped me to remember that there are good people no matter their faith or blood. You certainly spoke the truth when you said your husband is a good man... No matter what, Kyra, my daughter and I will remember you both with great fondness and love.”

As the Seasons began to change Genevieve noticed with great sadness that without the Bards and Runners so common in Pagan areas, the people had ended up with very little entertainment any more outside the village’s own, which was also surprisingly discouraged by the Christian priests. There was also a degradation of communication between the villages and towns except what might be gleaned from the occasional merchant or traveling priest; hardly a replacement for what the Bards had provided with their network. She and Rhiannon did as they could to pretend the religion of their neighbors, though often distasteful to their ears as they learned the customs of their hosts as quickly as possible spending many long hours with Kyra. Fortunately there was very little suspicion of them as they were expected to be somewhat foreign at first and the story of them being related to Owain held well enough although the village priest had had some misgivings for a while.

Late in the Fall as Genevieve was gathering some water for the house at the village well, a merchant and his apprentices rode in with wares of cloth and pretty beads. As Genevieve looked up to note their entrance, she gave a tiny start and watched the merchant as he pulled up to the building that served as a guesthouse for people traveling through. Cautiously she approached feigning a coyness that she hoped would be seemly for her ‘status’. The man turned around to help take down his wares before some of his apprentices would take the horses to the stable. Catching his eye, Genevieve signaled to him knowing no one in this village would understand the sign. He raised his sandy brows and signaled back, a smile warming over his face, “Young lady, have you come to see my wares? I am afraid I won’t set up until tomorrow... such lovely dark hair and eyes. I have many pretty cloths that would look wonderful on you.” She just looked at him a moment uncertain how to proceed now that she had gained his attention. “Where is your husband, lady?... you seem to be alone?” He offered.

“I am a widow... I live alone with my daughter next to my cousin’s house.”

The tall, sandy haired man gestured to the guesthouse, “Would you care to join me. I am about to take some supper.”

“That would not be proper... But I shall invite you to my house for your meal. I am going back now and will be beginning its preparations.”

“A widow? Alone?”

“Owain, my cousin, lives next door to me. As I said, I am a widow. It would not be thought wrong of me to invite a friend to dine. Especially as my ‘cousin’, Owain, lives next door. If you are untoward Owain will see to your undoing... But, to go in the guesthouse with you without any sort of familial escort, for me ‘would’ be unseemly. I ‘am’ a good Christian woman after all.”

The man gave over his wares to his apprentices instructing them to settle their things in the house and take their supper as he accompanied the good widow to her home. Once inside her small house both merchant and Genevieve relaxed some though they kept their voices somewhat low and controlled. Genevieve worked on preparations for dinner as they talked, the merchant sitting in a simple chair as he rested before her hearth and fire. “Lady... whatever are you doing here?”

“It is a long story, Eric... But, I am blessed to be alive. I did not know where I was and was beaten and molested by ‘good’ Christian men. Kyra, my neighbor here, found me and took pity on me bringing me to her home. No one but Kyra knows my real status... I have found it best to play their game for awhile. Until I find some way to leave... But.. I am surprised to see you here... A merchant?”

Eric went to sit at a little table with some ale that Genevieve had given him, “It gets me through these areas... Sometimes nets us valuable information, you know... They are not necessarily overtly fond of merchants. The priests, anyway, not so much the people themselves... But, I always pay my respects to the resident priest with devotions and a little monies... The monies always helps. For the most part, they leave us alone.”

“A Bardic merchant... what a thought... I suppose it does quite well, then? But in some ways you may not really be getting the ear of the people themselves... Not like a Bard would.”

Eric shrugged. “I admit it is a sporadic thing. And only a couple of us have tried this disguise so far. But, it ‘does’ get us in and we have gotten some occasional information that has proved quite valuable, as I said... I would it might get us more.” He looked at her face and saw the mental movement. “So... are the wheel of Genevieve’s mind beginning to turn on that one?”

“Perhaps...” She smiled thinking a moment more, “What if... What if you did something that edges you closer to these people’s religion and in effect edged you closer to them?... You know, they would be so grateful for some real entertainment and news. It’s so often so dead here. I can only imagine it is the same throughout these villages of the ‘new’ religion.”

“Whoa, lady... I’m not sure I am totally following you.”

Rhiannon set crude simple plates and cups upon the table as Genevieve brought soup and bread over to dish them out for their meal. Before speaking more on the subject, Genevieve interrupted their thought with a quick blessing, then took things up again as they were breaking their bread and dipping into their soup which was delightfully aromatic and good to Eric who had had enough of the Runner’s and his own cooking for the time. “Well... to get back to what we were discussing, Eric... You must know some of their religion by now, don’t you... the Runners with you, too, I’m sure.”

“We’ve had to... It would have done no good not to...”

“Right... good... then, I say... why not write some new songs, create new poems, even new plays that might disguise the real meanings of our works in a seeming deference to their God... I mean, something you can relate to yourselves without feeling you have compromised your beliefs, yet would seem to speak to them as well... It might take some time, that’s true... but, it might also be worth the attempt... then you could slowly begin to present them... And if done right, I really believe the people would be so grateful... they might very well even tend to overlook some things if you were careful... If you were very, very pious in your bearing and presentation.... Perhaps you might well

stay a 'merchant', but you could casually bring in a 'singer' here or there, see how it goes. Perhaps in time some could even live a space somewhere. Get to 'know' folks as neighbors and friends. Through our own true abilities we might infiltrate and bring back some true web of communication here... And my home might become a safe house...?"

"Yes... I think I may rather like this... A safe house, you say?" Eric pondered in agreement excited by this stream of thought as he rolled it around in his mind, his bright hazel eyes alight and dancing.

"Especially..." Smiled Genevieve gaily, "if I were married to a merchant who truly liked entertainment... of the pious sort, of course."

Having been immersed in serious thought over Genevieve's words, he started visibly at the last. "Married to a merchant?... Do you mean me?... My, my, I've hardly met you... and just what would your 'cousin' say?"

"Now, Eric... I hardly mean tomorrow... And I hardly mean anything other than a ruse... Stay close by this area this Winter... make a formal courtship and then ask my cousin for my hand... As your wife I might receive these new 'entertainers' as you travel to sell your wares."

"Ummm... Well... this all sounds possible... but you would not be housing others here without a man here of some kind... A man that was entrusted by me."

"Oh, well... then you'll just have to send for your son..." she quipped as they ate.

"My son?... Oh, oh... yes... that's good... my son... Yes, of course... In fact, I think I've got just the right son for you. He's a Sacred Musician not far from the boundaries. He's young and energetic and I think he'd rather like a bit of excitement and secrets. He's got red hair, too. I think he'd pass quite easily." Then Eric stopped and reflected for a little while before proceeding again. "You know, Genevieve..." He said quietly and looking at her intently, "I actually wouldn't mind making this courtship real."

"Well..." Genevieve hesitated and looked down at her hands, the animated spark she had been speaking with dying down into an ember, "I'm just not very certain 'how' I feel about men right now, Eric... Those men who hurt me were not Bards... they were foreigners to me... even foreign beings in many ways... But... it's just not quite that easy to get over... I may understand that in my head, but my heart still feels things I wish I never had to feel..."

"I understand..." Eric said in a near whisper as he averted his eyes, for he knew he had been nearly staring at her before.

"At least Owain has been more than kind and the men folk of this village have been decent... Which I admit, has helped a lot... But, still, I'm just not ready for anything closer than friendship... But... I do consider you my friend."

"Yes, Sister, alright... I surely will not rush you... But, I really have always thought you were lithe and pretty, like the faye."

She smiled warmly at him at last, "Well, at least you don't look like him."

Eric frowned not following, "What? Like who?"

"Morgan." She said like the breeze upon the air.

"Morgan?" Then he remembered, "Oh... your mate. I remember him slightly. When he was Kyle's Second... Smart man. Strong mind, if I recall rightly... Why? Is it good that I don't look like him, then?"

She nodded, "With all my upsets, I'd surely rather not be courted by another Bard that even vaguely resembles him... Actually... you look rather Irish."

“Well, my lady... Actually, I rather am.” At that they both laughed deciding to speak now of other pleasantries. Though Rhiannon said almost nothing she seemed greatly pleased with the man and the ideas that were being spoken that night. She remembered him well on other roads traveled before she and her mother had come to this village and in her heart she knew that he was the sort of person her mother truly could use in her life right then.



Doing as Genevieve asked and making a formal courting throughout the Winter and into the Spring, Eric and Genevieve were married that summer by the village priest. It turned out to be a pleasant affair near the Summer Solstice with Eric giving away cloth and beads to all the women folk. New construction would start to greatly enlarge Genevieve’s little house and through his generosity, Eric had Owain and Kyra’s house enlarged as well. Eric’s ‘son’ had arrived by the wedding as well, having supposedly stayed with an Aunt and Uncle for many years after the death of Eric’s previous wife far East and South from there, but of good Christian background, to be sure. The boy was but sixteen years of age, a gangly lad with red-blond hair and winning smile and it made Genevieve wonder if there might not be some truth in him being Eric’s son after all. Answering to the name Geoffrey, he played wonderfully on the lute, playing all the music for the couple’s wedding feast and giving the village a treat that they greatly appreciated. In that both groom and bride had been ‘married’ before, no one made much of the nuptials so that the couple was simply left alone afterwards as the rest of the village feasted well into the night. Eric made no suggestion nor did Genevieve invite though their friendship had grown considerably closer throughout their courtship. “Well, my lady,” smiled Eric, “I think your ideas may be well on their way to seeing some fruition.”

“You know,” remarked Genevieve, frowning, “in a couple years Rhiannon will need to return to Bardic lands. When she turns thirteen perhaps she could marry one of your ‘apprentices’ so that she could travel back... to his ‘family’.”

Eric smiled and shook his head, “You don’t think much of marriage, do you? I am certain you are not meaning anything but another ruse by what you say.”

“It is not that, Eric, and you know it... It is just that it is convenient in these circumstances, a way to let my daughter travel without causing suspicion... And once beyond the ‘Christian’ areas it would not matter, anyway. I doubt anyone would seriously ‘hold’ her to her ‘vows’ to a foreign God, do you?... My daughter ‘needs’ to return to the Council Seat. She’s a Bard, you know... she mustn’t stay here more than is necessary.”

“A Bard?... Yes, so I thought... The Council Seat?” his eyes grew wide, “There are whispers of a Bardic child... and she is so unusual, your daughter... her ‘voice’ is incredible... The rumors say a Bardic child is to become Head of the Bardic Council at a young age... daughter of Bardic parents... a child of wonder... your daughter?”

Genevieve shrugged trying to soften the look of awe that had drawn over his face, “She is my daughter, Eric... and she is a child. And though I admit at times she acts well beyond her years, she also acts a child... The only worry I ever have is what affect my experience with those evil men may have placed upon her. She is far less trusting these last several months than she used to be... and it amuses her that we fool the people of this village... I’m not always certain I like that, but what can I do?... Perhaps the Council can

help ease her back to something that knows of trust again... But, you know, I am rather surprised and relieved those men have never come through this village. Perhaps they were from somewhere else..."

"Oh, I'm sure they were robbers, my dear... there is a good chance they would have done exactly the same if you were a Christian woman caught off alone. It's a good thing your friend Kyra hadn't been there before herself, though she probably had 'responded' to the sounds of the fight... Anyway, they've been having increasing problems with robbers and thieves in the Christian areas... a sad fact and I 'never' do any traveling alone these days..."

"Well... I shall be interested that I may get my daughter out of here when the time comes. For now it may be very good for her to understand this operation that we are forming... Something she can use... Perhaps even rely on..."

In time Genevieve was seen as very respected and somewhat wealthy as her husband provided the household with a couple cattle, horses and pigs as well as a spacious house replete with a servant or two. Her activity in bringing about the building of a small church for the village priest was well received as well as the musician or two that her husband had found on his journeys. Eventually the marriage became something real; and though no longer truly young, Genevieve found herself with child once more. There was much now to make Genevieve quite happy though she often missed the ability to travel as she willed. She well knew Rhiannon would have to leave her before long and she wondered if, once gone, she'd ever see her daughter again.



One night as Rhiannon slept in her small private room near the back of the house strange music crept lithely into her being and filled her with a curious delight. She thought herself awake, though wondering, and removed herself from her bed curious and dazed only to look back to the bed to find that her body was lying there sleeping quietly. Having had experiences before in leaving her body, she was not startled and carefully looked about herself wonderingly until she realized that there was a bright light glowing at the end of the room. With that, the whole wall disappeared into the light as a beautiful girl with long silver hair stood beckoning her to step through. For a moment Rhiannon thought she recognized the girl and would have run to grasp her, yet uncertainty came back to cloud the moment and Rhiannon just stood and stared. "Rhiannon." Spoke the girl with familiarity and a bit of humor, "Rhiannon... Come. I wish to take some time with you."

Hesitant, yet drawn by the girl's ethereal presence, Rhiannon slowly stepped forward, "Who are you?" She asked, but the girl only laughed, though it was wonderful to hear such bell-like tones. When Rhiannon finally reached her, she took Rhiannon's hand and quickly pulled Rhiannon through beyond the light.

Suddenly the scene changed to one of great frivolity as many beautiful unearthly folk danced and sang beneath a great white moon in a forest glen in rich and variant greens and golds. Frantically Rhiannon looked about, uncertain if she ought not be afraid. "Sister." Spoke the girl again as she kissed Rhiannon's cheek, "I have sorely missed

you... Why do you choose to dwell with such somber folk? I thought for certain I would never see you again. But, then I found the door that you traveled by.”

“The door?” Rhiannon blinked as the girl encircled Rhiannon’s waist to finally kiss Rhiannon fully on the mouth. Taken aback, Rhiannon pushed the girl away to which the girl laughed merrily. “I don’t understand... Who are you all?”

“We’re your brethren... This is where you ‘really’ belong.” The girl stood coyly by a tree, “I am Chrysindolyn... I am your lover.” Rhiannon frowned and shook her head so that the girl replied, “You have forgotten... Do not let the Wheel catch you or you can never return.”

Somehow Rhiannon began to understand something. “But... it was my choice... I choose to enter the Wheel... If you would be with me, Chrysindolyn... Then you must come and be with me in the Wheel.”

“No!” Raped the girl, “‘This’ is my home. I am not foolhardy like you. Brave Rhiannon, Rhiannon the good... You are a fool. What do you really think you can accomplish?... Oh, my love, I miss you so... You have made me cry. And we ‘never’ cry.”

At that moment Rhiannon sadly smiled, “You always were the one who had to have your way... Yes, I love you still, but I shall not return. I shall find the herbs I realize I need now so that I shall stay and not return... You cannot make me, Chrysindolyn... You cannot hold me, for it was ‘my’ choice... But perhaps... you may change your mind and join me in the Wheel.”

Upset a moment, the girl’s lips quavered as one great tear rolled down her cheek. Taking Rhiannon’s hand once more she said, “Then dance with me. Dance with me the final dance so that I may be free of your song forever.” Rhiannon nodded as they proceeded to join in with the other folk who were dancing in a ring upon a hill. Though everyone else was full of laughter, both Rhiannon and Chrysindolyn remained pensive as they traced the quick, sprightly steps. Rhiannon knew it was important to remain alert throughout the dance lest she be caught in a fine interwoven web; yet, if danced correctly, she and Chrysindolyn might indeed be freed of each other should they truly wish it.

Towards the end of the dance a curious sight came to Rhiannon’s eyes as she whirled and stepped about. A young man with light brown hair and blue eyes sang sweetly and played gracefully upon a harp for the rest to dance. Though his singing was not as beautiful as the others, it was full and strong having an earthy sound the others lacked that reminded Rhiannon greatly of her mother and the Bards. Their eyes finally locked for a moment and he smiled widely at her as if in recognition.

Having finished the dance successfully, Rhiannon hugged and kissed Chrysindolyn in farewell. “If you find that you still wish to love me...” Rhiannon whispered in her ear, “You now ‘must’ come to me in the realm of the Bards.” At that Chrysindolyn turned away refusing to look back as she walked and disappeared within the others who continued to dance.

As Rhiannon repaired to find her sleeping form once more feeling the draw of her body pulling her back, the young man with the harp approached her to put something in her hands. As she looked at the leaves he had pressed there he said, “It will not be the last attempt, Rhiannon... Though some wish you well, others will seek your return... In order to stabilize yourself and let you remain in the Wheel... For though you may have a human body, your spirit is so strong that you will need these for a time... Look for these leaves

when you go back to Genevieve. Chew them and you will gain the upper hand... And Rhiannon... Tell your mother... I still love her.” At those words Rhiannon looked up only to find the whole scene having disappeared where once again she was back in the room.

Certain she knew exactly which leaves had been presented to her she settled back into her body where she fell into a peaceful sleeping state. “Thank-you, Papa.” She breathed once before falling into a long and pleasant dream.



Nearing her thirteenth birthday, the question of Rhiannon’s leaving came up again between Genevieve and Eric when he had come back from one of his travels to stay a little while. “It would be best if she were married, perhaps to that nice young boy, Cadwr. Isn’t he sixteen? I don’t think it would be wise for her to just go off with you as her stepfather. Too much would be made of it and I don’t want to encourage silly gossip.” Said Genevieve on an early morning before much of the rest of the house arose. She was near to giving birth so that Eric fixed her tea, letting her rest in a chair before a small friendly fire in the kitchen hearth.

“I don’t know, my love... they ‘are’ going to expect proof of consummation and I can hardly believe you’d put your daughter through that. Especially when it is evident she shows no interest in men.” Giving her a cup of tea, he sat in a chair next to her.

“Eric, Eric, my dear Eric... I am hardly cruel or unthinking... There are ways. I was taught well by an Herbal Healer when I was in my training... There are some things she taught me I remember well that do not include healing.”

“Genevieve!” Laughed Eric, “You can be quite the fox, though I suppose I ought to have known by now... Well, then... will there be a courtship?”

“There needs to be... but a short one will do well enough... they’ve seen each other in the last year or so. They are friends and it won’t take much to convince the village that he would decide to woo her.”

“Well, you’ve been debating this for quite some time, I know... And I think you are very right... I guess I shall have a long talk with the prospective bridegroom.” He ran a hand through her hair reflectively, “I bless the day I found you in this town... for I can not believe that under any other circumstances could we have come together... It has taken you a long time to release your former mate.”

“I’ve not released him,” she smiled sadly, “for I know our love has not died... But, I’ve come to realize that I must continue to live and you have brought me great happiness... My the Gods let us grow old together.”



The ruse of her courtship and marriage worked well so that finally Rhiannon was packed and ready to travel with her new husband, stepfather and two other apprentices who would divert their typical route to go to the supposed village of her new husband’s family. It was horribly difficult for Rhiannon to leave her mother, especially in the sole company of men, yet, she bore it well, her face as stoic as it often was. The villagers had given her many gifts that were carried in a cart pulled by two beautiful oxen that would

be going to her new 'family'. Her long, unruly blond hair was plaited into several braids and her clothes, though feminine, were suited to travel. She hugged her mother long and hard that day, whispering in Genevieve's ear, "Papa sends his love." As she remembered words spoken long ago that she in her youth had forgotten to give, though she had remembered to find the correct plant to take leaves from well enough.

"What?" Spoke Genevieve clearly startled as her eyes glistened slightly from the thought.

"In dream, Mama, in dream..." She hugged her mother one more time and kissed her newborn brother that was in a servant's arms before climbing onto the cart with the oxen that her 'husband' would drive. Knowing that her mother worried, Rhiannon said as they began to pull away mid the flowers thrown by the villagers, "You'll see me again, Mama... I promise you."



As they finally found their way into what they knew was mostly Bardic territory, everyone breathed a lot easier. The 'marriage couple' no longer acted the marriage, though indeed, they would remain great friends, staying riding companions as Rhiannon moved in the direction of the Council Seat at Waljanargel. The two left the rest behind to their own variant Bardic duties amid a stream of farewell hugs.

After a couple weeks of travel, Rhiannon and Cadwr came one evening to a large village that was feasting and dancing the Lamas Holiday. Having arranged where they might stay, they settled their cart, a horse and the two oxen and went out to join in the festivities. It was such a pleasant break from the road so that soon the two friends went out amid the happiness, dancing and singing with the rest.

As they continued to revel into the night, Rhiannon caught sight of a dark eyed girl with shoulder length cropped dark hair who stood by the side laughing and clapping. Her red and yellow trappings showed her to be a Sacred Dancer who was also dressed for travel. An odd pang of familiarity went through Rhiannon though the face and form were clearly different. Drawn to this full-bodied, pretty girl; Rhiannon went up to her to ask if she might dance. The girl laughed merrily in pleasant bell like tones, "So... I could not fool you, my love."

Taken aback, Rhiannon gasped, "Chrysindolyn?"

"Mab... My name is Mab here."

"But... we danced the dance but a few short moons ago... How can you be a grown woman?"

Mab laughed again, "Time is not the same there, as you well know... To me it was long, long ago. Long before I was born to this life... And I, too, chose the Wheel... I chose the Wheel for you, my love. That dance did not free me... May it never free me."

"Then come." Said Rhiannon, giving Mab her hand, "Dance the dance of Life with me. That our love will never be put asunder."