

Talibah, the Egyptian

Chapter 2

Acceptance

Having returned to the main Council Seat, Wynseren, for the winter, the Acting Head of Council prepared for a quiet evening in her quarters of the caverns. Though the old Council latticework of caverns and tunnels had been destroyed for safety's sake early in Rhiannon's leadership and the Council Itself had become more scattered into smaller groups as a result, other spots for teaching and administration had been set up over time in smaller caves, caverns and tunnels. What was thought of now as the main Council Seat resided near the Great House and lands of Gwydion, the first Ricon of Cymru.

It was interesting how the Bards had made little drafts in places throughout the caverns so that a comfortable fire could be created in several worked out 'rooms' within. The Acting Head's 'room' was warm with a lighted fire and wooden doors built in to close the area off. In many ways it looked like a room in a Great House except for its obvious lack of windows and faint earthy smell that were tempered by herbs cast into the fire from time to time. The door was snugly shut with rugs and pillows strewn about the floor near a large comfortable bed. The Acting Head of Council sat amid the pillows near her bed with various works and scrolls all about her as well as beautiful musical instruments of different sorts and sizes.

Looking through the bits and pieces about her, she ran a hand through her light graying hair, her gray eyes scanning what she saw with a tired but real interest. Though there was much to do, much to decide and much responsibility, she knew she rather enjoyed her status all the same. Yet, she was concerned for the future; an Acting Head is still an 'Acting Head' and she knew she could not resolve that matter on her own. Nor could the Council Itself; only the actual Head of Council, if still living, could do that and though she knew he was all right, it had been long since he had been heard from.

As if in answer to these thoughts a low, quiet voice whispered from the shadows, "Gwen, my friend, how are you?" Although the voice was soft it was distinct, causing her to quickly look up in the voice's direction.

"Maerdydd?... Maerdydd, is that really you?" She gazed to see a figure quietly step toward her. She was so happy to see him that she did not wait for him to come to her, but got up immediately to greet him. When he got to her, they hugged long and warm. "It's been so long, my dear, dear friend."

"Much too long," Taliesin said into her hair, "Much too long... there was no reason for me not to at least visit you from time to time... but, I don't think I realized how long... and my heart has been so distracted."

Gwen withdrew and bade him sit amidst the pillows with her., "May I offer you anything... tea?... something to eat?"

"No... I'm fine..." he smiled, then noticed all the scrolls and work paraphernalia feeling some pangs of guilt, "I see you've been busy."

"It's called acting as Head of Council... You know what that's like."

“Yes.” He said quietly, swallowing, “I know... but...” he sighed, “I just couldn’t.”

“It’s alright... I understood... I would have done the same... we all would have...” she patted his hand then looked at him carefully, saying so quietly it was like a breeze on the air, “Did you ever find her?”

Taliesin closed his eyes, a little tired, a little pained, “No...” He breathed out, “Gwen, I... “ Feelings broke around him, but he continued, “how could my rituals have gone so wrong? She should have appeared inside the Inner Temple when she left this World... I had made sure of everything... planned long and hard... I did everything... and now I’ve looked long and hard for her... everywhere I know to... every Inner Realm I know of... but, she’s gone... has it been years? I don’t even know... My Jenna is gone... the love of my life... is... gone...” He trailed his words staring into the dark corners a moment before continuing, “How could I be part of anything? I had to keep searching, Gwen... I had to keep trying.”

Gwen stroked his hand in a calm, understanding way, feeling the sadness that echoed through him, “Could not the Bardic Council have helped?... Can it not help even now?”

“I wish that it could... I surely wish that it could...” he whisked, then sighed again, “Believe me, Gwen, I would have utilized that source if I thought it could... but, this seems to even go beyond the Realm of Light and any help they can offer.” His eyes grew soft and distant as they sat there for several moments. “You know I truly do not know... how long ‘has’ it been?”

Gwen looked down, “Seven years... seven long years.”

“Seven?... Seven? You’re sure?” She nodded and he squinted, startled and a bit more than a little guilt ridden, “I’m so sorry, Gwen... I truly did not know... I have lost some understanding of time... of place... I should have made sure you had a way of contacting me... but...”

“You were distraught... I could feel that you were alive but I don’t even know if anyone could have reached you... regardless...”

“You’ve done well... and Gwydion...”

“Has kept our enemies at bay... He was a good choice, Maerdydd... you and Rhiannon made a very wise choice in Gwydion. As young as he was, he has proven very wise.”

“Well... it was really the Council’s choice...” He shrugged, “He’s the brother of Arionrhod... I think she is the most powerful Priestess who is not a Bard that I am aware of. A good ally... and if there had to be a Ricon of the Cymru, he made the most sense... Well... I did not come to you just to speak of my difficult times or of the current Ricon... It’s not why I came here at all... I really expect that I shall be coming back soon... back to Wynseren.” Gwen perked up at that and he smiled at her warmly, “Partly to do what I really should have done long, long before now... long before... Gwen, you ‘are’ my Chosen... I’m not sure you totally understand that. I gave you the Serpent’s Egg, but I think you felt it was just for you to keep while I went on my ‘questing’. I truly ‘was’ so distraught... I know I wasn’t making the best of sense... I know now that I didn’t do that all very well... Please, forgive me.”

Reflecting, Gwen looked at all the contours of his face, “Seemed like your hair went just about white that day... near overnight... I’m not entirely sure just ‘what’ I

understood... I was your Chief Advisor, I knew I would have to take over in your stead... yet, somehow I did catch a glint of what you meant... Though I was never totally certain... But, I am now." She brushed a hair from his face.

Taliesin looked into her eyes firmly, "I'll come back soon and I shall pass the power on to you as I should. And you shall be Head of Council. I'm not exactly expecting to die anytime soon, but I think that the Council needs a natural progression, now... I think that the Realm of Light has dictated Its desires over the Council long enough."

"And the Inner Temple? How is that progressing?"

"It's going well enough... but... it misses its final key." He sighed heavily and shook his head, "Somehow I seem to fail the most those I love the most."

"Maerdynn," Gwen frowned, "You mustn't think that way... You've gone through far too much... done too much for this land, for the Council ... we all can become distracted... sometimes shortsighted... Even you... but, no-one blames you... especially not me..." Thinking, she turned the subject, "But... I also gather from your words before that your coming to the Council Seat is not 'just' to give the Council over to me."

Pleased to be moved from his saddened thoughts, Taliesin smiled widely, saying briskly "I have a student."

"A student?... and how on earth did you come by that?"

"I believe wholly that the Goddess sent her... She's a Bard, you know... a wonderful one, actually... just needs to understand our ways, get some things clear and all. Rituals, Laws... things like that. A little Bardic magick... I shall be bringing her and presenting her to the Council... so she can get some training here as well. She'll begin to need to be with others before long... but, I should like to continue to be her main Teacher."

"Goodness... where did she come from? How did she find you? Is she from a village near where-ever you are?"

"No... in fact... from far away... from Egypt."

"Egypt?" Gwen was genuinely so surprised that her mouth dropped, "How on...?"

"How indeed... She says that Sophia sent her."

"Sophia... who's Sophia?"

"Sophia... seems to be the Divine Feminine of certain Gnostic Christians... so I understand from her."

"Christians?... Christians?" Gwen frowned, suddenly uncertain.

Taliesin raised his brows, "Not the type of Christians 'we' think of... certainly not from the way she acts... though I admit I'd like to know more..."

"Are you 'sure' this is alright, Maerdynn?" Her face was pensive, almost tight.

"Sophia... this Sophia... She 'is' the Goddess... I 'know' that the Goddess did send the girl... I'm very sure of that, Gwen... Trust me... she's very strong in the Goddess... she's here for a reason, I know it." Then he turned his thoughts away, "and I must go now." He got up slowly pulling Gwen up with him, then hugging her long and warm once more to kiss her cheek after. "I 'do' miss everyone, my dear. I hope it won't be long... I'll try not to... at least with the presence of a student, I am much more aware

of time, now.” With that he turned and walked back into the shadows. Gwen smiled after him as he seemed to walk and disappear into the dark corners of the room.

Though Talibah knew how to protect herself well enough and her swordplay was good, Taliesin trained her in a more Cymric fashion with Cymric weapons and exercise. Although a Bard was not really expected to fight in battle, it happened often enough anyway and though it was considered a high crime to kill a Bard, that, too was not a guarantee of safety. More so when one was a traveling Bard or one of the younger Bards in training called Runners who were often sent on the roads. And the roads had become increasingly dangerous over the last several years.

Practicing long and hard one evening, Talibah found herself falling into her warm coverings early in the secluded area Taliesin had given to her to soon find herself in a deep sleep. Suddenly she thought she awoke to streaming rays of colored light playing across the cavern’s walls in pastel shades. A strong scent of wildflowers filled her lungs as she opened her eyes and laid there. Uncertain, as if she wasn’t sure where she was, she looked around herself from where she lay, not sure whether moving was such a good idea. Then she felt eyes on her, watching her a moment so she decided to brave it and began to stretch and yawn, “You are not Taliesin... He would not stare at me like that... Nor would he just barge into the area he’s given me without requesting entrance.”

“Sorry... Hadn’t meant anything by it. You just looked rather peaceful.”

Talibah sat up, the light in the cave glowed and slightly rippled in soft gentle waves, “Jared?... It ‘is’ Jared... isn’t it?”

“Jared it is.” He jumped down from a perch somewhere that Talibah couldn’t see. “Hello.” He grinned.

She couldn’t quite make out what he was wearing, which seemed a little odd, though she remembered that she couldn’t remember much about what he had worn before other than it was greens, as if he were wearing the leaves and grass somehow. She looked at herself and realized that whatever she wore, it was rather nondescript as well. “I guess so... Good morning?”

Jared shrugged, “Morning... night... Guess that’s a matter of perspective... I choose... morning... sounds good to me. Good morning, then.” He said cheerily.

Not sure what to make of that Talibah proceeded, “And what are you doing here, exactly... In my area... In my ‘personal space’, I might add... I mean, ‘how’ did you get here?”

“Personal space... get here...” he shrugged, “I’m a little fuzzy on those meanings... Maerdynn; oh, yes... Taliesin... asked me if I would begin working with you... sooo... here I am.”

“Working with me?... ” she looked around herself, “Where are we?” Talibah had finally realized this was not the cave she remembered going to sleep in.

“Where?” He blinked, seeming to think on that a moment, “Here, I suppose... But, the energy is very strong here, don’t you think?”

“Whew! You’re making me dizzy! Do you know ‘how’ to give a straight answer?”

“Well, don’t you think that you confuse ‘me’ as well?... Not used to this, you know. Never been asked to work ‘with’ someone before. Guide someplace, yes. Never really work with... It’s a challenge to ‘me’, too... oh... but I am to ask you... would ‘you’ agree to that?”

“Agree?... Agree to what?” Talibah wanted to hold her head trying to listen to him.

“Agree to work with me... Thought I was clear enough... I said yes... but, you have to, too... those are the rules. Those have always been the Rules.”

“The Rules? Agreement, you mean?... What?... by all parties concerned... Sounds like something... What do the Cymric people call that? ... Sounds Elven... Sounds Eldritch... very Elven...fey... Something such...” She questioned.

“Something such.” He echoed, but she couldn’t discern if he was concurring or if he even understood what she had said.

“And, you aren’t going to leave until I give you some answer yes or no. And neither answer is correct as either one will see me caught up in some crazy wordplay of yours.”

“No.” He objected, shaking his head vehemently, “No, really... I truly just need to know if you’ll consent to work with me.”

“Work with you where?”

“Where?” he asked surprised, “The Inner Realms... Here... Here... That’s where we are... Between... someplace... Just hard to answer sometimes... don’t you get that?”

She regarded him closely as she composed herself in her sitting position a little more. She had to admit to herself that he was beginning to look a bit distressed. “Sit down a minute... can you do that?” She patted a place near her saying “please” when he looked at her hesitantly. “Let’s just sit a moment... say nothing... okay?”

After a moment he nodded his head in agreement and sat near her, watching her intently. It was beginning to dawn on her that he might not be human – at least not human in the sense of being in a human body somewhere asleep as his spirit roamed. Yet, she wondered if he was a human spirit of any sort, either, with his intense total stare, like a cat watching its prey. Finally she closed her eyes to just shut him out a moment so she could think. Work with him? Taliesin was asking her to work with him? How so? Still, she had to assume that Taliesin had nothing but her best interests in mind. She trusted Taliesin, so she suspected she ought trust Jared. Besides, Jared had done fine as a Guide. A little odd, but fine, and ended up being quite concerned. She just hoped she could deal with the rather disconcerting differences in responses. As if sensing that very thought Jared piped up, “You done yet?”

Her eyes shot up, “Wow!... Quiet time over, huh?”

“Well... You have an answer?”

“Oh, my goodness, Jared... Yes... okay... I will work with you!... I may regret it deeply, but I will work with you...”

“Good.” He said crisply and promptly disappeared.

“Alright...” she said to herself now very unsure, “So ‘now’ what did I just get myself into?” At that she found herself being drawn back into physical form hearing Taliesin softly calling her to breakfast.

Currying her horse with long, careful strokes, Talibah looked around the area of the cave where the horses were tended. She came to realize that they were in a fairly large cave where Taliesin had obviously made various areas for things. The two horses were comfortable in their stalls and though they were let out from time to time, always returned gladly for their rest and feed. At first Talibah had been concerned when Taliesin simply let them out to run, but he was confident and his confidence proved well founded. He had a beautiful horse, nearly a slate gray with a black mane and tail, large boned and muscled, a mare built to seat a larger rider than even Taliesin was. Yet, he sat his horse well when they did find time to ride and there seemed a joy in both rider and horse.

As Talibah cleaned the stalls and fed the horses fresh feed and hay, she wondered again how it never seemed like they ran low of anything. It was a bit eerie, there was always food, there was always drink and anytime she went to get anything, there was always more.

There was a wonderful little spring and pool of water a little ways through a short tunnel where they bathed, washed clothes and drank from. Though she only had the one set of clothes, Taliesin had let her have a tunic of his that came down below her knees that she'd wear to wait as her clothes would dry by the fire, and she often chose to sleep in it as well.

When she finished caring for the horses, she saw Taliesin watching her the last few moments having entered the area quietly as a cat, his eyes soft and smiling. "You mind horses well. They like you a lot."

"I like them." She smiled back. "God surely gave us a blessing when he formed them."

"Yes... Talibah... tell me... tell me a little bit about... Well, you 'are' Christian, aren't you?... At least that is my understanding...?" He frowned a little.

"Ummm.... Are you trying to compare me with the Roman version invading your land?" She sat on a large rock a bit tired from her work.

Taliesin remained standing though his pose was relaxed, "What do you mean exactly? Roman?"

"The ones that give you trouble... the ones trying to push into your Country... Trying to change your people... your beliefs... I know well about them... No... No, my Teacher... I am not like them."

"But then... do you not worship Jesus?... That's his name... isn't it?"

She blew out a breath, "Does it bother you?"

He shrugged, "It depends."

"Gnostics have no interest in changing others... besides... Jesus to us is a symbol, an energy or spirit, if you will. Logos, the Divine Masculine. Those others... those Romans... they get all into this idea that he lived and died... died for our sins. I'm not interested in that. No Gnostic is. I don't know if he was a real man; and I don't care. It's symbolic, you see. Symbolic of us all, of each person's struggle to connect with the Divine. The story of Jesus is the story of enlightenment through self-sacrifice. It's every person's story. And Sophia is the Divine Feminine or Wisdom. She is what we sacrifice for, you see. Logos or Knowledge strives to be one with Wisdom. And if we are to truly understand something, we must understand it with both our heart and our head. With

Logos and Wisdom. Jesus and Sophia. That is Gnosticism. The short version, anyway.” When Talibah looked up at Taliesin, his smile was wide and warm.

“And you come here seeking Sophia, seeking Wisdom... And She loves you very much.”

Talibah down cast her eyes a moment, “I wish to know Her... I wish to please Her...”

“I’m sure you do... we’re going to a village tomorrow... there’s some healing needs doing and it’s time you have some experience in that... In the Bardic way, anyway... there’s a bit of fever there... The village Wise Woman asked for Bardic song and ritual.”

“How do you know that?”

He said nothing to that and turned, “Time to eat and bed down. The way’s not far, but it all shall take us the whole of the day. We’ll stay the night after and return here on the morrow.”

Knowing she would receive no further answer, Talibah followed him away from the stables.

Though the snow was thick, when they got to a road, the area was packed down enough to make the ride fairly easy as the day was bright and clear, if a bit cold. Having given her one of his heavy coats to wear over her clothes, Talibah felt she must look like a mountain atop her horse. Taliesin, though bundled well himself, did not look as if he even minded the cold as he let his horse carefully pick her way. It took three to four hours of steady riding and though they didn’t really say a whole lot as they rode, Taliesin often sang, with Talibah joining in after a bar or two. It was a bright, pleasant day though very still and quiet; but despite the cold, Talibah always found Taliesin’s voice soothing, even making her forget much about anything else around them. Sometimes he sang something he had not yet taught her and she would simply listen, happy to just immerse herself in the sound. Sound, in this wonderful quiet where all she could hear was Taliesin’s voice, it made the crystal of her spine tingle and she almost felt like the sound of it was feeding her somehow, changing her, sharpening her awareness or expanding it. Colors seemed to deepen and smells become cleaner, crisper. In all, it was a wonderful day.

It was late in the afternoon when they came upon the village that was little more than ten to twelve one story round houses with straw thatched roofs arranged in a loose circle with what they had for farming lands beyond them. A few scattered sheep huddled nearby, but Talibah saw few cattle and no horses but their own. It was obviously a rather poor, mean little village and Talibah felt pangs for them, wondering if they even had enough food stored for the duration of the Winter, hoping that whatever she and Taliesin intended to do for them would be of real service and help. An elderly Wise Woman wrapped tight in heavy ragged wools of browns and grays stood on the outskirts obviously awaiting their arrival. Taliesin had been ahead of Talibah, but now she rode up next to him and started a moment when she saw his face. It was the face of an old man making Talibah’s eyes grow wide to which a look crossed Taliesin’s face that warned her not to say anything. “Welcome, sir.” The elder woman spoke, “We’ve been waiting. Who is this you bring with you?”

“My apprentice.” Spoke Taliesin in a very wizened voice, unlike the one Talibah knew which was deep and rich. “Her name is Talibah.”

“Talibah... an unusual name... But, welcome... welcome both.” She turned and led them into the small tight village.

In the village Talibah said nothing as they were shown to a small house at the edge of the others where they might work. A small meagerly fire had been lit against the cold in its center and there wasn't much room in the house to stand up straight as it really was little more than a mud brick hut with its thatching and but a bare hole in the center for the smoke to climb up. The rest of the day was spent doing Bardic healings and ritual, which involved a lot of toning and singing. Though Talibah did not know all that was being done, she followed Taliesin's lead as best she could. Then with one particular child, Taliesin had Talibah hold her closely. “Whisper long sweet tones to her, hum and resonate the crystals within you through her... Understand?” he smiled, a twinkle that let her see the true Taliesin behind the wrinkled face. Doing as Taliesin bid, she felt herself resonate throughout her body, then into the girl's, a peaceful hum that surrounded both her and the child, through them and Talibah could feel a mending going on. The child had been quite weak and frail when she was given to Talibah, but upon finishing, real color and strength had begun to return. When she let the child go back to her parents, Taliesin whispered in her ear, “Very good... Very good, indeed.”

Finishing their task and eating the small scanty meal the village could afford them, both Talibah and Taliesin were exhausted and fell easily asleep in the little house as they huddled round the fire putting all their clothing over themselves to keep out the deepening cold outside. The next day Talibah said nothing as they returned to the cave, silent in herself even as Taliesin sang and the day was again bright and clear and silent. She found her thoughts had become troubled and uncertain, though hardly surprised that Taliesin looked again as young as he had before.

After stalling and bedding the horses and then sitting down to eat by the evening fire, Taliesin finally broached her silence. “What troubles you?”

She frowned at him as if the answer ought be obvious. “What do you think troubles me?”

“You've seen and experienced much in your time here, Talibah... I can hardly think that what happened yesterday surprises you.”

“Things that happen in healing, things that happen in trance or spirit walkings... I know these well... but, altering the fabric of appearance in this world... is like... what do you say in your country?... glamour... What are you, exactly?... Food never runs low here... supplies of any kind... what magick is this?... Are you even alright for me to be here with?”

Taliesin breathed in long and low, “Do you really believe that your Sophia would have led you here if you were not meant to be here?”

“You're Elven, aren't you?... You, Jared, Cordelia... all of that... Elven, somehow.” She meant it like an accusation, but somehow it didn't truly sound that way to her ears.

Saddened, Taliesin sat back a moment reflectively, “I had been here, out here for quite a long while. I had left the Council, left my duties to the Council, my duties to the Court of Gwydion, my duties to the People of Cymru... because I was heartbroken, because I sought answers... I was alone... and I stayed alone... for years, it seems... and

one night I heard the Call of the Goddess... I had lost my way and I heard Her Call... and I went out into a blizzard in the middle of the night... and found you... We heard the same Call, you and I... I knew She had sent you and I accepted that... Yes... I am Eldritch... And I serve the Goddess... Cordelia and Jared... they serve the Goddess... the Divine Feminine... As do you... I accept you... I did not have to... But, I do... And I will... I will stand by you, Talibah... to the Council, to the Ricon, to the people of Cymru... I know what some people like to say... about the Eldritch... I've heard it all my life... But, believe me, the Eldritch do nothing that is not for the Earth, of the Earth and of the Goddess..."

After this Taliesin sat back and watched Talibah as she sought to take in all he had said. Shyly she spoke at last, "I'm sorry... I know what it's like to have to be careful... careful what I say, what I do... And it's fear that drives others... And I let fear drive me... and I'm wrong. You've taught me, shown me wonderful, beautiful things... you've given me food and shelter without so much as a thought... You're my teacher... I respect that... And," she turned the tone, "You want me to work with Jared?" she smiled, "Do you really think I can?"

Smiling back Taliesin chuckled, pleased by the turn, "Well... you're both about at the same place, spiritually... and you need to work with another realm being... So does he... Elves don't necessarily show much concern over other world beings other than to do as they must, whatever has been requested of them. Jared showed real concern when he guided you. He's ready to take on something more... and you are meant to learn more of other realms... You handle yourself well considering you're new at this... Some Bards never move to the level you are being asked to..."

"But... You're Elven... Why would I not work with you?"

"I'm Elven... And I've lived among 'humans' all my life... You 'need' someone still very much a part of their native realm... You 'need' to learn to understand them... communicate. He 'needs' to learn to do the same..."

"Oh." She said, a little disappointed.

"Yes..." Taliesin smiled widely seeing her face, "And it's not an easy task... It's not meant to be... But... you're a foreigner to begin with... and you've learned along the way as you traveled, did you not?... You can learn this... I 'know' you can... I would not have you work with someone incapable or on an unequal footing... Just remember to be honest with him... Elves respect honesty... and sometimes he may seem like he's not listening, but he is... Elves have a way of... I don't know... seeing one thing as they hear another... that's not exactly right, but as close as I can come... and if you have too much difficulty you can always have me to talk to about it. I understand humans because I grew up with them. I understand Elves because it's my nature."

"Are all Elves friendly, then?"

"Friendly?... Umm, well, are all humans friendly?... Elves have free will, just like humans. But, don't worry, we aren't dealing with that sort of thing... We're basically just dealing with Jared. And Cordelia, perhaps."

"Just communicating? Working on communicating?"

"And other things... Handling energy, creating energy. Healing, expanding awareness." Talibah's eyes unfocused as she pondered Taliesin's words. "Too much at once?... It'll be all right. It won't happen too fast... As I said, I'm always here. And you may as well call me Maerdyann now. It makes more sense."

“Your true name...” whisked Talibah.

“Well... as true as any name for an Elf gets...” His eyes crinkled merrily and Talibah relaxed in a new and relieved sort of certainty in her love of the divine Feminine she called Sophia.