

Talibah, the Egyptian

Chapter 6

Bardic Paths

By nightfall the Bardic Company of three Bards and three Runners had made it to the village Gwernpenn, a small farming community that Taliesin had indicated they should get to that day. But before actually getting there, they had stopped for a short break to rest and let their horses graze. Here Taliesin had presented Talibah with a broach such as he and Kevyn were wearing on their left shoulder, "Though you have the cloak and belt of a Bard, I ought to have given this to you earlier as well. But, I wasn't totally decided whether or not you ought be given out as a fully vested Bard to others yet... so... I guess this is my decision, then... I think I would rather people know for certain you are a Bard. You're due it... Not that you 'must' wear it all the time, you 'know' I don't... But, it shall let the villagers know when we arrive... And treat you accordingly."

The broach was braided in silver and gold encircling a harp and though delightful to her eyes, also seemed fairly old. "Whose was this?" She said as she fingered it when he held it out to her, "It's beautiful."

"Broaches are passed down as much as possible. When a Bard passes, their broach is returned to the Council to give to another... Though it has been others before her, this broach was Jenna's... my wife."

Tears filled Talibah's eyes. "And you give this to me?" she took it and held it in her hands just staring at it as it glinted in the afternoon sun.

"Not many would be suited to have this broach, that's true... But, I also can't imagine who else I could bear to give it to..." Taliesin gently took it back from her to place it on her shoulder. "There you are, Sister Talibah."

At that Talibah hugged him strongly, the tears tracing her face liberally, "Thank-you... thank-you so much... I am so honored."

The Runners all watched the exchange curiously, not quite certain what to make of what had just taken place though Kevyn barely paid much heed as he kept track of the meandering horses.

As they entered the farming village, the residents not in the fields at the time came out to greet them as much out of curiosity as anything else. It was a fair sized community whose rectangular stone houses with thatched roofs seemed arranged almost like a wheel with the farmed land spread out behind each one. At the center stood a few other buildings that seemed communal in nature with a fenced in circular area at the very center itself. Having passed a flock of sheep on their way, Talibah wondered if this might not be where they were kept, being surprised when she saw the sheep later put up elsewhere in the countryside.

Having been greeted pleasantly enough and their horses put up in a small stable, the little band was shown what Talibah assumed must be a 'guest house' in this wheel of abodes, for it was rather apparent no one lived there. Though similar enough to some of the villages she had stayed in before with Bardic folk, she was impressed with this one's real sense of organization and fair amount of tidiness. It also looked to be a fairly well off

little community for the folk looked like they fed well enough and the children seemed healthy and happy.

After getting settled, it wasn't long before they were invited to one of the nicer communal buildings where a fire was being built in a crude chimney at one end and people began to gather. It was obvious they were in great anticipation of some long overdue entertainment as it also seemed everyone in the village who could possibly get there that night were passing through into the building. As the Bardic company quietly sat themselves near the fire, Taliesin smiled at Talibah, "Would you like to play harp, Talibah... Bards rarely 'sing' or really 'perform' for these functions. Unless, of course, they are traveling alone... It's more of the Runner's training ground, you see... But, you could play harp for them... I have a feeling you'll like what you hear... especially from Brandon." He said it so nonchalantly, yet it made Talibah wonder just what Taliesin might have seen.

"I'd be delighted to, Brother Gwion." And she pulled out her small lap harp she had brought along as did they all as well as some rattles, small drums and flutes. When the villagers had all seemed to settle and place themselves at variance about the fire, no words were really spoken to introduce them, only that Talibah began to play as the Runners took turns to sing and do some poetic recitation. The villagers clapped and responded; sometimes even singing along when they recognized a piece. After a time, one of the other Runners took over the harping and Talibah found herself content to sit and listen as well, stilling herself when she, too, felt the urge to sing along as she sought to emulate her mentor who sat simply enjoying the Runners, though he obviously was paying some keen attention to them as well. She was certainly delighted whenever Brandon took his turn, for his voice matched his lovely speaking range, being rich and dark, much like the hair on his head.

After quite some time of this when Talibah thought for sure these simple folk ought be leaving to find their beds, someone began to call out for a story tale and it quickly began to be echoed roundly by all within the room. For several moments all the Runners looked over at Kevyn and Taliesin unsure of what they ought to do. It was obvious to Talibah this was not something that these Runners were really used to doing or else were not enough prepared. Then one of the villagers seemed to plea, "We haven't had but ourselves to tell tales here in Gwernpenn... No real Story Teller in quite some time... Please, it's been so long since we've had a proper telling."

Both Kevyn and Taliesin exchanged looks a moment until Taliesin nodded to Kevyn to proceed. Looking at the man who had just spoken, Kevyn asked, "No Story Teller? Of any kind?"

"No, sir... It's been quite some time... Even for Runners to come through."

"I'm sorry... that surprises me... though I had wondered a bit when no one of Bardic training had come to greet us. Still, I thought they might be out somewhere, tending other things or might even be part of more than one village and so would be there... so none, you say?... Then we'll have to see to that for you. I promise... And I suppose, then, a tale is much overdue you." He said gently, with an understanding voice. "Well, let me think." He ran his hand through his dark blondish hair as if a bit distracted, "Oh, yes... how about something about the 'good people?'"

“Oh, yes... please!” said several people almost in concert. Talibah caught Taliesin’s eyes drifting a bit as if he might be a little uncomfortable with Kevyn’s choice, yet he said nothing and finally smiled at Kevyn to proceed.

Getting the feeling that Kevyn was being a bit subdued in his telling, Talibah carefully watched the faces before them. Though she somehow felt sure he wasn’t giving it his all, it was certain none of the villagers could tell anything as they laughed, cried or otherwise responded to every word he spoke with total enthusiasm. At the end of the tale, however, many were truly beginning to yawn and stretch so that a village elder stood to say how much they all appreciated everything and that it was now time for everyone to go on to their perspective beds.

Leaving the building last as they carefully picked up the harps and other small instruments they had brought, the same elder stopped Kevyn, Taliesin and Talibah a moment as the Runners went on out into the night, “You are welcome to spend the night at mine or one of the other elder’s homes...”

“Very good... I should like that.” Spoke Kevyn assenting and nodding a little. “Thank-you for your gracious invitation.”

“We’re fine.” Said Taliesin, indicating Talibah and himself, “But I thank-you for your kindness... I expect you shall be asking some blessing rituals in the morning... or early afternoon?”

“Yes, lord... If you please... We’d be very grateful.”

“Very good...” Taliesin said turning he and Talibah away, “We’ll set that up after Brother Kevyn gets back on the morrow... Good evening, sir... And you, Brother.”

Taliesin took his time as he and Talibah walked back to the guest house where the Runners were waiting to see if Talibah might have questions since they had a moment or so alone. “Well.” Spoke Talibah once the elder and Kevyn were out of earshot. “At least I now know why the Bard did not always stay with the Runners.”

“Sometimes... There could be other reasons... You could also be asked to assist the Wise Women, Men or Healers if there was sickness.” The lights from the houses glowed warmly as they walked, the ground packed tight under their feet from both human and animal presence.

“Does a Bard always get ‘invited’ to stay with someone else?”

“No, not always... Often... in a village often, perhaps in a town. In a Greathouse there is more formal provision... Sometimes it is just custom, really. Sometimes there is a real desire to curry favor. Which I think in this case it is both... We may find we need to stay on another night here.”

“You said we were to take our time... You wanted me to experience this part of Bardic life.” Thinking and frowning a little, Talibah then asked, “Yet, why then, were we not invited when we went to those villages to heal?”

“We might have been, but we were always so tired and I had indicated to them beforehand that we would be. Besides, they were rather poor and I certainly didn’t wish to impose upon them further in any way. It would not have been fair, though I was aware that it would have been custom for them...Us being too tired relieved them from any feelings they may have had of having not fulfilled a return for our services... Actually... it is ‘always’ a courteous way of bowing out... which is what our host tonight assumed.”

“I see.” Said Talibah, though she wasn’t totally certain she was getting the full story though didn’t feel she knew how else to approach it.

They had come to the doorway of the little house where they could hear the Runners talking and laughing amongst themselves. "Anything else?" Smiled Taliesin, "Before we needs face 'them' again?" He indicated the voices coming from inside.

"I'm going to miss this..." Said Talibah a bit sadly.

"Miss what?"

"Miss talking with you, having your attention, asking questions... It's hitting me pretty hard already."

"Oh, pretty soon you'll be too busy with your life to miss that too much... but... here's an important bit of knowledge you can let sink in... I'll always be there... whether I am in person or not... To ask questions of, to express your feelings or fears... I'll answer... I might even 'appear' for you... but, I'll always answer somehow... It is something Bards do for each other. It is part of how we learn, how we communicate. We get better at it as we grow... But, I promise I will 'hear' you, Talibah... You've been a wonderful student, my dear... You mean a lot to me." He hugged her warmly and rather fatherly making Talibah wonder if he did have children, yet she decided she had asked enough questions for the evening. "Are you ready?" Asked Taliesin indicating the wooden door.

"I suppose." Talibah smiled good-naturedly.

As they came in they noticed Adian scurry back from Kevyn's things, though the other two were sitting eating from foods obviously set out by the villagers during the time they had been in the communal building performing. A pleasant fire was also dancing in the fireplace at the room's end where everyone's gear was laid out on piles of sweet grass as makeshift beds. There was a bit of surprise in the faces of the Runners as Taliesin and Talibah entered, but they said nothing of it and only indicated the food. "It's right good." Said Brandon cheerily, "But it may be starting to cool."

"And you left enough, I hope." Spoke Taliesin, testing a bit.

"Of course... We always leave enough... Brother..." Brandon said a little hesitantly, "We can't really guess when you'd be back."

"Very good." Smiled Taliesin as he and Talibah sat on the ground by the fire so they, too, might eat.

Brandon watched Taliesin and Talibah a bit closely through their meal so that when they finally bedded down Talibah asked him, "Is something wrong?"

"No, of course not, Sister." Said Brandon quickly and though Talibah wasn't too sure that she believed him, she went and lay down within her bedding to drift to sleep.

.....

The next day Kevyn returned late morning looking fed and rested with a pleasant little smile to himself that made Talibah wonder a bit. The villagers had brought fresh milk and bread and the Runners were already happily taking their share.

"Well, Brother, the villagers treated you well last night, I see." Spoke Taliesin softly smiling.

"Indeed... very well." As Kevyn began to pull out other clothes from his gear he nearly cussed a little, "Alright... who's knotting up my clothes again?" He pulled out a fresh tunic all rumpled and tied in knots. "If I had left my boots I'd expect the lacing'd be all knotted together." He shook his head out as he unknotted the clothing, which included

his other trousers as well, then hung them both over a stool. "Well, I hope that helps them and they better not be touched or 'someone' may get to curry and see to the horses 'all by themselves' for a week... Do I make myself clear, Adian?"

A little surprised, Adian flashed a look at Taliesin who shrugged, then she bowed her head though they all could sense a slight giggle in her throat, "Yes, Brother."

"Umm..." Kevyn shook his head, "Well... no matter. What I have on will do well enough... There are villagers gathering in that fenced area. They have some sheep and cattle... And I think some folks just want some general blessings. There's Wise Women, a Wise Man, and a Healer, too... I expect they'll want us to say some words over the crops before they begin planting as well." Kevyn grabbed a bit of bread and milk himself as he spoke.

"So, that's what the fenced area is for? Meetings?" Queried Talibah.

"Sort of." Said Kevyn, a little surprised to have to explain, "Sometimes they trade livestock, sometimes they have festivals... sort of a catch all. Games, fairs... Not seen one before?" asked Kevyn of Talibah.

"I guess I really hadn't noticed. Not so centered like this, anyway. It's nice... The whole village is nicely set up."

"Yes, well... we've a bit of work out there... How do you wish to do this, Brother Gwion?" Kevyn said looking over at Taliesin who was relaxing a bit and playing some sort of game of twigs and stones with Osla.

"Much as I said, Kevyn..." Taliesin said a little distractedly as he moved some of his stones, then looked back over at Kevyn, "I'll let Brandon and Talibah assist you. But, I'll be right there. And I'll help some. Especially if Talibah gets a little stuck... And of course if there's any serious healing to be done... I expect Brandon knows most of the formalities by now?" He said looking up at the boy.

"Yes, yes I do!" Said Brandon happily; pleased he would be able to show off some of his knowledge in front of Taliesin.

"I guess I'll be going out in a moment and talk with the Wise Women, Man and the Healer for a bit and see how they'd like us to handle things." Kevyn finished eating and rummaged through his things to pull out a couple ritual items of a wand and some herbs for an incense as well as his harp. "I hope we may keep it fairly simple or we could end up there quite well into the night."

"Don't worry." Said Taliesin pleasantly, "There 'are' four of us for this, though I expect it may take us the day. But, they really just want a little attention. I don't think they've had much attention in quite some time... You're going to have to expect that I'm taking a route where folks may well not have had much converse of late in order that we avoid much traffic with others... so we may well expect a couple days to an area. But we've got the people, so it won't be all that difficult."

"Well, you're quite right about their need for attention." Said Kevyn as he got up and went to the door, "I got to hear 'all' about that last night." He rolled his eyes slightly, but smiled despite it, "Still... I 'did' have a nice evening. See you in a bit." He waved back to them as he passed outside.

When they all went to the fenced area, Talibah was surprised how many of the villagers had decided to be there, yet she supposed this must be a fairly unusual event and something none of them would wish to miss. It would be nearly time for the villagers to begin their planting and she could see out in the fields that they had already been working

the ground. She also noticed the areas where there was some sheep and cattle in intermittent areas between the fields.

When they had finally begun the rituals and blessings, Talibah found she had been right in her assessment of Kevyn's performance the night before. Now his voice was strong, beautiful and full with a certain languid grace that she also associated with Taliesin's voice. Something seemed to stir when he sang or spoke and she saw a similar response in the villager's faces. She also found herself to be very comfortable as they proceeded, perhaps because there was so much support and only once or twice did Taliesin intercede when he saw she wasn't sure what to do. She could also tell that Taliesin was very much in a sort of observation mode as it went on, his eyes smiling at her when she took her turn to speak or sing. At least the rituals were pretty close to what she had done with Taliesin so she felt she was doing a passable job. Brandon really did seem to know everything he needed to and was very enthusiastic the whole time, which did indeed begin to filter late into the day.

The other two Runners did just that, they ran errands for the other four whenever it was requested of them, letting Talibah realize some of why they called them that. They also seemed to spend a good deal of time just talking to folks that Talibah came to understand later was the giving and receiving of news that they would also pass on to the next stop they made. Though usually a task for the Runners, she also noted that even Kevyn ended up doing a little of that before the day was through.

As they finished doing some healing work the Wise Women, Wise Man, and Healer had specifically asked of them, speaking a little while after about specifics with the Healer, Talibah could see that the villagers were beginning to wind down and that their little group would likely be able to retire before long, staying another night as Taliesin had indicated they probably would. When they were truly finished with it all, this time Kevyn also accompanied them back to the little house.

"So, we 'do' stay another night?" remarked Talibah as they walked.

"Oh, yes..." Said Kevyn as he yawned and stretched sleepily, "And I am too tired for anything but supper and bed." This brought a few snickers from the Runners causing Talibah to frown a little, though Taliesin only smiled and shook his head.

Sitting about another supper that this time included a little beef cooked in with hearty root vegetables and a side of greens that Taliesin explained was a treat from the Wise Women who had picked it fresh from the nearby wooded areas, Talibah remarked to Kevyn, "You held back last night... the tale you told, I mean... It didn't sound anything like you sounded today..."

A little startled, Kevyn looked over at Taliesin questioningly and Taliesin remarked, "Well, explain yourself, Brother... I'm afraid I've been a bit remiss, though I've not had much cause to explain some things to her... so... I'll let you."

"Well..." Said Kevyn, a little unsure and clearing his throat a bit as he pushed at his food, "A Bard's voice... it can cause changes in folks... as I'm sure you know... so... unless one does it in ritual or for healing or when you 'mean' to effect a change for some reason... a Bard needs be careful, be aware... And 'you' have a very powerful voice, Sister. You should have seen everyone's face when you sang... including mine... I think our work was most successful... Don't you think, Brother Gwion?" He finished, putting the subject back with Taliesin.

"Oh, yes... Absolutely." Said Taliesin happily.

Frowning, Kevyn said in sudden curiosity, “You’re foreign, aren’t you, Sister?.. I mean, you seem a bit unfamiliar with things sometimes... May I ask?”

Exhaling, Talibah looked over at Taliesin who shrugged and said, “Why not?”

“Alright... Yes, I’m definitely a foreigner... I traveled here from Egypt almost three years ago now.”

Truly startled and taken aback the rest of them said as if in one voice. “Egypt!?”

“I’ve barely even heard of Egypt!” Exclaimed Kevyn. “The only thing I’d heard recently was something told me by some Runners about someone claiming to be from Egypt who disappeared suddenly from a group of Bardic folk way to the south in Gwent. I mean, that’s an awfully long ways from here. We’re in Powys... Northern Powys at that. It would take weeks, maybe even months to get here from where it was said she disappeared... And, I would have thought someone would have noticed... ‘Anyone’ who was from Egypt... So... how ‘did’ you get here?”

A little taken aback herself, Talibah found she was suddenly dumb causing Taliesin to respond in her stead, “I found her and we traveled to my cave, such as you saw... I did not wish anyone to know about her until now, so no-one did. I am who I am, after all... Does that answer you?”

“Answer enough, my lord.” Said Kevyn quietly, a bit as if he had been reprimanded.

“Don’t sulk, Kevyn. I didn’t mean it harshly. I’m answering it to you as I can.” Taliesin said kindly, though he was really watching Talibah more closely for her eyes had grown wide and round. Yet, after a moment, Talibah settled back down, retreating into her own thoughts, though not for long as the Runners suddenly began to pelt her with various questions about her homeland. Relieved to have this turn of thought, Talibah began to answer as best she could with Kevyn rejoining with questions, too, after a moment or so having shaken any of his moodiness back away as Taliesin simply sat in the background quietly observing and enjoying their interactions.

.....

After a little more than a week of travel, having stayed in two other villages for a couple days and some various caves Taliesin knew of, Talibah remembered the ring Cordelia had given her. She felt a little guilty that it had taken her so long to remember; yet the newness of all that was happening to her seemed to speed up the time and fill all her perceptions. The cave they had come to that day was fairly hidden from easy view with foliage wildly growing thickly around its entrance. The horses were tethered loosely outside nearby, though Taliesin never seemed terribly concerned just how well as he always could manage to call them all back, so no-one else got too concerned about it, either.

It had been a fairly rough ride that day as the terrain was pretty rugged as they came closer to some of the mountains in the region. At the end, they had to clear off some of the foliage in front of the cave so that they might build a fire. Though the Runners still did most of the physical work, Talibah found she rather wanted to help them. Not that Kevyn and Taliesin didn’t do anything, for they set all the gear inside and arranged where the fire would be and how to set it. Yet, they let younger legs run for the firewood and younger bodies pull away the extra growth about the cave. Talibah even wondered if

Taliesin might reprimand her actions, yet he said nothing letting her realize it was her own choice just how she wished to do things. They had hunted a little that day so that Talibah did note that Taliesin settled down to dress the meat for cooking. By the time a supper was put together and made ready to eat, they had all fallen into a tired silence, sitting and staring at the fire with no thought of sharing story or song as they often liked to do. It was then that Talibah remembered the ring on her finger, looking at it a long while and fingering it a bit as they sat in the evening airs. She caught Taliesin looking at her as she was considering the ring and he smiled lightly, raising his brows and nodding a little as if he had wondered just how long it would take her to get back to that.

It was no surprise that everyone turned in early, fussing at some small area they had managed to make for themselves about the embers of the fire. Talibah put her small blanket on the ground, then took the cloak she wore upon her shoulders to cover her, resting her head on her other set of clothing covered by a rough towel she used when bathing. Having nearly everything she owned now about herself, it was strange to realize that she had actually left her original set of clothes behind in what she now thought of as 'Maerdynn's Cave', as if she knew that she had truly left her youth behind somehow and now entered a new stage of life. Quietly huddling into her cloak she closed her eyes and softly breathed over the stone of her ring repeating the phrase Cordelia had given to her in little more than a whisper as she felt herself quickly slip into an unfettered sleep. The last she could sense was the crackle of the dying fire and the slowing breaths of the others all around her.

Knowing she was no longer in her body, Talibah stood up and looked about the area that had become awash with soft filtered lights and what appeared to be a night sky above with millions of twinkling stars. She wondered if she might have done something wrong, for she expected she would see Jared right away, yet was apparently alone. Not wishing to venture far without him, she stayed where she was, growing a little pensive. However, after a few moments of this consideration, a form shimmered for a space before her slowly taking form and she was happy to see Jared appear when it finally solidified.

Though Jared was smiling at first, within moments his eyes grew wide, his face pensive as he gazed about the area and Talibah could feel a fear rising up in him. "What's wrong?" Spoke Talibah worriedly.

"Strange places, strange energies... I feel eyes everywhere."

He began to look around wildly and disoriented to such a degree that Talibah finally reached out and grasped both his hands in her own. "Jared, Jared... we're safe. Don't be afraid... Maerdynn's here, too."

Jared looked back at her and shook his head, "No... no, he's not... he wanders... Only a shimmer guards his place." With that, Talibah noticed a muted glimmering of energy where she expected Taliesin's body slept. "We are alone." Jared almost whined, looking deeply into Talibah's eyes, then hugging her to himself tightly as if she could provide safety to him somehow. Which is when she realized that she could, that she was that safety, that somehow 'what' she was automatically surrounded them with some protection. Yet, she also knew that that wasn't enough, not enough to do 'work' or to venture.

Comforting Jared a moment as she wondered what to do, she suddenly felt a tickle along the nape of her neck, like a warm liquid glow that began to travel down into her left hand. She looked down to see the ring's stone was beginning to shine stronger as

a wash pulled up from her tailbone through her spine and she could feel the crystal of her vertebra vibrating like a musical instrument.

Pulling back from her a little, Jared looked at her wonderingly, "Dragon." He whispered. "You can call the Dragon."

"Call the Dragon." She whispered back as she felt the energy begin to wrap all around them as if putting them inside a glowing cocoon. For several moments they stood facing each other as the energy grew around them and Talibah felt she could see the image of a golden winged dragon encircling them. Giving her a strange sense of quiet power, Talibah wondered if she might expand this, withdrawing a bit from Jared and extending out her hands, willing the energy to go out beyond them in ever widening circles creating a larger and larger golden cocoon. When the space felt good enough to truly move around in, Talibah willed the Dragon to remain as it was, feeling surprised and very pleased when it did exactly as she asked.

"How wonderful!" Exclaimed Jared, happy and excited, clasping his hands and moving about. "Safe! You made us safe!... I must tell Cordelia about this... Oh..." He thought suddenly.

"What is it?" Said Talibah, walking about herself, enjoying her handiwork a bit.

"Cordelia promised I would get back easily.... That you only need tell the Dragon to send me home... But... so much strange energy, strange life forces... I've never felt like this before." He looked back at her a little stricken.

"Surely she's right, Jared... She 'knows' these things... doesn't she?"

Jared nodded his head 'yes', though his eyes gave a somewhat uncertain cast. Yet, he came back up to her to take her hands, "Should we do some work? Perhaps we could 'fill' this space with our energy. Make it strong, then give it all into the Earth."

"Yes... yes, I'd like that." For a time they worked on exactly that, pleased when their combined energy swirled and pushed to the very limits of their cocoon, then moving back down and through them into the Earth, smooth and glowing. Finishing their task, they sat facing each other a long while, saying nothing, seeming to just quietly enjoy being with each other, working with each other.

After a little time, they both heard what sounded like a rapping from outside their cocooned space as if someone were knocking at a door. Looking over in the direction where they had heard the sound, Talibah felt like she could just see an image shimmering outside. She got up and walked over to realize that it appeared that Taliesin stood there. "May I come in?" He seemed to ask though she heard no words.

"Of course!... Come in, friend." She responded.

"I need a door." He seemed to be saying and he gestured to her that she needed to move her hand in such a way to create one for him which she promptly mirrored. With that, he stepped quickly inside and then turned to gently brush his hand along the opening she had created to close it up again. Turning back, a pleased smile came over his face and Talibah realized he was as he had intimated he would be; for though he looked rather human he was still a bit 'off' somehow, especially through the eyes. And she also noted that his hair was nearly black and full, somehow giving her the impression of raven's wings. Yet, she also 'knew' it was him; something unmistakable about his carriage, his manner, his life force. "This is good, Talibah... very, very good... I well expected that you'd discover that 'you' would be the one to create a sacred space in these circumstances. Though, most assuredly, I would have responded if there had been any

real problems. But, I admit, I wasn't thinking about the Dragon... You tapped that well... And she's powerful, too!" He laughed a little. "Though, of course, in any case I ought ask permission and request a door if I am outside someone's personal sacred space... I truly could not have 'forced' my way through the one you created, either."

"But then... what would have happened if I were not to take it down?" Talibah asked rather worriedly.

"Oh, don't worry." He said, seeing her face, "It would dissipate once you returned to your body... Or rather, the Dragon would recede back into you."

"The others... Kevyn and all... are they 'out there'? Can they get back?"

"No-one out tonight but you and I... But, next time, give us all a sort of 'pass', would you? So we aren't stuck outside until you decide to go back?" He chuckled.

"How do I do that" She wondered.

Taliesin shrugged, "Just think it... the Dragon will know..." Then he turned his attention to Jared, "Hello, friend... Not 'too' discomfited by all this, are you?" He said kindly, concerned just how Jared was doing. "And, I assure you, once we get to where we are traveling to, it all such be much easier for you. Plenty of protection, plenty of sacred space."

"Strange here..." Said Jared, quietly walking up to stand by Talibah, gently taking her hand, "But my friend..." He smiled, indicating Talibah, seeming very pleased to use the word 'friend' in his indication, "I'm happy to be with my friend." Then his eyes took on a worried glint. "I will 'get back home' after we finish here, won't I?"

"You trust Cordelia, don't you?" Asked Taliesin seriously looking for Jared's ascent. When Jared finally shook his head 'yes', though it seemed a bit uncertain, Taliesin was satisfied, "Then, don't worry... I'll make sure, too... But, that's a mighty fine Dragon, you know." Taliesin quipped pleasantly. "Perhaps someday Talibah shall ride her, too."

Talibah looked at him quizzically and would have responded with a question but he had disappeared. Turning to Jared, Talibah took both his hands to squeeze them, "It was good to see you here... Now we know it shall work for us."

"Oh, yes... Do not wait too long... do not get too busy... We have work to do, too." He hugged her tightly and whispered in her ear, "See you soon." Suddenly the Dragon seemed to unravel from around them and a great snap filled Talibah's ears as it looked as if Jared as well as the dragon disappeared into her ring. But before Talibah could truly consider what had just happened, she felt someone's foot press into her side as someone stretched causing her to awaken to the early gray of dawn and the muted voices of the company around her.