

TALIBAH – THE EGYPTIAN

Chapter 7

Caretaking

As they really needed a rest, both Kevyn and Taliesin agreed that they all would be better off if they stayed at the cave they had come to for a few days to do just that. A small, fairly warm lake was found near by where they took turns to bathe and wash their clothes out. It felt good to take a little time out, for though Talibah enjoyed meeting so many new faces, she realized she had had very little time to really think and contemplate. Even the couple times they had not gone to a village, but slept in a cave, it was only for the night as they moved on the next day. Though it had seemed casual and unrushed enough at the time, coming to a true rest made them all realize that they needed the release. Even Taliesin showed signs of being less pensive and observant the next day, laughing more freely with the Runners and their antics. The scenery was beautiful with mountains so near so that later that first afternoon after having just finished bathing, Talibah found herself sitting beneath a great old oak just letting the time pass by as she lightly dozed. After a time Taliesin came out to sit by her startling her a little, “I’m sorry... I didn’t mean to wake you up... I just thought since everyone else has gone off to do other things it might be nice to take out some time with you... Beautiful here, isn’t it?”

“Yes...” smiled Talibah, “Yes, it is. Everything I’ve seen in Cymru has been beautiful, I think. So many mountains! So very, very different from my homeland... but beautiful.”

Settling down beside her, Taliesin asked, “So what do you think, so far?... The Bardic life... The road?”

“I did not know I was so tired,” she laughed, “Until we truly stopped.”

Chuckling back, Taliesin looked off at the mountains, “Yes, it’s important for a Bard to learn how to pace him or herself... It’s nice to stay where you’ll get shelter and fed, but of course, they also expect something in return... And usually a Bard does not travel in so much company. Sometimes they don’t even have any Runners with them. Though Bards and Runners usually have horses for speed and expedience... I’ve known lone Bards to go on foot to deliberately slow their pace and get to know the countryside... It’s all a matter of pacing... Knowing what you can handle... What you wish to experience and create...”

“Do Runners ever travel by themselves... Or are they always attached to a Bard?”

“Depends greatly on their age and ability... Sometimes for a space they can be on their own... If a message needs be sent out quickly and their memory is well honed... Actually, they are the ones who usually go out with messages. Sometimes the ‘experience’ of being on their own is good, especially when they are nearing the end of their time as Runners. They can do some minor healing and ritual if deemed ready... But messages... The term ‘Runners’... One of the reasons we call them that is reference to the fact that they ‘run’ messages... ‘One’ of the reasons... I’m sure you’ve noticed

others... Besides, they're the young ones... Running all over all the time, anyway." He smiled widely.

Talibah stretched and straightened herself out; the ground was getting warmer and many sprigs of grass and foliage greened the ground about them as the sun seemed to smile down at them through the scattered clouds. "Do all Bards travel?"

Taliesin shook his head, "No... Though all need to be able to travel if the need arises... Surely you've met a Court Bard or two in Gwent?"

"Maybe... But I must not have been paying attention because I don't recall much about it... what do Court Bards do?"

"A lot." He laughed a little at his too simple answer, "There is usually a Chief Bard and a 'Second' to the Chief Bard at any given Court. Their most 'important' duty is to act as diplomats between mundane and spiritual life... Runners and 'Wandering Bards', which is what we 'are' right now, report to them when coming to a Greathouse and discuss what's going on in the countryside both for spiritual as well as strategic reasons that may well get discussed with the Lord or Lady of the Greathouse if deemed necessary... Court Bards are asked to judge religious matters, advise on mundane ones, do rituals and healings at Court and the surrounding villages and towns if needs be. They keep the record and history of their respective Court and its surrounding area and peoples... They also co-ordinate festivals and work with Sacred Dancers, Singers, Musicians, the Players and Storytellers that may be in the area at any given time. And the Heralds of the Court also report directly to the Court Bard of their activities."

"In other words... a lot." Talibah rolled her eyes and shook her head, "And you must have been one once, I'll bet."

"What makes you say that?" Taliesin adjusted his clothes nonchalantly.

"Ohhh... a familiar tone in your voice, I guess."

"Well, yes, I was... Quite a while, actually... but I was a Wandering Bard once, too... A long time ago, to be sure... but I was."

"Soooo... What are all the others that you speak of? Heralds, Musicians, Storytellers?... How do they all fit?"

"Well... let's see... the short version... Sacred Dancers, Singers and Musicians are 'not' Bards... They are attached to us, they work with us and co-ordinate with us, but they have their own system... However, as a Bard, you need to learn something of each of those functions and how they approach it as it will assist you in your work... the Players, Heralds and Storytellers are all part of the Bardic System and you must learn something of each of those branches as well. Heralds were once Runners, but who have not become Bards, but who have good solid memories... Storytellers are either Bards or what we call near-Bards who have a propensity for Storytelling and are usually just in villages or towns, but rarely at Court as the Court Bards take that role. To pause, as I know you would ask, near-Bards are those who are very gifted, yet have not quite moved into the Bardic state... they may or may not in their current life... they must be brought into their Gift as a Bard by another and also must be deemed 'ready'... a curious business... something only the Council Members are capable of judging as it can be dangerous... anyway, to get back... Players can be once Runners, near-Bards or Bards of any degree, but not Council Member; though I've known a Council Member or two do some work with them for a spell; who do plays, both Sacred and not. There is 'always' at least one Bard in a 'troupe'. Then there are the Council Members who are the teachers,

basically... and administrators... oh... and a near-Bard 'can' wander, might attach him or herself to a Court or be in the Players or stay at a Council Seat to continue their training. As a wanderer, though, they would be like to remain with a Bard in that they would continue training that way... and lastly... a Wandering Bard can be 'any' status... including Council Members... including the Head of Council, as you know... the Head of Council also has Advisors with one Chief Advisor... and I believe that's about it."

"My goodness!... And I have to choose from all that?"

"Well... It's not so much 'choice'... your personal propensity will show itself and you'll be 'called' to your status... Or, let us say, you'll be instructed where to go."

"I see..." Talibah smiled looking off to watch a pair of falcons in an aerobatic dance in the sky. "Well, I guess I can live with that... But, the Runners... I get the impression not all become Bards from what you're saying... do they all become Heralds and Players, then? Or what? Would they get sent home to their village or town?"

"Sent home to their village or town?... My dear... This is a spiritual life... Many come to us as young children... If they find that they care about this life, do their best, learn as they can to the best of their abilities... We take care of our own, Talibah..." Taliesin sat back, realizing he had said that a bit harshly, "Sorry... I didn't mean to sound upset with you... when we get to the Council Seat, to Wynseren; you'll begin to understand... Clothes don't come from air, you know... or broaches, belts, cups, bowls, utensils... even foods and herbs for travel... Other than pocketed Bardic communities that are very few, very small and very scattered ... Wynseren is one of three self sufficient communities that basically supports us all... A Center that includes spinners, weavers, blacksmiths, animal handlers, farmers... everything... Some of the work is done by the students there for it is a Center of training. All three Bardic Seats, actually, are the same. And many of its population who run it, maintain it and help make it function were once Runners. And they, too, continue to study, continue to grow... And who knows? Sometimes we have late bloomers... It's been known to happen... Even the Bards do their share of the work when they're there, though for Council Members, they're usually quite occupied in either teaching or administration... But, we're a community... And we function as such... all of us."

Talibah took his hand and squeezed it. "Thanks... That brings me a great deal of comfort... and I'll do my best to find my place..." For a while they sat in communal silence as a smattering of finches chirped about in the trees and foliage about them. After several moments of just listening and watching the clouds float by in a beautiful blue sky, Talibah finally said, "Since I seem to be having a little space to ask questions..."

"Yes?" spoke Taliesin rather dreamily as he continued to listen to the birds.

"At the villages... when we've been 'invited' by the Elders to stay with them at their homes..." Talibah fidgeted a bit rather unsure how she felt about even asking, "Well... you always said 'no' for you and myself... But Kevyn always said 'yes' at least one night."

"Ah huh..." Said Taliesin watching her face a bit, letting her lead the conversation.

"Well... why do I get the impression that invitation meant something more than dinner and conversation?"

Shrugging some and stretching his legs a bit, Taliesin thought a moment before speaking, "Ah, well, yes... You are right... And Kevyn is a young man who could do

with a bit more 'adult company' from time to time than we are really going to provide him."

"I see..." Spoke Talibah considering, then surprising Taliesin with the comment, "And what if he were not to wish female 'adult' company?"

Laughing, Taliesin nearly quipped, "Didn't say it necessarily was..." He shook his head out and shrugged again, "Don't know Kevyn... But... perhaps I ought not to have spoken for you, then?"

"No, no... that's quite fine... I'm a foreigner and I know you are unsure just how I'll respond to things at times... Besides, I am as like to insult someone and I prefer and am grateful to stick with you until I truly am more sure... At least, out here."

Just then Brandon came up from behind an outcropping of rocks and walked over to them. He frowned a little seeing Talibah's hand laid casually over Taliesin's but did not say anything of it. "Hey." He remarked. "Talibah... I've got something I'd like to show you."

Regarding him uncertainly, then looking over at Taliesin who only arched his brows, Talibah responded, "Oh?... What?"

"Come on... No big deal... But, it'll be fun." Brandon smiled showing his young, healthy teeth.

"Fun... fun... I've heard that word before." She said as her thoughts touched on Jared momentarily of the night before. Getting up she looked down at Taliesin before going with Brandon. "Fun is a good thing, isn't it?"

"So I've heard." Replied Taliesin, "Go on... Go be a young person... It's good for you... Too much contemplation is like to ruin such a pretty day as this."

"Yes, alright." She said a bit uncertain at Taliesin's glibness, yet turning to Brandon who had taken her by the arm. "I guess we'll go, then... fun, you say?"

Happy to win her attention, Brandon steered her into the brush and trees to follow him down to the lake. The grasses were tall despite the Winter, having simply gone yellow as new green sprigs pushed up between them. As they got close to the lake it became more and more rocky as well, causing them to be careful where they stepped as they moved. Brandon seemed to almost make a point of taking her hand as they moved through, guiding her carefully. A slight warmth of breeze wafted across them as the sound of crickets and frogs caught Talibah's attention. For a moment Brandon stopped, rather alert, then turned to Talibah putting a finger over his lips for quiet. Suddenly Osla and Adain bounded up to them. "Hey, Brandon! He's down there, now!" Adain said happily.

"Shh! You two... Be quiet... You'll spoil it."

"Spoil what?" Asked Talibah.

Brandon turned to Talibah and grinned widely, a glint in his eyes. "Kevyn..." He nearly whispered, "Is bathing now... We thought we might relieve him of his clothes... for a space."

"What?!" Said Talibah, surprised as the other two giggled, "Won't that make Kevyn upset?"

"Well, that's the idea..."

"And you 'like' to upset him... don't you?"

"Welllll... what else are Bards for?" Responded Brandon happily.

"But... I'm a Bard." Protested Talibah.

“Oh, you’d be no fun... We ‘know’ Kevyn... ‘Kevyn’ is fun to upset... Come on.” Brandon pulled on Talibah as all four began to carefully move down to the shore. “And be quiet... all of you.”

When they got to the water’s edge they spied through the grasses to see Kevyn swimming about in the water happily, even singing to himself in pleasant airs. His voice was lovely and Talibah really would have preferred to sit and listen to him, but the others had found where his clothes were and were making preparations to snatch them in the brush.

It was Adian who finally managed to obtain them, even the rough towel, happily brining them back to the others. “Better go,” whispered Brandon, “Before he notices us.”

Tabilah grabbed at some of the clothes from Adian, managing the towel and trousers, “I’m not sure this is such a good idea... why do you want to make him angry?”

“Tabilah...” Said Brandon disgruntled, “Don’t spoil it.”

Having heard the rustle in the grasses from Talibah’s exchange with the others, Kevyn looked at the shore and immediately realized what was about. He quietly swam to the water’s edge and got out, then walked to where he had heard the noise. Before he could quite get there, Adian sounded an alarm and all of them scattered. All of them except Tabilah, who was suddenly faced with a very wet and naked Kevyn staring into her eyes. “Hello, Tabilah... might I have that, do you think?”

Realizing he meant his trousers and towel, she quickly gave them to him. “Yes, of course... I...”

He sighed a little, “Alright, everyone... I know you’re out there.” He said with some real authority, “Get yourselves here... and I mean ‘now’.” With that the rest slowly appeared shyly, knowing they had been caught and that it would do no good to gainsay any of it. Adian coyly gave Kevyn the rest of his clothes and he rolled his eyes as he shook his head, “Okay, all of you... Fun time is over for the day... Let’s see how good you are at gathering greens for a salad tonight. I mean, a ‘really good’ salad with nuts and berries, too, if they’re there to find... starting ‘now’... And a good bit of firewood, too... Oh yes.” He said lastly before they left to do as he said, “You can make sure ‘all’ the rest of the clothes are washed and dried tomorrow... all of them.” As the others left, Kevyn took hold of Talibah’s arm before she could follow with them, “No Talibah... Not you.”

“What?” She said, surprised.

“Three reasons... First, you’re a foreigner and I accept that and even suspect the Runners will ‘play’ on that... Secondly, You’re ‘not’ in my keeping. You are Taliesin’s student. I have no business schooling his student for any reason other than something dire or dangerous... And thirdly... Well... You’re a Bard.”

“I’m sorry, Brother...” She said averting her eyes for he still stood dripping wet, having made no effort to put his clothes back on as they remained grasped in his arms.

“Well, then... May I be left in peace, now?... I ‘was’ enjoying my bath, you know... I’d like to get back to it.” He said walking back out to the water, obviously desiring to return.

“Yes, of course, Brother.” With that, Talibah turned, nearly running back up to the cave in embarrassment.

The next day having had a most wonderful salad of all sorts of young tender greens and even a few nuts and berries with the evening meal the night before, Talibah was still feeling rather chargined by her experience though the Runners had returned to

their usual exuberance. Noticing Talibah's mood as the Runners took all the clothing they could down to the river and Kevyn went off to do a little hunting, Taliesin took Talibah for a walk taking one of their rough towels with them that they might pick some berries or nuts if they were to find any as they walked. A little dew still clung about their feet as they walked and Talibah noticed the movement of insects along the ground and in the new leaves. Blackbirds called in the skies like friendly neighbors while they strolled, neither of them saying much as they went for quite some time. Walking up a rise of a hill they found themselves looking down into a valley where they could see a bit of smoke in the trees that bespoke the presence of either a town or village. Being away from the direction they had come to get to the cave, Talibah remarked, "Is that where we go next?"

"No... it's more West than we're going... Besides, it's a town and it follows to a Greathouse over a ridge we can't see from here... It will rain tomorrow... It's a good thing we have plenty of wood stacked up and that the clothes will be done by then."

Talibah sighed, "Oh yes... the clothes."

"You have something against clean clothes?" remarked Taliesin as they stood under a bright sky, Talibah wondering a little how Taliesin could see such a lovely day and predict rain on the morrow.

"No... I... just feel perhaps I ought be doing some of the washing."

Smiling wryly Taliesin said, "Still feeling a bit guilty about yesterday?... You know, Kevyn wasn't angry by any means... Surprised, maybe... not angry."

"He told you, then?"

"Ummm... In a sense I ought reprimand you... However, Kevyn's quite right... The Runners are playing with you, too... And besides... I had just told you to go have 'fun'... I ought to have realized that Brandon might be up to something like that... No harm done, really... When I was young I did lots of the same things... Might now, too, if I could get away with it." He smiled, trying to put her at ease.

"I'm really sorry." She said with downcast eyes, "I hate to disappoint you."

"Oh, Talibah... You don't disappoint me... That would be very hard to do... it's alright... Don't worry, either... No one's angry, no one even really cares... I know it's sometimes hard for you to distinguish what's all really taking place... But, you'll get there... Actually, I think Kevyn does quite well with these 'children'. He's barely much older than Brandon by a couple years, I'd guess, and has proved himself well in control with them... I'm rather impressed... I'm really fairly impressed with everyone here... Which, of course, includes you, my dear..." Talibah looked down and away a bit, still unsure though she could feel Taliesin's warm smile on her. Suddenly Taliesin frowned, distracted. "Something doesn't 'feel' right. I think we better go back."

With that they turned back to the cave meeting Kevyn along the way with a couple rabbits he had caught in a trap he had set the day before. All of them had felt a prickle of wrongness when they had been out and were somewhat apprehensive as they finally arrived at the cave. Looking about in and around the cave, Kevyn laid down his catch as Taliesin put away the few nuts and berries they had managed to pick still feeling a sense of wrongness in the air. "I guess we ought go check on the children." Remarked Kevyn, "though I don't hear anything and everything had seemed like it should be safe enough."

Just then Adian came running up to the cave white as death and out of breath, “Kevyn!... Oh, thank Goddess, you’re ‘all’ here! Osla! Osla! He’s been bitten by a snake!”

“What!?... Where!?... Where’s Brandon!” Cried Kevyn taking Adian by the shoulders.

“Brandon’s with him... He’s working on him... They’re at the riverbank where we were washing the clothes... He needs help... Osla needs healing.” Adian was nearly in tears seeing Kevyn’s face becoming ashen and stricken.

“Get herbs... Get supplies...” Kevyn said in a rush to Adian pushing her into the cave to get them, then looked at Taliesin and Talibah briefly before rushing away to the river before anyone said anything else. Taliesin turned to Adian, “Well, Adian, you heard Kevyn.” With that Adian went to do just that as Taliesin turned back to Talibah, “Let’s go... Kevyn’s going to need our help with this.”

Adian rushed back up to them, the herbs and supplies already in her hands, “Brandon’s made a tourniquet, and was sucking the poison out, but Osla was out... I’ve got the herbs.”

“Run, then... We’re right behind you.” Said Taliesin as they all ran, Adian in front of them. When they got to the scene Brandon had already found some usable herbs to make a poultice of though he gratefully accepted what Adian brought. Osla was lying on the shore in some of the grasses pale and short of breath, a dead poisonous snake near by probably killed by Brandon. Kevyn had his arms wrapped around his brother tightly, humming and trying to sing in Bardic healing though it kept getting caught in his throat in near gurgles and mis-starts as he shook violently. Brandon kept working on the bite that was on Osla’s foot, taking a cup from the supplies and telling Adian to get some water from the lake staying calm in this storm. Taliesin looked over everyone quickly a moment, nodding a bit at Brandon, “Good work, son.” Then kneeled down by Kevyn, “Kevyn.” Taliesin said quietly and calmly, gently taking Kevyn’s shoulders and stopping him from his miscalculated sounds, “We’ve got work to do here, Brother... Are you up to this?”

“He’s my brother.” Kevyn said continuing to shake, tears forming in his eyes, “I promised our mother I’d take care of him.”

“Okay...” said Taliesin carefully, “You come over here, Kevyn... Come on.” Slowly, gently, Taliesin pulled Kevyn away to sit him a few feet from his brother. Still shaking, Kevyn looked into Taliesin’s face afraid he’d see accusation, yet was met only by concern, “It’s okay, Kevyn... It’ll be okay... You sit... We’ll work on him... If you feel better, then join us...” Then Taliesin looked at Talibah, “Time to work, Sister... I’ll start at Osla’s head, you start at his feet.” They stationed themselves gently, though quickly as Brandon worked around them, continuing to press the herbs, bringing a bit of water to Osla’s lips when Adian brought some back in the cup. Both Taliesin and Talibah fell into a light trance as they began to hum and sing healing sounds, sometimes touching, sometimes holding, sometimes moving their hands slightly above Osla’s body. It took a moment or so for Taliesin to feel Osla’s life force for it had become fairly shallow despite Brandon’s ministrations; yet once Taliesin had, he enclosed it within his own life force as he and Talibah continued to feed it, guiding it back into Osla’s being. Talibah sensed a glow all about them as the crystal of her spine responded and she felt it might be a truly beautiful experience if it were not for the dire aspect of the circumstances. After some

time Talibah became aware that another energy had joined them and she knew Kevyn had finally felt himself stable enough to come help. Kevyn was a wonderful Bardic Healer, so Talibah was happy and relieved that he had finally felt calm enough to help. At first this went well as they proceeded, even sensing Osla's breathing and pulse returning to normal as they went on, the warmth of his skin less flushed. Then something seemed off and though Osla was actually starting to come round and getting much stronger, Talibah could tell the process wasn't as it ought be. Taliesin quit humming, softly speaking, "Talibah, you stay with this... Osla will be alright... but Kevyn's too deep into this and I must pull him away." As Talibah continued to work, she could sense Taliesin moving to Kevyn, pulling his energy away, "Kevyn... Stop... Stop now... Let go, Kevyn... Let go... You're not doing your brother any good like this." Carefully, Taliesin finally got Kevyn to disengage and sat him again a little ways off, looking at him and checking him a moment. After that, Taliesin sat and wrapped his arms around Kevyn, saying to Talibah, "Take Osla back to the cave as soon as he's a bit conscious, but continue the herbs and Bardic Healing... I'll stay with Kevyn... He went too deep... He needs healing now, too." With that Taliesin closed his eyes and began to sing and hum to Kevyn, a bit of a worried look drawn across his face.

Before long Talibah and Brandon were able to move Osla after they had gotten a good amount of water in him as his color quickly returned and he spoke a little to them in a dreamy sort of way. Getting him back into the cave, Adian following nervous and yet curious, they laid him down as best they could as Adian started the fire back up. Having fixed the poultice, Brandon ventured, "You think he'll be okay?"

"What are you saying, you oaf?!... I'm fine." Spoke Osla grumpily, suddenly trying to get up and face his friend.

"You stay put." Said Talibah to Osla interrupting her healing a moment to intervene the move, "But, yes, Brandon... He'll be okay."

"Well... We left a good bit of wash yet down there... Guess Adian and I ought finish it."

"Yes, that would be fine... Check on Brother Gwion and Kevyn, would you... But I'm sure it'll turn out okay... And things still need to be done." With that Talibah returned to her healing as Brandon and Adian went back out to their delayed chores.

It seemed a long while before Taliesin returned with a weakened Kevyn whom Taliesin laid near the fire and covered with Kevyn's cloak. "You rest now, Brother." Taliesin said crouching down to Kevyn to make sure of the covers, then smoothing back Kevyn's hair and lightly kissing his forehead. Then Taliesin went over to Osla who slept peacefully now beneath his own cloak and Taliesin kissed his forehead as well. Feeding the fire, Talibah checked some water she had put on for tea, then stirred in some herbs before filling a couple cups with the brew, then handed one to Taliesin who took it gratefully. Sipping at it he sighed long and low, saying quietly, "When we get to the Seat, to Wynseren... I think it would be wise to separate these two... big brother feels far too responsible and is far too attached... We could have had two casualties today... Would have if you and I weren't here... Brandon, too, I think... Though he would not have been able to prevent it in the end... We must look out for each other, you know... And this time I believe it means seeing two brothers out of each other's paths... Kevyn just doesn't see straight when it comes to Osla. He's a good man; he does well by his charges... But his brother is too much to expect... It often is."

Talibah noted nervousness in Taliesin she had not met up with before, “You’re a bit shaken...” She said softly as she, too, sipped at her tea.

“We did alright by Osla, but Kevyn sank on me very fast... Kevyn’s strong, he took in a lot of Osla’s poison, but because of his own remorse, couldn’t flush it back out... He’s so strong I almost couldn’t bring him back up so that together we could flush it... Yes... I’m a bit shaken... And very tired... I may lay down myself awhile... If you’re not too bad, why don’t you check on Brandon and Adian... I’ll watch out for these two. They’re past any danger now.” Talibah went over to Taliesin and hugged him warmly, “Hey now... we’re all going to be fine.”

“I know...” Spoke Talibah as she got back up, “Just a little shaky myself, I guess... I’ll see to the... children... We’ll get the clothes back and start seeing what we might manage to fix to eat. I’ll set Brandon to dress the rabbits for dinner, I guess. Perhaps I might find some tubers, too... I think I might have seen some yesterday... Seems to be plenty of firewood, even through tomorrow, though we might get a little more.”

“Sounds good.” Taliesin said a little sleepily as he put his cup down to push around his own things to lie down and rest on. Soon he, too, had fallen into a light slumber as Talibah watched them all a moment before going out to find the other two members of their little group.

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Returning to their apartments in the Greathouse of Gwydion after Jenna’s Initiation as a Council Member, both she and Taliesin had remained quiet, barely speaking as if to allow Jenna time to bask in the glow. As two children still lived with them, Jenna checked on them momentarily before going to she and Taliesin’s bedroom. Softly she closed the door when she entered their room, Taliesin standing by the window, the shutters still open as he looked out into the night. The candlelight lit the room in soft colors and as he turned to Jenna, Taliesin smiled warm loving tones, a smile he seemed to reserve for Jenna alone. “Everyone seems to be asleep.” Jenna whispered. “You know... soon both children will need to stay in different halls.”

“Umm.” Agreed Taliesin wistfully, watching Jenna move, the hum of vibrations still about her like slow dancing waves, as he closed the shutters of the window and began to repair for bed. He had allowed his dark hair to grow long the last few years, braiding it down his back, a style Jenna seemed to like for she would sit by him to unbraid, brush and braid it of her own accord, sometimes running her hands through it in amusement. Sitting by him that night, she undid his hair, making no move to put it back as she proceeded to help him remove his clothes. She kissed him on his neck and whispered in his ear, “I thought you wished to discuss some things with me after the Initiation.”

Chuckling, Taliesin took her about the waist, kissing the mounds of dark curls of her own wonderful hair, “In a little while, my love... There is no hurry.”

Pushing him away, giggling a bit as if she was somewhat tipsy, she also began to disrobe, not allowing her husband to help, seeming to prefer that he watch. Leaving some candles lit, they both climbed into the bed entering into a slow and languid pace as they

made love. It seemed to enhance the wonderful hum of Jenna's experience, allowing it to widen out and letting Taliesin partake of it as well.

Later, as Taliesin held Jenna in his arms while she lightly slept and the candles finally guttered out, he thought a while on just how to present things to her. After a space Jenna turned and awoke, realizing Taliesin was conscious and thinking. It seemed curious to her that she would just know that without even opening her eyes. "Maerdyenn?" She ventured softly.

"Yes, love." He whispered in the now near total darkness of the room.

"You are thinking... I can almost 'hear' it."

"Yes." He sighed, "Council Members have very strong bonds."

"But, you seem sad... and I thought this was a good thing." She snuggled into his chest and listened to the reassuring sound of his heartbeat.

"Yes... It is a most wonderful thing... But, it is a powerful thing and you must be 'seen' to." He stroked her hair, pulling it back from her face and kissing her mouth tenderly.

Pulling away, she looked to see his eyes and though the room was dark, still could see a glint where his eyes would be. "Seen to?... Seen to in what way?"

Sighing again, Taliesin proceeded, "We will call in another Council Member to take over your duties here for a time... You must go to the Council Seat, my dear... This is a time for 'you', for your growth... The doors have been opened and you will need help to deal with all that you shall face in consequence of it."

"Leave here?... Leave the children? Leave you?" She said, suddenly a little fearful.

"Leave here, yes... for a year and a day. But..." He said, squeezing her warmly, "The children are welcome to stay at Wynseren... and I'll be there. I'll be there every moment you need me... Sometimes when you don't, probably... Jenna..." He said softly into her hair, "What you've experienced is a powerful thing... You will begin to have memories from past lives. Sometimes strong ones. You will begin to see the 'thread' of your being and your connection with all there is in a very dynamic way... You'll not lose your place here at Court. That is why we send for a Council Member and not chose one of the Chief Bards who serve you... Besides, Dylan will make certain no one supersedes you."

For whatever reason that made Jenna relax some, even giggle a bit, "Dear Dylan... We can always count on him."

"Umm... Yes we can... I was so very pleased when he became a Chief Bard... and so pleased he's still here helping you... He's been our friend a long, long time... Trust that... All will go well while you are away... Both I and Dylan will see to that."

"And the children can be at Wynseren? At the Seat?"

"Yes, my love... This is 'your' time..." He enfolded her close where she relaxed fully.

Then a curiosity came to her, "But, you never spent so much time away... And you were made the 'Chosen'... And you were just a Chief Bard when that happened."

"Ahhh... That puzzles you... puzzles me a little, too... Somehow I was already there... My past already closing in, the threads already apparent... But, in many ways, I suffered some things alone... Needed to face things quickly whether I willed or no... It is much, much better the way you shall experience it. Easier, safer, with love surrounding

you... And when you come back, you will be strong, happy, fulfilled in ways I don't know how to tell you... And you will be able to have students at Court if you'd like."

"Students?... Students... Yes... I might like that... Children, bright young faces to teach." Finally things seemed happier and brighter to Jenna once more. With that they began touching and kissing again when Taliesin startled from their embrace.

"Maerdyenn." He heard, "Maerdyenn... Wake up... You are dreaming and I need to speak with you."

Suddenly Taliesin remembered that he was in the cave the night after he had healed Osla and Kevyn and fallen into a very deep sleep having barely managed to eat an evening meal that Talibah and the other two Runners had given him. Sitting up to see the sleeping forms about him, he looked over into a corner of the cave to see the glow of a figure standing and indicating that he come to them. He got up from his bedding, such as it was, to follow the figure where it led. The cave seemed to fall away as he went, leaving him in a realm of gold and silver lights.

"Rhiannon." He said finally, seeing the form before him solidify. The woman who had been the Head of Council before him and now maintained the Inner Bardic Temple with him after her death quietly and gravely looked up at him. Her great brown eyes were full and warm and a mass of wheat colored hair about her shoulders framed her face of golden skin like an ethereal aura. "Is something wrong? I have come to you when season and ritual dictate... Have I been remiss somehow?"

"No... Dear friend, beloved friend... Though I pain for you and what you seek... You are as you should be." She took both his hands, kissing each lightly, almost formally. "But something... Something seems strange... A force of energy, perhaps of life, I cannot trace... And I am concerned... I am concerned whatever it is, it means 'Our Mother', the Earth, no good."

"From where?" Spoke Taliesin, distressed by the thought.

"I said I do not know... The stars, perhaps... It does not feel near, but far away... and dark things are being stirred from it... and I grow uneasy... Be aware... Be alert."

"Can not our rituals help avert it?" Frowned Taliesin, taking Rhiannon's hands back into his own and watching her face carefully.

"I fear we may 'need' the final key for this." She said looking back in his eyes and though much smaller, Taliesin felt her eyes encased his very presence as if he were but a child.

"I've looked long and long... And continue to... Somehow I believe, though, that I may be getting closer at last... Somehow I believe Talibah may help me find her."

"Ahhh... Your new student... Yes... there is 'something' there... You train her... to walk 'between'... Perhaps someday as 'you' do?"

Taliesin shrugged, "We'll see... But there's something... Something she 'knows', something 'about' her... And I will stay alert, dear one, my Lady... I shall watch for signs... In the Wheel... In 'all' the Realms."

"Even so..." Rhiannon nodded, then hugged him and he returned it. In a moment she dissipated leaving Taliesin to stand a moment thinking before returning to the cave and the Realm of the Wheel.