

Talibah, the Egyptian

Chapter 5

Leave Taking

It had been a beautiful night with the clear sky filled to bursting with starlight in the near absence of the moon. The insects were far calmer in the autumn airs, though not totally stilled and the occasional hoot of an owl broke that stillness like some lonely echo from the trees. For a little while Taliesin walked casually with Jenna outside the stone walls that encircled Gwydion's Greathouse, Taliesin carrying a small taper in the darkness as he wanted this to be a quiet and private walk. The walls stood silent and high above them as they followed along a little path next to the fitted stones, the lights of the buildings within obscured by the walls from their eyes. Little was said between them and then only in whisper as Taliesin also seemed to indicate that he really didn't want them to attract any attention to themselves, even from the woods. Jenna could feel a certain amount of energy shifting around them as they finally walked away from the walls and any human habitat, away from the route towards the villages and over into the trees of the woods. As they moved more deeply into the trees, Jenna began to wonder what this might truly be about and though Taliesin would not give any indication of what it was, she trusted him so implicitly that she kept up a calm front though she still could feel a certain amount of small tremors inside despite anything she told herself.

Finally they came to a little alcove and Taliesin stopped. The night was so dark that Jenna could hardly see anything beyond the small light of the taper they had with them. "I would blindfold you, but I'm not sure there's much point." Remarked Taliesin, "I am already here, so some of the meaning is already known... but, I would ask that you close your eyes, my love and let me lead you into the sacred space."

Her heart skipped, then began to beat quickly, "Maerdynn?"

"Shh... calm down, love... Close your eyes and let the magick sing to you." With that she did as he asked and he gently took her hand after he could feel her calming once more. "Just let me lead you." As they slowly walked on just a little more, the clumsiness of the situation tempted Jenna to open her eyes. Yet she realized that in some ways, this too, was a test, so she did not for in no way did she wish to disappoint her spouse. When they finally stopped walking and she was aware that others had come to join them as a wonderful musical hum filled the airs, she knew for certain what was happening and great tears filled her eyes and joy swelled her heart as her face became traced with the salty-sweet moisture.

As the humming continued, she could feel them all get closer and closer to her until they were nearly hugging her with their bodies as well as the sound filling to the brim with their energies until she felt as if she might burst apart. For several moments afterwards as the energy worked itself within her, connecting her with all the others about her, she stood silently as the others gently began to move away from her, letting the power hum through her, rushing through her, becoming one with her. After several moments in this silence, Taliesin finally stepped up to her to hug and kiss her gently,

letting her know it was now all right to open her eyes once more. “Oh, my goodness!” She exclaimed, hugging Taliesin back so tightly he almost winced. Soft, delighted chuckles ran through the group around them, making her draw away from him laughing a little as well.

“We will need to talk some, my love.” Taliesin smiled tenderly at her, “But I am very proud of you. And so happy. Welcome to the Council... To some degree, I think this may be long overdue.”

For a little while the small group of Council Members sat upon the ground with their newest, speaking congratulations. Even Gwen, Taliesin’s Chief Advisor had been able to be there, making the event even more special for Jenna because it also inferred a certain amount of subtle importance to this initiation. And though it only required six members of the Council to enact this ritual, Jenna noted that she had gotten a full twelve causing her whole body to continue to sing with the infusion of energy for quite some time after. As she looked around at all the pleasant faces, she realized that though she already knew each one of them by name, she now knew each one of them in heart as well. That she knew all the Council Members in heart and that she was now connected to all of them in a wonderful web of energy and knowledge.

As they finally began to get back up to go about their separate ways, Taliesin remarked rather offhandedly, though it carried a subtle impact, “You shall also be one of my Advisors as well. It is why we went with a full twelve, you see.” He smiled. “Of course, you’ve already been one of my Advisors for quite some time, I think...”

She looked at him a little startled, “I’ve never sought to advise you in matters of estate, my Lord.” Her remark caused the rest of the company to chuckle merrily. “Have I?”

Taliesin laughed a little himself, “Well, to be honest, I don’t think you’ve meant to, no... And I haven’t really meant to openly discuss things... But what is ‘meant’ is not always the way things ‘are’...” he smiled openly, taking her arm, “But now things are as they should be... And let us go now, dear... There are some things that still needs be discussed.” With that, everyone relit their tapers from the one Taliesin had seemed to manage to keep lit throughout the entire process as they all bid he and Jenna goodnight before going out into the quiet, starlit night.

The first glints of Spring had appeared and much of the snow would soon melt as the days increased in the warmth and sunshine. Though Talibah had greeted the break in the weather with her own sunniness, she noticed that Taliesin had lately been rather listless and almost a bit distant at times, sometimes staring off into nothingness for long periods of time.

“You seem rather lost in thought lately.” Spoke Talibah as they had begun to truly pack a few things together in preparation for their leave taking that Taliesin had indicated would be very soon.

“Just reminiscing a bit, I guess... Some memories seem to be wrestling with me a little... I don’t mean to be distracted... But, then again, you’ve learned much of what you need to at the moment and just be working on the things we’ve gone over before... At this time you really require interaction with others. Some stimulation from other minds...

younger ones... I mean, it must grow tiring for a young person to house for so long in seclusion with an old man." He smiled.

"Old?..." She questioned. "Are you old?... And just 'how' old, though?... You don't seem to act very old at all... And other than your white hair... you don't look very old... Besides, how on Earth would I know how an Elf would act at any age?"

Laughing a bit Taliesin shook his head, "No matter... You really do need to be with others, anyway... Bards are not really creatures of seclusion and you could do with folks closer to your age and temperament... Make some friends, learn and have some fun in your life... Talibah, have you had much time to have fun in your life?... From what you've told me seems like an awful lot of your life so far has been very duty bound ... I think it's about time for a bit of a change."

Talibah looked through some of the herbs they'd bring with them as they were from the surrounding area and something Taliesin had said the Healers at the Council Seat would be more than pleased to get. She wrapped them carefully in such a way that Taliesin had instructed her, pleased by the aroma they made as she folded them in. "Fun..." she said a little distantly as if she wasn't even certain what the word meant. "Fun would be nice... I guess..." Then she turned her thoughts back in sudden curiosity, "So, what or who do you reminisce about?" Having gotten it out of her mouth she wondered if she might have been out of place to ask.

"Ah... so you wonder just what an old Elf would be reminiscing about, eh?" He went over and took out her small lap harp from where she liked to sit in the evenings to hand to her. "Why don't you set those herbs down for a bit... we've about packed all we're going to be needing but for a few personal things... Play a little while, would you? I fancy I might like to hear some of those Egyptian strains of yours again... I think I might like to try and memorize some of them... They're different and speak of emotions that might well be quite useful. A quality I like... Do that for me and I'll tell you... what an old Elf may be reminiscing..."

"Sir?" She said in some hesitation.

"Indulge me, my dear... We won't be leaving for a few days yet... We have plenty of time, really... The day is pleasant... I would relax for a little space."

For a while she played and sang as a satisfied smile crept upon Taliesin's face making her wonder a bit. She thought he was simply distracting her from her questions, yet he did seem to be actually paying very real attention to her manner as she plucked the strings as if he could tell something important about her, about her people within the melodies and chords. When she had finished a piece that was specifically in praise of Sophia, Taliesin nodded his approval, his eyes closed and a satisfied look drawn across his face. Pleased by his response, Talibah set the harp down a moment as she remarked, "I think that is my favorite piece from my homeland."

Opening his eyes back up slowly, Taliesin nodded once again and looked directly at her as he quietly spoke, "My wife... I think about my wife."

"Your wife?" Talibah said in some true surprise, her eyes wide.

Sighing, Taliesin continued, "She died, you see... quite a while ago, really... Though it hardly seems so to me..."

"I'm sorry, Maerdynn... I had no idea..." was Talibah's frank and honest reply.

Shaking his head a bit sadly, Taliesin returned with, "Don't be... Really, it 'is' quite some time ago... over seven years, I believe."

“It just was something that had not occurred to me, I guess... I certainly had no intention of prying... I’m not sure what I assumed... I guess I was seeing you as a hermit, but...”

“Well, my dear Talibah... don’t you suppose that even hermits may have a past?” He spoke in some amusement, “And believe me, I ‘do’ have one... Going on to Wynseren is not only for you, you understand... There are things that ‘I’ must do...”

Changing the subject back as she was still more than a bit curious about this new information, Talibah queried, “Was you wife...?”

“I loved her a lot... ‘I’ thought she was the most beautiful thing in the world... And, yes, I still miss her terribly.” Though still a bit sad, Taliesin’s smile was gentle and relaxed. “In many ways she was more than my equal and I miss that as well... a friend and companion as much as my love.”

Realizing something suddenly, Talibah said a little worriedly, “You know... I’ve not seen Jared in a while... Not since I spoke to you about his inability to go with me.”

“Don’t worry...” Taliesin said rather relieved to move to another subject, “I’m sure you’ll see him soon... You needn’t panic about it... even Elves have things to do.” He smiled, “Let’s go take a good look at the horses, shall we? They need some tending yet to be ready, too, and we may as well see to that.” Getting up Taliesin bid Talibah follow him as they went into the area where their horses were kept.

A Bard and three Runners came to Taliesin’s cave one night announcing that they would be escorting she and Taliesin to the Council Seat on the morrow and though in the past Talibah would have wondered how on earth they knew to come, she now tended to take it as a matter of course, even though it still eluded her just ‘how’ they knew. The journey to Wynseren would take several days, but the weather had turned fine and all preparations had been settled for their leave taking. The Bard was friendly and deferential to both she as well as Taliesin whom he addressed as ‘Father’. The Runners seemed very shy of Taliesin himself, though totally at ease with Talibah, even acting a bit silly around her. They all piled about the one fire that night where she and Taliesin had always taken their meals, though Talibah wasn’t certain just how comfortable she was as there really was just room for all of them. Yet Taliesin felt it best to all stay together as a way of beginning the process of leaving the cave behind, blending the new with the now familiar for both she and Taliesin. Even Taliesin and Talibah’s horses were a bit discomfited by the additional animals in their area as there was only just room and though it took a little doing, Taliesin was finally able to calm all the animals in the end, stroking and singing to them as if they might be children.

It was in the middle of the night, this last night with close quartered bodies and a sense of near mourning that Talibah awoke and sat up as all the others continued in sleep. Stifled and no longer very comfortable at all, she left the other sleeping forms to wander in the dark to her old area. Though it had gotten a bit cool there, she sat in the darkness feeling a bit alone and afraid.

“Hello.” Said a familiar voice at her side.

“Jared?” she gasped, turning to look at him as a soft glow of golden light overtook the area. “How are you here?”

“Here?... It’s where we always are.” He said puzzled.

“We’re in the ‘Between’? I don’t recall falling asleep.”

Not sure what she meant, he just looked at her several moments, then shrugged, “Missed you.”

“Yes... missed you, too... Where have you been?”

“Things to do... Things to say.”

He seemed fairly chipper to her so she ventured, “Have you talked with Cordelia?”

“Oh, yes... And we must go now.”

“Go? Go where?”

“Where we were... Come.” He reached out his hand to her, taking hers when he saw her hesitate. “Must go, Talibah... Must finish what we started.”

“Started?... what did we start?” He shook his head a little as if she were a bit daft, then pulled her after him into the shifting landscape. After several moments Talibah was very surprised to find them once again before the churning waters of their previous escapade. For a long while they simply stood on the sparkling beach watching the waters churn as Talibah realized Jared was holding her hand almost too tightly. She felt a nervousness shoot through him as they stood and a very real desire in herself to try and calm him somehow. “What is this, friend?... What is it we must do?”

Warming a little, Jared turned to look at her, “I am your friend?” He asked almost shyly.

“Of course... At this point if you were not my friend it would hardly make much sense to continue.”

He shifted a little, “Not always true... But... I am very glad... I like being friends. It is good.” He sighed slowly, “Perhaps this will go easier, then.” With that he brought out the crystal they had put the foreign energy in the last time they had seen each other. “Cordelia says... we must put it back.”

Taken aback, Talibah looked at the crystal and retreated a pace or two dropping Jared’s hand. “Put back?... The energy?... ‘How’ are we supposed to do that?... If we release it, won’t it come after us again?”

“Hope not.” Remarked Jared rather frankly as he looked back over the water. “But doesn’t belong ‘in’ crystal... Belongs out there...” He indicated with his head, “With the Mother.”

“And... exactly what do you propose we are to do?”

Jared turned back to look deeply into her eyes for a long while before answering. A sweetness seemed to fill them, a warmth that moved within Talibah that made her want to hold it inside her and not let go again. “We sing.” He said simply, “We sing to the Mother... ask Her to come take Her child back to Her.”

His answer surprised her, yet it also seemed to make her a bit less fearful.

“Sing?... But, how do I know just ‘how’ to sing, or ‘what’ to sing.”

“Silly... Just join your song with mine... I sing to the Mother all the time... So do you... Not so difficult.” He quipped as he sat on the sand facing the waters, then patted the ground next to him for her to sit as well. When she had done so he placed the crystal in front of them. “Now, let’s sing.” He seemed to draw in a long, low breath that Talibah emulated, feeling herself joining his energy as they began to fill the air with their voices. The sweetness, beauty and power of the sound surprised Talibah, as it seemed to rise

from them and somehow move across the waters as if caressing it. It was strange and wonderful as Talibah saw colors bursting from the sound and spreading everywhere like a blanket of colored, twinkling lights. She watched the waters in front of them as she and Jared sang, their voices sounding now as if it came as one voice. As the sound they made continued to move across the waters, she noticed that the water seemed to begin to respond, beginning to gently sway with it, swell with it like the embrace of a loving dance.

Talibah could no longer tell how long she and Jared might have sat there singing, the water dancing, for she had entered a state of full ecstatic trance. In that state she felt the waters move toward them, over them and then finally through them in a thundering wash that roared throughout her spirit as she suddenly felt like she might drown. She caught a breath in her throat as she felt as if she were thrown somewhere wide and far yet realized that neither she nor Jared had moved from their spot on the sands.

As this wave of raw emotion subsided from her she looked over at Jared for they had both quit singing in their startlement. Jared looked as winded as she, yet he also seemed to be smiling wide in triumph. “What happened?” Talibah said finally, catching her breath as if there was a breath to catch, noticing Jared was also enacting a heavy sort of heaving from his chest.

“She took it.” He gasped through his grinning, “She took Her child home.” He showed Talibah the crystal that had grown smoky once more, then sat it back on the sand where it slowly melted, then dissolved into the ground. “We did good!” With that he grasped both Talibah’s hands and quickly kissed her mouth. Startled, Talibah just as quickly pulled away and looked at him, yet he seemed unconcerned by her reaction. “Cordelia will come.” He remarked happily. “Cordelia is here.”

With that Talibah felt a presence behind them. “Hello, my dears.” Spoke a feminine voice. “Jared is right... You both did very well... Very well, indeed.” Talibah turned to see the beautiful red-haired Elven woman and began to get up to greet her. “No, no... remain as you are. I shall sit with both of you, I think... It is good to see you, my dear.” She said to Talibah as she sat, then regarded them both. “Jared and I have been doing some work... for you... He’s my cousin, you see. A younger cousin... a student of mine, really... A ‘good’ student, at least ‘most’ of the time.” She smiled at Jared with an almost parental patience. Then she took Talibah’s hand in both of hers. “I also can not bear to see my cousin unduly upset. Especially when there is good reason. Though both Maerdynn and I agreed on Jared’s fitness for the task of being a good companion for you to work with, we ‘both’ ignored a ‘very’ obvious problem... and resolved to find a solution...” With that Cordelia removed her hands from Talibah where there was now a green stoned ring encircled by a silver dragon upon Talibah’s left index finger. Talibah gazed on it, impressed by its beauty. “This is Jared’s tie to you, dear. The dragon is keyed to the power on your back.” And Cordelia gently touched the tattoo on Talibah. “Softly blow on the stone in the evening when you lie down and say, ‘dragon of the earth, dragon of the sky, let Jared find his way to my heart’s path by and by.’ That will allow Jared to ‘see’ the heart in the stone and the dragon will lead him to you.” Looking at the ring again, Talibah noticed that there was a soft light at the center of the stone that almost glowed causing her to smile.

Suddenly a little confused, she looked back up to Cordelia, “But... how will ‘I’ see this ring when I am in the Wheel?”

“How, indeed.” Smiled Cordelia as everything suddenly faded and Talibah knew she had returned to her body. Surprised by the quick turn of events, she was equally startled to realize that she was back near the fire huddled with the rest of the Bardic company and feeling the return of day quickly approaching them. Hearing the stretching and yawning about her, Talibah sat up as well, looking about at all the sleepy faces. Then she looked down at her hand where her eyes grew wide for there was the beautiful green stoned ring encircled by the silver dragon on her finger. As she looked and gasped she felt eyes upon her forcing her to look up and meet Taliesin’s smile across the smoldering embers. “Thank-you.” She mouthed at him to keep the exchange private and he responded by gently nodding his head. “Shall I get breakfast fixings for everyone?” she said in a cheery voice.

“Do that.” Said Taliesin, “And we shall get this fire back up while you get aforesaid fixings.” With that Taliesin began to fully rouse the others, getting the Runners to go out and fetch some wood. The Bard helped Taliesin work on the fire itself with what was already nearby.

“It will be good to have you back, Father.” Remarked the Bard as they worked.

Taliesin sighed, “I hope so... Really, I think most shall be relieved when I cede power... Which is what I intend to do.”

“Father?” The Bard said, a little startled that Taliesin would be so open with him.

“Don’t worry... That’s not like it’s some big secret... I’m sorry, son. I don’t think I got your name very well last night. We were all rather tired, though I hope everyone ate well enough.

“I’m Kevyn, Father... And yes, it was a good supper, especially as we had ridden long and hard that day getting here to you.” He smiled, breaking twigs and feeding the small blaze.

“And the Runners’ names? They had been said so quickly when you first arrived and the hour was so late... I promise to commit them to memory this time.”

“The red, curly haired girl is Adian. The light haired boy, who is my younger half brother, is Osla. And the dark haired older boy is Brandon... All fine students, from what I can see and all that I’ve heard from their teachers... Especially Brandon. Has a wonderful astute memory... One of the best I’ve come across in a long while, really. I swear he can repeat four or five sentences word for word and have it totally committed to memory almost as fast as you can say it when he’s asked to.”

“Really?” said Taliesin pleasantly as Talibah re-entered the area with pots of water, tea and some grains to make into their usual meal of mush. “And this is ‘my’ student, Talibah.” Taliesin indicated her proudly to Kevyn. “She has a wonderful voice and a most keen sense of timing.”

“Yes, Talibah... I wasn’t sure, but I could certainly tell you had high favor from the Father.” Kevyn said to Talibah smiling and nodding his head in greeting.

“Thank-you, sir.” Talibah said differentially as she sat to arrange her wares to begin to create their meal.

“I am Kevyn, Talibah. Please don’t call me sir. I know you are more than my equal if you are the Father’s student.”

“The’ Father?” asked Talibah, a little unsure how the title was meant, “You keep calling him that, last night and today... and I am not certain that I understand.”

“Kevyn.” Taliesin interjected, “She knows I have ‘something’ to do with the Council. She doesn’t quite understand. I’ve not truly told her. I had thought it best before, but I suppose it can’t be kept from her understanding much longer, anyway.”

“You’re ‘Head’ of the Bardic Council, aren’t you?” said Talibah suddenly realizing, suddenly knowing for certain. “I had thought perhaps so, but you never truly said... Then, I thought perhaps you had abandoned all and only went to the Council Seat now to have me trained further... But then you said the other day that you went to the Council for you, too... Why did you leave?... Why do you go back now?” She said in sudden curiosity.

Taliesin looked over at her gently as he helped her put things together over the fire. “It’s a long story, Talibah... And you well deserve its telling... But for now... Just know... Yes, I’m the Head of the Bardic Council... And someone ‘holds’ my place for me... And I must resolve that. I must return.”

With that the Runners bounced back into the cave with their arms full of wood that they happily placed a little ways from the fire itself where Kevyn took some pieces to add as Talibah continued to work on and stir the mush. Not sure what to do with themselves; the Runners sat about the fire seeming to look from Kevyn to Taliesin waiting for some sign of what they were supposed to do next.

“Relax youngsters.” Taliesin finally said, “There’s not much else to do but eat breakfast and then proceed on our way today. Talibah and I already packed our bags full before you even got here, so we’re ready. We are Bards, after all.” The Runners sighed happily, chatting amongst themselves.

As the mush got ready, Talibah served out some tea mixed into a pot of water that had finally gotten hot enough. Everyone had their own mugs, bowls and utensils, so there had been no dishes to bring out. As it had been almost three months of just she and Taliesin in that place, having four others with them felt a little disconcerting and a little cramped, though in reality, there was enough room. It wasn’t that she hadn’t done all this before on her initial journey there, but she had gotten rather used to her privacy and legroom. Still, it was nice to be meeting others beyond the small poor villages she had seen only a couple times when Taliesin had gone out to help their Wise Women with some healing work, and sometimes even bringing some food. The others all told her their names again, yet with the onslaught of all the new experiences, she wasn’t certain if those names would truly stick with her for a day or two. But she liked the faces she was being introduced to well enough, especially the Runner with dark hair and eyes who seemed to keep sneaking quick glances at her. He was older than the other two; maybe her age, she judged, and he had a lovely warm speaking voice with a most delightful laugh. He was also decidedly less silly than the other two, being rather composed and Talibah felt sure he had a nice singing voice, finding herself anticipating when she might be hearing it.

Taliesin rather insisted that they take their time that morning to eat and talk, allowing them all to get to know each other just a little before setting off. “There is no urgency, friends. There are villages and caves enough along the way, though I shall prefer no-one give out who I am other than a Wandering Bard and I shall forgive the address of ‘Father’, but try to remember to say ‘Brother’, or ‘Brother Gwion’. That would be good. In other words, if they suspect me as a Council Member it’s okay, but try not to. And Talibah... I’m also Brother Gwion to you, too... no Taliesin or otherwise... alright?”

“Yes... Brother.” She smiled.

“Very good...I’ll prefer this until we actually are in view of Wynseren Itself... I just don’t wish to excite interest or idle gossip...Or an intrusion on our privacy... I want to take our time. And I shall let Kevyn handle ritual and healing requests and only ‘assist’ him... I shall avoid singing under all conditions... Actually, I shall be asking both Talibah and Brandon to do some assistance to Kevyn. And the Runners, as always, will be doing most of the ‘entertainment’... I must think a bit as far as what Talibah might do in those circumstances. I’m going to do my best to stay in the background, children. And we shall be sticking to villages as much as possible. A town perhaps, but ‘no’ Greathouses... No towns if I can help it, either. Besides, the small farming villages could do with some new faces and I truly wish us to be at ease and take some time... No-one at Wynseren is going to mind... If a few days turn into a couple weeks or more. It will give both Talibah and myself some real space to adjust... Though Talibah has ridden with Bardic folk before, she’s not really been ‘part of’ the Company. This shall be her first lessons in that.”

Before too long they were getting their horses from out of the cave, putting their rolled up baggage on them along with their bows, swords and small lap harps. A real sense of sadness descended over Talibah as she realized that they were truly making ready to leave for good. Somehow she also knew in her heart that once they were actually out of sight, the cave itself would likely be gone and all she would have would be the memories. It also began to dawn on her that Taliesin would no longer be the constant companion she had gotten used to, that his attention would now be divided and she needed to cherish the time they had had together.

As they brought their horses full out into the sunshine and were preparing to mount, Talibah looked a long time at the cave’s entrance. It looked so pretty with dots of green beginning to surface about it and the roll of hills that finally broke into a mountain or two behind it. Patches of snow still clung in the shadows, but Spring was making Herself known now and Talibah noted the pleasant chirping and song of birds in the breezes. A line of trees stood near the cave that led into some woods, though an obvious path went through it where Taliesin and Talibah had often rode. As she looked about herself she heard a voice next to her. “Were you here long?” Asked the dark-haired Runner, Brandon.

“A good while... near three moons.” She said turning to his tall, supple form as they stood next their horses a moment.

“How lucky... to train with ‘him’.

“Yes...” She said, looking at the young man fully, “Very.”

“Alright, children.” Spoke Taliesin now atop his horse. “I expect we ought be off now... It would be good to get past some of these initial woods. I think we can be certain of a good meal and bed tonight if we can get ourselves going now.” With that Talibah and Brandon mounted and with some resistance Talibah finally turned her horse as they rode away.