

# *Transcendence*

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*Turn and face this world.  
I mean, truly, dear one.  
Turn your face upon this world.  
Let them see the truth of you.  
Let them see what they, too, may become.  
Do not diminish yourself any longer  
By hiding your Light.  
Do not reduce yourself any longer  
By hiding in ordinariness.  
Do not lower yourself anymore  
To facilitate identification.  
This part of your walk you have completed.  
Identification is not necessary now.  
Most will see what they want to see,  
And they will see you as they are.  
But there are those who will see the truth of you.  
Let these souls look upon your face,  
Your mighty face.  
Let them know the glory and power of your Light.*

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## *Our Imagination*

Children have such wonderful imaginations – vibrant, colourful, unique, without limits, and they even tend not to distinguish between what is supposedly imagined and what is supposedly real. In that sense, they exist far closer to the truth than adults. Because, as we grow up we're taught to be disparaging of the imagination. “You just imagined it. It didn't really happen” is a common theme in this human reality now . . . tragically. If we're told we “imagined it”, the connotation is that we made it up, like a lie or a fabrication, or even as a product of mental illness.

I beg to differ. In fact, I know this for the misconception it is. What we imagine is real, very real, as it happens. It's just real on another plane of existence, in another dimension. What if I was to tell you to make something real on the physical plane, you must first of all imagine it? Or, rather, you must first of all make it real on the higher plane. Because this *is* a fundamental truth humans have completely forgotten. Any artist will tell you to bring art to life, to give it physical form and expression, you first of all have to conceptualise and visualise it in your imagination. So, too, is it with the theatre of our lives, which are, after all, like stories in stage plays, our own unique plays. You don't realise how much of your life, with its many and varied experiences and interrelationships, was imagined first, before you came here, but often, too, without you necessarily realising it, whilst you're here.

The imagination is a vital part of human consciousness, as vital to consciousness as breath is to life. Collectively, human consciousness has become uni-dimensional now because humans exist only in the conscious awareness – the most shallow layer of consciousness. But human consciousness is *not* uni-dimensional. It is, in truth, multi-dimensional, like a beautifully-cut jewel with many facets, as I've said many times. The imagination, however, although higher-dimensional in and of itself, provides a unique and vital function for us because it is the convergence of all the dimensions of our consciousness. It is in the imagination and it is through the imagination that we are able to access the higher dimensional parts of our consciousness. It is like a bridge that links all

the dimensions of us. It is, therefore, a crucial and vital tool, or mechanism, of connection, which automatically makes us vulnerable. Damage the imagination and you damage an individual's ability to connect all the layers and dimensions of consciousness, or, to be connected to all the facets of consciousness. 'Tis very much like causing a deliberate break in an electrical circuit. With such a break, an electrical socket simply will not work.

And there are just so many mechanisms in this human reality now that have been deliberately designed to do exactly that – damage and stunt the imagination.

The over-saturation and bombardment of advertising images alone is doing damage, causing our imaginations to become like overflowing garbage bins, full to the brim with white noise, useless images, but images that control and detrimentally influence both the imagination and the subconscious. When we use the imagination like a garbage bin, we force the subconscious to act to keep both itself and the imagination clean, and it does so by throwing out the useless images and information we accrue throughout the day in our sleep, through our sleeping dreams. This is a great pity because our dreams are designed for something else entirely, and so we deprive ourselves of the unique guidance and communication our sleeping dreams could potentially afford us. Added to the sheer bombardment and over-saturation of advertising images is the constant streaming of what we see on television, the images of computer games, the images and information on social media, and movies that are jammed full of special effects specifically designed to stimulate our physical senses, and the damage is compounded.

The antidote is, however, actually quite simple, and the good news is that both the subconscious and the imagination are remarkably and powerfully resilient. They will recover. Turn the television off. Disconnect from social media. Instead of going to the movies, take the time to read a well-written book or to just sit and listen to music. Or, better still, spend time in your own imagination. Daydream. Fantasise. Give your imagination permission to run wild. Lose control of it. Let it overwhelm you. And lose your guilt over the supposed waste of time. I dare you!

Imagining consciously, or dreaming, or fantasising, takes courage. As I wrote a long time ago, often our dreams and fantasies become dangerous reminders of a disappointing reality. This is a dynamic I have had to face and confront as part of the Process I went

through to rework my perception of my own imagination, and my interaction with it, giving it permission to do what it does best, to be. And the Process was neither easy nor quick. On the contrary, it was painful and arduous because human reality has become like the dry, arid wasteland of the Fisher King's kingdom in the Grail Legends, mine included. And the damage we've done and continue to do to the imagination coupled with our separation from it is predominantly responsible for this very sad state of affairs.

With this book, I am opening up my imagination to you, the reader, allowing you to step into it and even to walk through it. Also, I am opening up to you the Work I have done to connect with the dynamics – the whys and wherefores – of how I fell into the abyss of Separation in the first place. Although published as a collection, these stories were written at different times, over a long period, forming a vital part of my own transcendent Process. In that sense, with the stories I have included in my other books, they have been, for me, like rungs on a ladder, taking me higher but deeper into myself.

So, welcome to what I refer to as my 'inner rich world'. This is the core, or the essence, of who I am. I can tell you there is profound, powerful, wonderful transcendent information to be found not just in my imagination but also in yours. May you enjoy the journey this book takes you on as you traverse the landscape of my 'inner rich world', and may it inspire you to step into and explore the hidden valleys and plains and crevices and landscapes of your own 'inner rich world'.

*Jennifer*

*Something Happened  
in Ancient Egypt*

*Something evil happened in Ancient Egypt. Something evil happened to you there, in lives you lived there aeons ago – something that is both source and symptom of what is not right within you today, here in this life you are living now. Do you know what it is that happened to you there?*

*Something evil? Would you describe them as acts of evil?*

*Not the acts, no. There was no evil or malicious intent in the acts themselves. But whenever any soul acts out of fear, there is a certain evil involved, and the consequence, for you, is as though they were acts of evil. The consequence has been dire for you, dear one.*

*Dire? Yes, I guess they have been dire. But has it not served a very valuable purpose in this life, to carry such a wound within me?*

*Yes, dear one, it has indeed. How wonderful it is for us to hear you say so. But we have a question for you now, and we want you to think very carefully about the answer you give us, for whatever you answer – yea or nay – will set the course and direction of your life from the moment you answer us.*

*Ask me your question, then.*

*Will you surrender the very great wound within you, and will you allow the Divine Process to heal you, to take the wound away?*

*That is the only way I will ever know my Self, is it not?*

*Indeed, it is.*

*And it is the only way I will ever truly see my Self in my fullest glory, fully revealed?*

*Indeed, it is.*

*Then my answer is yes, I will allow the Process to take away the very great wound within me.*

*Even if it causes you great pain?*

*Even so. I cannot keep existing in this darkness. It is my version of hell, not knowing who I am. Whatever I must create to become whole again, let it be so. I trust the Process and I surrender to its flow. I will allow myself to be healed. I will surrender the wound within me. I will allow my heart to be restored and to beat its own rhythm once again.*

*Very well, then, dearest one. So be it. Let the Process begin. We will guide you through it.*

## *Something Happened in Ancient Egypt*

*She stood still, frozen like a statue, made of flesh rather than stone. She could not take her eyes from the massive structure that loomed over them all, dwarfing the temple underneath it. When the sun was at its zenith in its journey across the sky, one could not look upon this magnificent, mighty structure. The sun's light, reflected off the white limestone of its outer casing, was too bright, and tended to burn the eye. 'Twas rather like looking directly at the sun itself. But under the light of the moon, one could gaze at the structure for as long as one desired. She thought the structure beautiful when seen under the light of the moon. She thought it looked, under the moon's light, like the ethereal, sacred object everyone knew it to be. To her, the two – the moon's light and the sacred structure – were a perfect compliment to each other, as if the one had really been designed to be seen under the light of the other. The moon's light poured over it, the mighty structure that loomed over her in the darkness of night, illuminating it so that it shone like a polished pearl against the black velvet of night.*

*She swallowed nervously in the darkness, and her eyes wavered for a moment so that she looked away. Always, while she had admired it, she had felt no real connection to it despite the work she was doing and had done, now, for a full turn of the seasons. She always admired it the way one admires a beautiful painting hanging on a wall in a gallery. You simply stood and drank in the sight of the painting's beauty, but beyond that, there was no connection to it. You would never reach out and touch it. You drank your fill and then moved on to look at the next painting hanging on the wall beside it. So it was with this magnificent structure, except that she was able to admire it, under the light of the sun or the moon, whenever she wished to because she lived underneath it and had done so for a full year.*

*But tomorrow, her relationship with the mighty structure would change. She would no longer admire it from a very small distance. Tomorrow was the culmination of everything they had worked towards for the last year, she and her mentor. Tomorrow was her initiation. Tomorrow, she would touch it, the mighty, sacred structure. She would forge a connection with it. She would step inside it, lie in its sacred heart, and she would open herself to its power.*

*Suddenly, she felt afraid of it, the mighty structure. Suddenly, it loomed over her*

threateningly. He kept telling her she was ready, and she knew she should believe him, for did he not know best? He was her mentor, after all, the only one who could rightly judge whether she was truly ready or not. But as her time had drawn inexorably closer, one niggling worry had gnawed at her deep, deep within. She had tried to push it down and push it away because it generated dangerous doubts within her. She had worked hard to suppress it, to repress it, to pretend to herself she was not thinking it, feeling it, sensing it. But to no avail because the niggling worry had not just lingered and persisted, it had gathered momentum and gained power over her. And now, gazing upon the structure in the moon's light, she could not deny or ignore it any longer, and so she gave it full reign.

*She was not sure this was what she wanted.*

*And, now that she was acknowledging the thought, allowing it to be, and allowing herself to contemplate it, a subtly different realisation was beginning to crystallise within her, becoming a solid certainty. She was not sure this was the right step for her. In fact, she suspected the opposite. This was not right for her. This was not her destiny.*

*Why oh why had she not voiced this concern to him before now? Why had she not told him? She breathed deeply and exhaled the air in her lungs on a long, soft sigh. The answer to that question came effortlessly and easily without any assistance from her conscious mind. She did not want to disappoint him. Not even for a fraction of a moment could she entertain the thought of disappointing him. She wanted him to be pleased with her. She wanted him to be proud of her. She wanted him to think well of her. But, more importantly, she wanted to be with him. If she'd told him of her concerns, who knows what the consequences would have been. But then, if she'd told him of her concerns, would he even have heard her?*

*For so long, she had held her dreams close. Every night she fell asleep picturing, in her mind's eye, the moment she would re-emerge, victorious, from her initiation, and there he would be, waiting to embrace her. He would wait for her, of course. And it would be the first time he had ever touched her. All mentors waited at the entrance to greet their charges after initiation so they could celebrate together, because successful initiation in Meri-amu – their name for the mighty structure – was always a joint effort, and it was a time-honoured tradition to celebrate together. She could not fail him by abandoning her initiation now. She could not shame him in such a way. She simply could not.*

*Again, she swallowed nervously as realisation settled like a heavy stone in her gut. These were,*

she knew, not good reasons to enter into the sort of initiation demanded of a priest or priestess by Meri-amu. No, not good reasons at all. And to enter into such an initiation for the wrong reasons could potentially be a dangerous undertaking. So dangerous could it be, in fact, that the possibility of not re-emerging at all had to be acknowledged and considered.

She lowered her eyes and swallowed nervously once again, shifting her weight on her feet in agitation. How had she allowed herself to get here, to this place of danger?

Involuntarily, an image of that first day formed in her mind's eye, as if her deeper consciousness had been awaiting the question and now quickly and eagerly responded. That first day – the day she'd first seen him – she'd been in a class in the temple she loved. She'd always known, even before she came to the temple of Anu, that she belonged there. Even as an acolyte, in training, she'd known Anu was where she wanted to be. That day, in the class at Anu, he had come to speak to them all, as Meri-amu's priests and priestesses often did. Meri-amu's priests and priestesses travelled the length and breadth of the land, visiting every temple in every corner of the land, looking for those with the ability to undertake Meri-amu's unique and powerful initiation.

As he explained to them all that day, the unique skills and talents necessary for undertaking Meri-amu's initiation did not make those priests and priestesses any better than anyone else. They were just uniquely gifted. 'Twas no different, he told them, from comparing someone who could sing with another who could not sing. The individual who could sing was not better than the one who could not sing, he was just uniquely gifted. And thus gifted as they were, for those individuals capable of undertaking Meri-amu's initiation, it was their sacred duty to explore their talent, to connect with it, to open it up, deepen and expand it, and, eventually, gift it back. You see, he told them, as priests and priestesses, these people had something unique to gift the land and its people.

He was mesmerising as he spoke. Well, she smiled to herself as she remembered, he was seductive really, and so she had watched him and listened in absorbed fascination. But not even for a moment had she considered the possibility she might be one with the unique skills and talents he was talking about. He, on the other hand, had known she was one almost in the same instant he laid eyes on her. And so, when he pointed her out at the end of his speech, she'd not been at all prepared for the onslaught.

"You," he'd said, pointing his finger directly at her, "are one who possesses the skills and talents necessary for undertaking this special, powerful initiation. You have been specially honoured by the gods. Meri-amu awaits you."

Rendered momentarily speechless with the shock of being pointed out so definitely, she had not at first responded. In fact, it had taken her a prolonged moment to realise he was actually pointing right at her. When she did realise, she'd wondered, briefly, how he was able to determine she was one simply by looking at her. And then she thought, in almost the same instant, that he must be wrong about her. So she defended herself from his determined attack with humour. She'd raised her eyebrows at him and said sweetly, "Oh but I could not possibly be an initiate of Meri-amu's. I'm claustrophobic."

The rest of the class had laughed, as was her intention, but he had not laughed.

"Claustrophobia is just a fear like any other," he'd responded. "And is not the purpose of any initiation to be cleansed of one's fears?"

She'd sobered, not because he was absolutely right and so she'd been unable to come up with even a semblance of a counter argument, but because she could see he was not going to back down or give in. His mind was set on her, and he would not be dissuaded. Knowing him now as she did, she knew it was his nature, and she knew she was doomed that day. When he set his mind to something he was implacably determined and in possession of a single-minded focus that easily and powerfully swept all obstacles out of its way. He had convinced her tutor of the rightness of this new change in direction for her, and together they, he and her tutor, had argued with her, cajoled her, coerced her. For hours and hours they'd spoken to her, convinced her to leave Anu, the temple she loved, and to accompany him back to Meri-amu's temple. She was helpless against the force of their joint arguments and the pressure they exerted on her, and so she had left Anu with him that same day.

If only she had been able to foresee how her feelings for him would develop, maybe she would have been stronger that day, more able to resist the pressure they applied. It was highly unusual for a female initiate in training to have a male mentor. The time they spent together and the intimacy of the relationship was fraught with dangers and temptations that were well recognised and acknowledged by the temple. But somehow, he had been granted permission to mentor her. He was possessed of such a single-minded focus that the temple's hierarchy believed him impervious to the temptations involved.

She wondered if the council had considered their relationship from her perspective because it was not so for her. She had succumbed, completely, to the pitfalls of the male-female mentor-trainee relationship. When first she'd seen him that day in class, she had thought him beautiful even then.

*He was tall with beautiful hands, long fingers, hair as black as a raven's wing and clear, blue eyes. At first, she had felt as if those eyes could see right into her, and she had struggled to maintain eye contact with him. She had felt naked before him and pulled her eyes from his as a means of covering herself, metaphorically, that is. But he seemed not to see her flaws and weaknesses and shadows. Instead, he had encouraged her and complimented her, and he had been so pleased with their progress that she had grown in confidence, both in terms of what she was learning and in his company. And, gradually, she lost her fear of him.*

*She wasn't sure at what point the niggling worry had started to take hold. But when it had, so, too, had the fear of not seeing him again. Even after only a handful of weeks in training, she had known she would not be able to bear the thought of not seeing him every day. So when the niggling worry had begun to gnaw at her, she had acted instinctively to suppress it, and to deny its existence within her.*

*And so, now, here she was in this place of danger. She looked up at Meri-amu again. There was no choice now. She had come too far. She had worked too hard. She would have to go through with it. She just hoped Meri-amu would understand and be kind to her . . . .*

*A breath of movement behind her alerted her to a presence, and so she turned. She smiled at the sight of him, her mentor, thinking he had come to give her final words of encouragement.*

*"Anlille," he said her name softly. "I have come to say goodbye."*

*Her smile disappeared. "Goodbye?" she repeated stupidly.*

*"You do not need me anymore. You are ready. You must stand on your own now. And I wish to continue with my own work. I have been invited to attend the temple in the south, at Abydos. We leave at dawn tomorrow, so I will not see you before I go."*

*"You are leaving before my initiation?"*

*"You no longer need me," he said again. "Tomorrow, you begin the next stage of your work as a priestess, and you must do so without me. Our work together is finished. I cannot come with you tomorrow, and you do not need me to hold your hand. As I said, I must move on with my own work now."*

*She nodded mutely, trying to control the painful lump in her throat and failing miserably. It burned. She didn't trust herself to speak, and her legs felt as if they'd suddenly turned to liquid. She began to doubt their ability to support her. Oh that she should disgrace herself so in front of him, and the memory of it would be his last of her . . . unthinkable.*

He stepped towards her as if he would embrace her, as if he would give her a chaste, impersonal kiss on the cheek to say goodbye. Involuntarily, she stepped back and raised her hands defensively.

"Well, then," she said quickly, breathlessly, "goodbye, Daimon." She turned away from him and started to walk away. "And thank you . . . for everything," she said over her shoulder.

He called her name but she barely registered it. She walked quickly on shaky legs until she reached the sanctuary of her own room. Shutting the door behind her, she sank to the floor, leaning her shoulder against the door for support as she forced herself to breathe . . . in, out, in, out. She closed her eyes, fighting nausea, trying to steady her wildly beating heart. And involuntary thoughts raced through her mind like shooting stars, each generating its own fresh wave of nausea. Abydos? The priests of Abydos were renowned for being reclusive. They did not interact with the priests and priestesses of the other temples. She would never see him again.

And what of her dream? Could he not even wait the single day necessary for being there when she emerged from her initiation? What of the tradition that mentor and initiate celebrate their success together? Did that mean nothing to him? He wished to move on with his own work? Then what was it he'd been doing with her for the last year? Was she nothing to him but a pet project – someone for whom he could take credit for moulding and shaping into . . . what? And now that project was complete, was he just to move on to the next, the last forgotten, put behind him, never to look back?

She knew he was possessed of a single-minded focus that swept all and any obstacles out of its way. She'd just never expected to become one of those obstacles herself. Because that is what he'd just done – swept her out of the way as if she was of little note. Did he feel nothing for her, nothing at all, even if just as a friend? All her dreams were now as dust. She felt utterly foolish. Was this Meri-amu's way of warning her not to enter into her initiation for the wrong reasons? If so, she'd got the message, loud and clear.

She leaned her head against the door and sagged against it, closing her eyes. Her head felt as if it was in a vice, and there was a burning pain in the centre of her gut. But the pain that was truly unbearable was in her heart. Weakly, she brought a hand up to her chest as if to ease the pain there, but it was a futile gesture. She could feel her heart. You weren't supposed to feel your heart as it beat in your chest. But her heart felt as if it had been sliced open with a sharp knife or a sword. It burned in her chest, and it hurt to breathe.

She lost track of time as she sat sagged against the door. But she must have sat for hours

because when she eventually roused herself she tried to stand but found her legs would not support her. They simply refused to work. So she crawled across the floor, and then dragged herself onto her bed. She curled into herself and thought she lay there awake, but strange visions assailed her, images of strange beings reaching out clawed hands towards her, tearing at her chest, and strange colours spiralled in and out of her vision. Shivering uncontrollably, she could only lie helplessly as the images wrapped themselves around her . . . .

~

She awoke slowly from a deep sleep, becoming aware as she did so that she was lying on her back, and a cold cloth had been placed over her brow. Slowly, she opened her eyes. Light was all around her, filling the room where she lay, and it hurt her eyes. So she dropped them closed again.

"Oh good," a voice said beside her, "you're awake. Here, Anlille, drink some of this."

She felt something pressed against her lips and then cold liquid spilled onto her tongue. She swallowed the liquid and it felt good, so she swallowed some more, and then some more. The liquid was soothing and she realised her tongue felt hot and swollen.

"Where am I?" she whispered with difficulty.

"You are safe, sweetheart. No one can harm you here."

The voice was gentle, as soothing as the cold liquid, and she felt comforted.

"You have been ill, sweetheart," the voice continued gently. "You have lain ill with fever for many, many days. We thought we might lose you, but you have put up a gallant fight."

Anlille turned towards the voice and recognised Dala, one of the healers. And then she looked around her, struggling to remember where she was. This was not her room at Anu, and it seemed unfamiliar.

"Is this my room?" she asked the healer.

"Yes, Anlille. This is your room at the temple of Meri-amu. Do you not remember it?"

"Meri-amu," she repeated softly. Meri-amu. Yes, Meri-amu had warned her about something, something important. And then she remembered. "Many days?" she asked the healer. "I am supposed to complete my initiation . . ."

Dala gently but firmly pushed her back down onto the soft mattress of her bed. "You must rest, Anlille. Just relax, sweetheart. You missed your initiation. That is how we knew you were unwell. We came looking for you when you did not turn up. There is no harm done. We will reschedule it when you are well again."

Anlille shook her head on the pillow. "No. She warned me. I must not. It's not right. I must not. It is not my destiny. I would have done it for the wrong reasons. She knew that."

Dala frowned heavily and took one of Anlille's hands in her own. "You will feel differently when you are recovered . . ."

"No," Anlille said vehemently. "I will not. And I will not change my mind."

~

In the silence that shrouded them she sat as still as a statue, made of flesh rather than stone. It was easy to be so still. It was easy to show no expression on her face whatsoever because she felt nothing. Or rather, the emptiness within her was utterly devoid of feeling. The emptiness was like a vacuum, sucking everything into itself.

She should have been nervous. Most people in her position would have been. She had been summoned by Amenophis, the High Priest of Meri-amu's temple. It was a rare thing indeed to be summoned by the High Priest. And now that she was here, he said nothing as he scrutinised her with his all-seeing, all-knowing eyes. But she did not squirm with discomfort as others would have, nor did she feel even slightly nervous. The emptiness persisted even under his direct gaze. The emptiness had been her constant companion since awakening from her illness. When she had awoken or returned to consciousness, she was only partially alive, or so it seemed to her. But she did not mind. It was a blessed relief not to feel.

Amenophis leaned forward and rested his clasped hands on the table in front of him. "I am told you will not complete your initiation, child, and after all the work you have done. You are gifted at this work, Anlille. You have a natural affinity for it. Are you to throw this away?"

She maintained eye contact with him for a moment, and then shook her head. "No. I have learned much in my time here, and I will take what I have learned back with me to Anu. I will use it to continue my work there. Nothing will be thrown away, and nothing will be wasted. That is what I wish for, to return to Anu and to continue my work."

Again, she should have squirmed under his steady gaze, but she did not. Instead, she calmly returned his gaze.

After a long moment of silence, he nodded as if satisfied. "Very well, child. I will arrange for you to return to Anu. We will miss you. I hope you will remember us fondly."

Those last words stirred some feeling in her. Mildly surprised, she felt the prickle of tears. "I

will," she whispered. "And thank you."

*She rose from her chair and turned towards the door, but he stopped her.*

*"Anlille," he said and then hesitated. In truth, he was shocked by her appearance. She was skeletally thin, and her eyes were sunken and hollow, dangerously lifeless and, perhaps more concerning, lightless. But he was even more concerned by what he sensed, or rather, by what he did not sense within her. Something had been lost, like a flame that had gone out. He hoped, for her sake, returning to Anu would heal her of the wound he could feel within her.*

*"Daimon did not leave at the dawn of your scheduled initiation with my approval," he said. "I tried to talk him out of it. I tried to persuade him to stay one more day, for you. But he would not be persuaded. He would say only that you were ready and had no more need of him."*

*She turned to look at him. "That is what he told me, too," she said quietly.*

*Amenophis frowned in concern at the sorrow in her eyes and in her voice. "He cares about you, Anlille. You must know that."*

*She smiled at him, but the smile did not touch her eyes or alter them in any way. "No, he does not," she said softly. "He does not."*

~

*Anlille closed her eyes and raised her face to the sun, paying silent homage to its warmth and light. Since returning to the temple of Anu, she had worked hard, so these respites on the stone bench in the apple orchard were her one indulgence, her one rest far away from her work. She opened her eyes and looked at the apples on the trees. They were nearly ready to be picked. It was at this same time the previous year she had returned to Anu. Then, as now, the apples were almost ready to be picked. How quickly the year had gone. That was, no doubt, entirely due to the fact that she had loved her work this last year, and she had loved being back at Anu, the temple she loved. A smile lit her eyes and she closed them again as she again raised her face to the sun. She was content in this place. There was something about it. She belonged here.*

*"Do you mind if I join you?" a voice asked beside her.*

*She opened her eyes and saw Uncas standing beside her, so close his shadow was cast over her. Involuntarily, she shifted to make room for him. He was one of the temple's High Priests. You did not say no to Uncas. "Of course not," she said.*

*He made himself comfortable on the bench beside her. "Ah," he commented, looking at the apples hanging on the trees, "so it is that time again, eh? It comes around so quickly, does it not?"*

*And a bumper crop we'll be having ourselves this year by the look of it, will we not?"*

*She smiled. "We will indeed."*

*A comfortable silence descended on them as they sat soaking up the warmth of the sun. And then she broke it by asking him, "Have you come to soak up the sun, too, then?"*

*"No, my dear, I have not. I have come to speak to you. I waited for you to come here because I knew you'd be relaxed here, more open to suggestion, one might say. And I knew you'd come because I have observed that you do so most days, if not all of them."*

*"Oh," she said involuntarily, feeling slightly apprehensive and hoping she had done nothing wrong. She thought quickly back over the last weeks and could find nothing in her work or her actions or behaviour to justify a visit from Uncas or to bring her to his attention.*

*"I have been looking at your work, Anlille. I have been reading your writing, and I find it to be quite exceptional. I would very much like it if you would come and work with me, and so I have come to speak to you in an attempt to persuade you to do so. What say you on the matter? Would you like to work with me?"*

*She turned towards him with eyebrows severely raised, looking shocked and not bothering to hide it. "Like?" she repeated. "It would be my very great honour to work with you. In fact, I can think of nothing I would like more."*

*"Good. Well," he slapped his knees with his open palms in satisfaction, "that's settled then. I am pleased. Let us not waste any time. Shall we begin tomorrow?"*

*She grinned at him. "Tomorrow would be great."*

~

*"Will you be attending this month's lecture?"*

*Anlille looked up from her work in surprise, frowning in puzzlement, wondering why he would ask her that particular question. In all the months they'd been working together, a year's worth, she'd not missed a single monthly lecture. It was a routine set in the early months of them working together. They both attended so that they could discuss the lecture at length in the days following it. They both derived great enjoyment from their lengthy discussions following the lectures.*

*"Of course," she said, still sounding puzzled. "Why would I not?"*

*"Because it is your old mentor, Daimon, who is giving this month's lecture. That is why."*

*She dropped the scroll she'd been reading as the blood in her body suddenly decided to obey gravity and rushed from her head and face. "Oh," she said as she sat back in her chair.*

Uncas sat in the chair opposite hers. "Shall I ask the question again? Will you be attending this month's lecture?"

She bit her bottom lip and sighed dramatically. She and Uncas had worked so closely together for so long – actually, for as long as she and Daimon had worked together – that she didn't bother to hide her reaction. There would have been no point. Uncas knew her too well. "No," she said simply in answer to his question.

"Ah, it is as I suspected then," Uncas said. He observed her with narrowed, considering eyes for a moment longer, and then he asked her, "You are aware, are you not, my dear, that your heart does not beat as it should? In fact, I strongly suspect that only about half of it beats at all."

She smiled wryly. He had such a way with words. "Yes," she told him, "I am aware. I do not know how to heal it, but I do not want to change any part of my life, so I've always figured I do not really need to heal it."

Uncas considered that. "I see," he said. "And am I right in assuming Daimon was the source of the wound in your heart?"

"Yes, you are right. When are you ever wrong?"

Uncas ignored the question. "You have questions that need answering, dear one," he said seriously. "And I think Daimon is the only one who can answer them for you."

She responded to the seriousness of his tone. "I do not ever want to see him again," she told him honestly.

"I know, Anlille, and I cannot blame you for that. But you are not a coward, my dear. 'Tis one of the things I like best about you. You do not shy away from confrontation with your fear. You are, in fact, a master when it comes to dissolving your fear. Do not run from this opportunity. You will regret it, I think."

~

Daimon had his back to her when she walked into the room – the room he was staying in for the duration of his stay at the temple. He was looking out the window. She was relieved. It gave her time to compose herself while she looked at him for the first time in over two years. It gave her time to react without him seeing that reaction, and it gave her time to assess and come to terms with how she felt about him now.

Obviously hearing her footsteps, he turned.

"Hello, Anlille," he said simply.

*"Daimon," she said by way of a reply.*

*He indicated one of the seats in the room with his hand. "Won't you sit?"*

*She sat and so did he, opposite her.*

*"I am told you did not go through with your initiation in Meri-amu," he said. "I am hoping I have been misinformed."*

*"You were not misinformed."*

*He did not respond and so they sat in an uncomfortable silence. But she had not come to sit in silence. She had come because Uncas was right. She had questions that needed answers, and only Daimon could give her those answers. And she had to know it all, no matter how painful it turned out to be.*

*"Are you disappointed?" she asked him.*

*He shook his head. "No. If you did not go through with it, there would have been good reasons. I trust you. When it comes to your work I've always recognised that you knew what you were doing. You always did love it here, in Anu, and the work you are doing with Uncas is . . . truly exceptional."*

*She nodded her acknowledgement of the compliment and then took a deep, fortifying breath.*

*"Why did you leave when you did? And if you tell me you left because I no longer had need of you, I will stand up and walk out. I want to know the truth. I need to know the truth."*

*He looked at her for a moment and then stood and went to resume his position at the window, with his back to her. Silence hung between them and she began to wonder if he would answer her at all. But then he turned towards her again, although he did not sit down.*

*"I wronged you, Anlille, and for that I am deeply sorry. A mentor is supposed to care for and look out for his charge. Instead, I caused you great hurt, and I am sorry for that."*

*She waited for more, and when no more was forthcoming, she said, "That does not answer my question."*

*This time, he did come and sit opposite her again. She frowned slightly because she'd never seen him so agitated, so not in control. Even a blind fool could have sensed he was finding this difficult.*

*"You know the male-female mentor-trainee relationship is not encouraged in the temple, and for good reason. But I arrogantly thought myself better than to succumb to such trivial temptations, and the council thought so, too, because they approved it in our case. But we were not even half*

*way through the training when I began to know I was in trouble. I was not so impervious after all. I was, in fact, all too human."*

*He paused, possibly to gauge her reaction she thought, but there was none. She sat still and silent in her chair with her eyes on him, unblinking and unwavering. In the pause, though, she couldn't help but say, "Being human is not necessarily a weakness."*

*"Perhaps not," he replied. "But for a long time, I thought otherwise. So when I felt an attraction to you," he continued, "something I'd never felt before, how could I not think of it as a weakness in me? And then I knew I loved you. It has taken much introspection these last years to realise that love was not a weakness but a strength. At the time, I am sorry to say, I saw it as a weakness, a flaw."*

*This time, there was a reaction in her. She frowned.*

*He continued, "But I was protected by the fact of anything happening between us being strictly and absolutely forbidden. It would have been a violation of a most profound nature if I had allowed it, punishable by expulsion from the priesthood, for me, possibly for both of us. And I could not allow that. So I struggled with and fought my attraction successfully. I mastered it, controlled it. But I did not trust myself once the barrier of forbiddenness was lifted, as it would have been as soon as you completed your initiation. Then, we would no longer have been mentor-trainee, and we would have been free to love each other."*

*"Yes," she said, "then we would have been equals."*

*He didn't respond to her statement.*

*"You lost control," she said. "You lost control of yourself, and you wanted it back again."*

*"That's . . ." He began to deny her accusation but thought better of it, ". . . one way of looking at it," he finished.*

*"I always knew about you that you were in possession of a single-minded focus that swept away all obstacles as with the sweep of a hand. The way you felt about me was one such obstacle. I stood in the way of your very great work as a priest so you swept me aside as if I did not matter at all."*

*"Yes," he said simply. "I wish I could deny it, but I cannot. You are right."*

*"You hurt me, not just because you left when you did, but because you stayed away. You never followed up or tried to contact me to see how I was or even if I had gone through with the initiation. You so easily sacrificed me on the altar of your precious control. When did you find out I never completed Meri-amu's initiation?"*

He looked ashamed as he answered her. "Two days ago."

She stood then. "I loved you, too, you know, Daimon. I loved you more than life itself.

Perhaps that was the problem for me. I loved you more than I loved myself. But loving you was the worst thing I ever did. I have paid a very great price for that love, and now I am incapable of loving anyone else. Something within me – that vital part of me that should love – has shut down, and I do not know how to make it work again. I lost something. Maybe you still have it. I do not know. But I wish I never laid eyes on you," she said flatly, her voice devoid of emotion. "I wish I had found the strength within myself to resist you that day. I wish I had never gone with you."

As she walked away from him, she knew she wasn't trying to hurt him. She was just telling him the truth.

~

She shifted in the bed and felt more comfortable for doing so. She was able, then, to concentrate on her breath – in, out, in, out. She was so close to death she could almost reach out and embrace it. She was not afraid of death. She understood it, and so she knew this was not the end of her journey. It was merely the end of this part of it. But with endings, there are also always new beginnings. Death was merely one such transition.

She had no regrets. She had worked hard, devoting her very long life to the temple she loved so much: Anu. She was one of the temple's High Priestesses, such was her devotion to the temple, and so even in death she was surrounded by people. They would not allow her to make this transition alone. She understood, but she would have liked to have been alone for these final moments of her long life. No matter. They did not demand anything of her so she was free to allow her thoughts to wander at will. And, of course, what else does one do when one is confronted by the end of a very great life if not contemplate it in its entirety?

Her work with Uncas caused her to rise to great heights in Anu, and in rising to such heights, she had spent a lifetime working with other people. How she had loved that work. She would be forever grateful to Uncas for singling her out in such a manner. It was a very great honour he did her, and she had repaid him in kind because their work had given him as much pleasure as it had her. Uncas had passed over many, many years before, but his legacy had endured. She hoped hers would endure even half as much as had his.

And with the passing of Uncas, there was no one else who knew her secret. So, she alone had carried it, knowing the truth, and never once revealing it, not to a single other soul. The wound in

*her heart had never healed, and as a consequence, she could not love. Over the years, she had come to realise that where she thought a part of her heart had died, it had not. Instead, the wound she carried there was open, suppurating, and she had simply protected it by encasing it in protective armour. That way, no one could touch it. Except Uncas. He had touched the part of her heart that was not wounded. But she was not able to love the way a lover loved, and she could not let any man touch her the way a lover touched a woman. Uncas had never tried to touch her in that way. 'Twas not the nature of their relationship. With Uncas, she had felt absolutely safe. But she had also felt loved and valued by him. In that sense, he had been her lover, and she had been his.*

*She thought, then, of Daimon. Following their conversation when he had visited Anu, he had returned to Abydos and written her a letter. In it he had expressed his very great sorrow that his actions had caused such pain not just to her but to himself as well. He had confessed that he knew there was a hole in his life, something missing, and he believed she had been meant to fill that hole. But he had squandered the opportunity to love and be loved in return, and in doing so, the yawning hole had never been filled and never would be, he knew. She had taken a long time to respond to the letter, and when she had, she had thanked him for his words. They had helped somewhat. That was the last time they interacted with one another. He, too, had passed over many, many years before. She had felt no grief at his passing. He had died, for her, when they were still both young.*

*But now, at the very end of a very great life, she couldn't help but wonder what it would mean for her carrying the wound in her soul. How ironic, she thought, that you couldn't take with you all the trinkets you amassed over a lifetime, but you took with you every wound you incurred that had not been healed over that lifetime. If only it was the other way around, she thought, smiling inwardly. And then she sobered. Still, because she had never been able to heal the wound in her heart, she knew she was taking it with her. She couldn't help but wonder how that would shape and influence the lives she would live in other times and places.*

*She couldn't help but wonder . . . .*

~

Jennifer took her hands away from the keypad of her laptop and sat back in her chair. Finished. This latest memory had been surfacing for a couple of months, and so she'd been processing it for a couple of months. But processing these memories was always taken to whole new depths whenever she wrote any of them into stories. Writing forced

her to be with the characters in depth, to get to know them in depth, and to confront all the subtle and not-so-subtle dynamics that existed between them and within the story in general. It was an intense process, the echo of which stayed with her for days after the story was actually finished. Although, really, once she wrote a past-life memory into a story, the memory became a part of her consciousness *consciously*. It never left her again. After that, she could access it at will, any time she chose.

She pushed her chair back and went to stand, as Daimon had, looking out of the window that overlooked the side garden. By the gods, she thought, it was beautiful at this time of year. Little purple flowers fell in a cascade from a decorative urn in the garden's centre, and the cactus hanging on the fence, normally quite ugly, was a mass of beautiful bright red flowers. The window was enormous, taking up a whole wall on one side of the room. It really was a great place to write, and it was just as well she liked being in the room because she spent an awful lot of time in it. The view of the garden afforded her by the window opened up her small world in this back room. It brought the outside in, and it connected her with nature. But at the same time, the garden, with its wall of hedges, protected her from the world outside. Yes, it really was a perfect place to write.

Folding her arms in front of her, the garden forgotten, she thought about the story she'd just finished writing. It was a sad and sorry tale in some respects, although not in others. Both Daimon and Anlille had devoted their lives to the work they loved, and they both spent their lives in places they loved. Anlille had found happiness, peace and contentment in her work and in the temple of Anu. Jennifer envied Anlille. She would have given her right arm to have been back in Anu. She remembered it well. She remembered well the powerful sense of belonging – something that was decidedly lacking in this life – something that had eluded her in this life.

Still, the story would just have been a story, no more, really, and no less, except for two things – two things that, unfortunately, had a lasting and profound effect on the life she was living now, and, therefore, two things that could not be ignored or passed over as irrelevant or insignificant. And, thus, neither could the story itself be passed over as just a story. First, she knew she still carried the same wound on her soul that had so afflicted Anlille, and, second, she could see another shadowed dynamic in the story – her fear of

being controlled by powerful men or people with a powerfully masculine energy. She feared control by exactly the sort of man Daimon had been, and she feared the harm that would surely befall her if she allowed herself to be thus controlled. No bloody wonder, she thought crossly.

“God-damn,” she whispered on a sigh. How absolutely annoying. And this was, of course, the reason the memory had surfaced in the first place. She still had Work to do . . . obviously. And it was time to Work on these shadowed dynamics within her. Was there no end to it, the Work required of her in this lifetime? Sometimes it seemed to her as if all the shadowed dynamics from all the lives she'd ever lived had collected themselves into one cohesive group just so she could Work on them all in this life. Why couldn't she have sorted some of them out in other lives? It was exhausting, not to mention painful. Was there no joy to be had in this life at all? Was this life to be spent, in its entirety, sorting out the shadows from previous ones?

The jarring sound of the phone sliced through her thought processes and brought her attention sharply back to the present. Leaving the window and its view of the garden, she turned to walk down the hallway to answer the phone.

“Hello,” the voice on the other end of the phone said after Jennifer introduced herself, “I wonder if you can help me. I'm looking for the author of the *Lady of Light* website.”

“Oh, well, you've found her,” Jennifer told the voice.

“Excellent,” the voice said. “That was easier than I thought it would be. My name is Diane, and I work for a publishing company in Melbourne. I'm very interested in your writing, and I wonder if I could speak to you about your work, face to face. I'm very happy to come out to you, if you would prefer that, save you coming into the city. Would you be interested in meeting with me?”

Jennifer was surprised not so much by the phone call itself but by the timing of the call. She knew what the call meant because she knew the choice she'd made when first processing the memory and writing it into a story. It wasn't just pretty prose at the beginning of the story. They, with whom she communed in the depths of her soul, had asked the question for a reason, and, knowing that, she had answered in kind.

“Yes,” she answered the voice on the phone, “I would be interested in meeting with

you.”

“Oh good,” Diane responded. “Are you free for lunch tomorrow?”

“Tomorrow?” Jennifer repeated thinking the woman sounded keen. That was promising, wasn't it? “Yes, tomorrow would be fine.”

Jennifer hung up the phone after giving the woman, Diane, directions and arranging a time and place to meet. Rather than moving, though, she stood looking at nothing, frowning. She could feel her resistance already even though nothing had really happened yet. Answering 'yes' to the question of whether or not she would surrender the wound within her was the easy part. Now the Process would create the means of her actually doing so, and that was the part she dreaded. Oh well, she couldn't turn back now, or change her mind, for that matter. All she could do was allow it to unfold as it would.

And, then, she thought, allowing her thought process to change direction, all wounds and past-life memories aside, the fact of this woman being interested in her writing was actually quite exciting. This was the first time anyone had shown any interest at all in her work. Resistance aside, her curiosity was aroused. She wondered what the woman wanted from her.

~

“Thank you for meeting with me,” Diane said, opening the conversation once they'd both taken their seats on opposite sides of the table, consulted the menu, and given their lunch order to the waitress.

“My pleasure,” Jennifer said. “How did you find me? My work may be in the public domain, officially, but I've done almost no marketing whatsoever, so no one knows about it. How do you know about it?”

“Well, you must have done *some* marketing,” Diane replied. “Because I was flicking through old issues of *Living Now*, last year's issues actually, and I saw an advertisement for two of your books. The ad piqued my interest so I had a look at your website. It took me a couple of hours to read through it all and to familiarise myself with your work enough to engage you in a conversation, and then I tracked you down. It wasn't hard. I wasn't sure where you lived, but I started with the phone book, and there you were. I was very happy when I discovered you lived in Melbourne.”

Jennifer laughed softly. "I don't believe it," she said. "You actually saw the ad. That was my one experiment with advertising – one ad in one issue of *Living Now* – and you saw it."

"Such is the power of marketing," Diane observed with a smile. "It does have its uses, you know."

"Yes, I know."

"So why haven't you marketed your work properly then? It's the logical next step for you now."

"Yes," Jennifer agreed, "so it is. Apart from the fact that marketing requires money and I haven't been prepared to sink any more money into my writing, I haven't marketed my work because it hasn't felt right. I haven't felt ready. And I've been through a whole process with it . . . well, actually, a couple of processes, I would say."

Jennifer would have left her explanation at that, but Diane wanted to know more.

"What processes?"

"Well . . ." Jennifer began, reluctantly. She had not articulated her transformational processes to anyone else, so to do so now was a little bit intimidating. "When you write a book, isn't it natural, in this third dimensional world, to dream of selling your books and becoming a successful author? Does not one naturally follow the other?"

"Of course."

"In the third dimension, yes, it does. But not so from the higher-dimensional perspective. My writing, my books, are not about publishing success or making money or selling as many of the books as I can. It took me a long time to come to terms with that because for a long time I was caught up in third-dimensional mindsets and couldn't see anything else. My writing is not for third dimensionals, for third-dimensional humans, I mean, especially those who are sound asleep, as most of them are. To understand the whole concept, you have to think not in terms of third-dimensional recipes but, rather, in terms of higher-dimensional perspectives. My third-dimensional ego wanted publishing success. My soul simply wanted me to write, to be honest in my writing, to write purely and straight from my heart with no distractions or interferences, and then to gift my writing back to the Universe. What happens to it now is not up to me . . . in one sense."

She hesitated, and then thought she might as well tell Diane the whole truth since she'd already told her part of it. "My writing *is* higher dimensional. In writing, I have brought the knowledge and wisdom within it out of the ethereal realm. Well, actually, I believe I have brought the whole book, *Lady of the Lake*, out of the ethereal realm. I believe I wrote it originally somewhere else, in a higher dimension, and simply remembered it here . . ." She thought, briefly, and added to herself more than to Diane, "Or should that be remembered it here?"

"So," she continued, "it would have been a violation, a sacrilege really, to have reduced and limited it by trying to make it just another spiritual book sitting on the bookshelves of the 'Mind, Body, Spirit' section of bookshops. And it would have been a violation of a most profound nature to have used my books to achieve third-dimensional success and to build third-dimensional wealth . . . what I call 'empowering entrapment' in the third-dimensional perspective – the very thing I've come here to transcend. That was never going to be allowed. I mean, something so sacred was never going to be used to empower entrapment when the Process was working so hard with me to free me *from* entrapment, to *disempower* it. I've even been wondering of late if I would have to die first before my writing could be revealed to the world. If so, I would not mind at all."

Diane took a moment to process what she'd just heard. Finally, she commented. "My god. You're the real deal, aren't you?"

Jennifer smiled. "The real deal?"

"I wondered, when I read your website, what you would be like in real life. Your writing is so potent, so powerful, so honest, and you've obviously been through some intense spiritual transformations. I wondered if that would translate to you as a person. You know how you can love someone's writing and then meet them and be wholly disappointed? You think they're something special when you read what they've written, but then you meet them and realise they're just ordinary people like everyone else. Not so with you. Meeting you, I can see your brand of spirituality makes other kinds of spirituality seem like a Sunday school picnic. You're the real deal. You really know what this is all about." She waved her hands in the air to indicate human life and then sat back in her chair. "You really have to meet Damien. He started the business I work for, and

you are exactly the kind of person he's always searching for."

~

Jennifer stood in the foyer, the reception of Diane's publishing company, staring at the paintings on the wall. They were twin paintings of modern, abstract art, the same but different, and they were beautiful. But that wasn't the reason she was staring at them transfixed. She recognised them because she'd seen them many times in her visions. She always loved them in her visions, but she always thought the wall behind them, plain white, did not do them justice. They needed colour behind them to bring out their beauty and to highlight the vibrant colours in the paintings themselves. And, now, seeing them in reality, she thought the same thing. But the paintings were a message, one she got loud and clear, and her heart started pounding anxiously as a consequence. Pay attention. Be cognisant of what's really going on here.

Why oh why, she thought, still staring at the paintings, couldn't she go into this Process in ignorance? Everyone else got to go through their Processes in ignorance. Her inner voice remained ominously silent. And why should it dignify her sulky question with a genuine answer? In truth, she didn't need her inner voice to tell her that in this, the seventh stage of her initiation, it was time for her to Process consciously, fully participating in Perfect Alignment. She knew enough now to know that, without her inner voice reminding her of it.

"Jennifer."

Dragging her eyes from the paintings, she turned and smiled when she saw Diane standing beside the receptionist's desk.

"It's good to see you again," Diane said. "Thank you for coming. Come through," she said, turning.

Jennifer followed her into a large office with an impressive view of the city through a large set of windows on one side of it. The office was masculine, with a large desk at one end of it, and a leather lounge suite at the other end. A man awaited them both, standing in front of one side of the three-seater lounge. He was tall with hair as black as a raven's wing and clear, blue eyes that he used to great effect. As Diane introduced them, Jennifer struggled to hide her shock. The gods dammit, she thought, going through your Process

consciously was one thing, but why did he have to look exactly as she'd pictured Daimon when she was writing the story? That was just cruel and unfair. And why did she have to go through this Process with the same god-damn soul anyway? Why couldn't it be someone else? *Because*, her inner voice answered in the depths of her own thoughts even as she shook the man's hand, *he was wounded in that life, too. Isn't that how karma works? What is entwined in one life must be un-entwined in another. And is it not typical of the Divine Process that it always kills many birds with the same stone? Or, in this case, 'resurrects' might be a more apt description.* The Process would resurrect both birds with one fell swoop.

And then Diane said his name again, and for a second time, Jennifer had to hide her shock. Damien. Even their names were similar. If she wasn't so familiar with and knowledgeable about how these things worked, she would've thought it a cruel joke. But the Process wasn't joking, nor was it playing with her. Quite the opposite, in fact. It was letting her know in no uncertain terms exactly who he was, just so there would be no misunderstanding, and so there would be no misconstruing what this encounter was really all about.

She made the appropriate responses to the introduction and then sat in one of the single-seat leather chairs, wondering as she sat if he recognised her as she did him. Probably not, thank the gods. Her ability to recall memories from other lives she'd lived was unique, she'd come to discover. Most people struggled with the memories of their current life, let alone memories from previous lives.

"Can we get you a coffee before we start?" Damien asked her.

"No, thank you, I'm fine."

"Something cold?"

She smiled, slightly. "No. I'm fine. I don't want anything. But thank you."

He nodded once, briefly. "Diane tells me all the time," he said, obviously opening the discussion, "that I come on too strong whenever I encounter someone like you – the kind of person I'm always on the look out for. I set this business up to bring like-minded people – people like you – together. The problem is, people like you are hard to come by. You don't encounter them every day. What's the expression?" he asked both women. "They don't fall from trees, so to speak."

Both women smiled, as was his intention, but both stayed silent so that he could continue, as was also his intention.

“So when I do come across them, I tend to get a little over zealous, and my enthusiasm can be somewhat overpowering. I apologise in advance if I do come across too strong. And no doubt I will.”

“That's fine,” Jennifer reassured him. “I'll handle it if you do.”

He smiled his acknowledgement of her comment. “I've had a chance to read some of your work, Jennifer. I've read your website in entirety and I'm in the process of reading the first of your books. I'm not sure what Diane's told you about our business so I'll briefly outline for you what we do here. We publish books of a specific genre – spiritual, obviously, given our interest in you. But not just any spiritual work. We're interested in alchemical, hermetic and/or philosophical works mostly. We tend to avoid New Age spirituality.”

“Good,” Jennifer said, unable to help herself and interrupting him briefly.

“We also produce a quarterly magazine,” he continued as if the interruption hadn't happened, “and we organise conferences to bring people like you together physically. We have an international following of between nineteen and twenty thousand people at the moment, but it's growing rapidly. We keep in constant contact with those people, not just through the magazine but through our website as well. We conduct online symposiums, or chat groups, and we conduct physical ones, as I said, in various places around the world. Obviously, we're always looking to increase our readership, and to that end, we advertise in local spiritual magazines, like the one you advertised in last year, in this country and in others.

“Technically, we're not-for-profit, although we do have to make money to cover overheads and salaries. So we do accept advertising on our website and in the magazine. I'm telling you that because I noticed you have no advertising on your website, and I wasn't sure how you felt about it.”

Jennifer couldn't help but smile. “I'm morally opposed to it,” she said simply, “for more reasons than one. But I do understand that it is an evil necessity sometimes.”

Diane and Damien exchanged wry smiles. They didn't try to hide the exchange and so

Jennifer caught it.

“Is that why you haven't properly advertised any of your books?” Damien asked her.

“No, actually,” she replied. “It's not. As I said, sometimes advertising is necessary. I recognise that. People can't buy your books if they don't know about them.”

“Okay,” he said hesitantly, “that's good because I would like to advertise your books extensively.” He stopped and held up his hands. “I'm getting ahead of myself. Let me start from the beginning. I would like to publish your books, all of them eventually, but we'll start with *Lady of the Lake*. And I'd like to regularly advertise the books in local and international spiritual magazines, similar to the one you've already advertised in, as I said before. And, of course, I'd like to advertise in our magazine. That goes without saying. I'd also like to interview you for our magazine, perhaps do a series of interviews over the next few issues of the publication. I want to delve into the inner workings of you in the interviews. From what I've seen of your writing, that shouldn't be a problem. You're very honest in your writing. I'd also like to get you involved in a couple of our chat groups, our online symposiums, even make you the topic of some of them. And I'd also like to line you up as one of our speakers at our next symposium in Sydney. How does all that sound?”

Jennifer could only stare at him with her mouth slightly open. Too strong, he'd said. My god, she was exhausted just listening to him.

“Um,” she said slowly, trying to organise her thought processes, “you have to understand,” she explained, “my work may be in the public domain, sort of, but I have been hidden from the public arena. I've managed to stay out of it up until now. I live a very quiet, very solitary life, and I like my life that way. I have such minimal contact with people, you could be forgiven for thinking me a recluse. What you're proposing sounds overwhelming. I don't want people contact. Being reclusive works for Dan Brown, so why can't it work for me?”

She hesitated to gauge his response, but then she thought of something else.

“I've already published my books. What benefit could be gained by you publishing them?”

He didn't hesitate. From the speed of his reply, he'd obviously prepared his arguments

in advance, or he was just used to this kind of conversation, or probably both. "We could make them cheaper to purchase for starters. Print-on-demand publishing is notoriously expensive. I'm sure you know that. We can manage the distribution of your books far more efficiently and cost-effectively than print-on-demand."

Jennifer considered that. It was a convincing argument. There was no doubt about that. So she voiced another concern. "What I like about self-publishing is that I don't have to surrender artistic or editorial control. I don't want anything changed in my books even if parts of them don't suit the reading public."

Again, he didn't hesitate. "Not even a single word would be changed in any of your books without your express approval. You can have that in writing. We'll incorporate it into your contract."

She nodded her acknowledgement of this and then voiced yet another concern. "I'm still writing," she told them both. "Not books. I think I'm done with them . . ."

"You never know," he interrupted. "I think you still have many books in you."

"Maybe. Maybe not," she countered. "At the moment, I can write whatever I want to write. I'm beholden to no one. I don't want to surrender that kind of freedom and independence. I need both the same way I need air to breathe."

"Nor will you," Damien said, "surrender the freedom to write whatever you wish to write, that is. We want that for you, too. The last thing we want to do is stop you doing what you do best."

"That's what you say now," she said quickly. "I have very strong views that I express through my writing on things that are considered taboo by most other people."

"I know," he said. "I told you, I've read your work. Jennifer," he said and leaned forward for emphasis, "I mean it when I say I don't want you to stay silent. I want you to write, and I want you to write whatever you feel to write, nothing held back. That's the very thing I'm attracted to in your work. I simply want to give you a forum for your voice, and I want your voice to be heard. No one's hearing you at the moment. You understand that, don't you? You're speaking and you're saying the most wonderful things, but no one can hear you. I want to change that."

Jennifer said nothing in response. Although she looked away from them, she could

feel the intensity of their gaze upon her. Was it wrong to judge him based on what she knew of Daimon, and to think he wouldn't let her go now that he'd found her? Was he the same in this life as he had been in that past one? Tears prickled her eyes and she felt as if she was back in that classroom at Anu being pressured both by her tutor and by him. The force of his personality was incredible, she had to admit. No wonder she had given in all those thousands of years ago. But there was a difference this time, and she had to make herself remember that. Because she was conscious this time, she would do nothing she didn't want to do. He would not and could not force her against her will. She was in control here, not him.

She looked up and glanced at them both. "I thank you for your interest in me and my work. You are the first people to take an interest in my work, and I promise you, I will not run from that. I will work with you, you have my word on that. But you have to understand, until now, it's just been me – me working alone, in private, in secret really, with no support, no feedback, no one else involved at all. It's a big step for me to join my work with yours, and to bring you both on board in relation to my work. I already know it's right to do so. But you'll have to give me time . . . not much time, just a few days to come to terms with all this. And I would like to start off slowly, it that's all right with you."

Only a blind person would have missed the relief on both their faces. She almost heard them both release held breath, and couldn't help but smile. Whatever else was going on here, it was nice to be wanted and appreciated. And it was very, very nice to finally be recognised.

"Starting off slowly is fine by me," Damien said. "Shall we meet again at the end of the week? Would that give you enough time?"

"Plenty," she said.

~

"All right," Jennifer said, wasting no time once all three were seated, once again, on the leather lounge in Damien's office a couple of days later, "I will do the interview with you, Damien. Whatever you want to talk about is fine by me. I will publish my books with you, all of them. And I will allow you to advertise them in your magazine, only yours,

though, at least for now. As for the online chat groups and the speaking at your next symposium, can we just see what the initial response is first before we get into serious stuff like that. As I said in our last meeting, I don't want people contact, and that hasn't changed as yet. Maybe it will but I can't promise that. I'm not sure how I'll feel in the future. Is that all okay?"

Diane was smiling, looking very pleased, but it was Damien who responded verbally. "That is all absolutely fine with us. Welcome aboard."

"Thank you," Jennifer said, smiling.

~

Damien turned off the dictaphone, and just like that, with the click of a button, more than three hours of conversation was over. Only just over half of it, most probably, was actual interview. The problem was, they kept digressing, going off track, so much of what was on the tape was their conversation – a conversation that had wound its way through many topics and many different territories. Jennifer thought she would hate to be the one to have to wade through it, pull out of it what was the interview and discard what was not. But that was not her problem. It was his. He had allowed them to go off track every time. Indeed, he had been a willing participant.

Assuming the interview was over and thus, so, too, was their meeting, she pushed her chair back, leaned down to get her bag, and would have stood, but he stopped her.

"I'd like to have a conversation with you strictly off the record, if that's okay," he said.

She raised her eyebrows in surprise, dropped her bag on the floor again, and pulled her chair back under the table. He hadn't moved, so he'd obviously held the intention to have this conversation all along, once the official stuff was out of the way. They'd had a couple of brief, quick breaks over the many hours they'd spent in the meeting room, but she hadn't eaten anything during those breaks and now she was decidedly hungry. She hoped this new conversation wasn't going to take long.

He read her mind. "It won't take long. I promise. But it's important."

Her curiosity was aroused. What could be more important than what they'd just talked about for over three hours? "Fine," she said. "Go ahead."

He leaned forward and clasped his hands on the table in front him, just as Amenophis

had done many thousands of years earlier. "You have an affinity with the cultures that existed in Khem and in pre-dynastic Ancient Egypt," he said flatly, matter of factly.

"Would that be right?"

He had her full, undivided attention, hunger forgotten. Whatever she had thought he might say, that was definitely not it. "That's right," she said.

"In fact," he continued, "your soul lost interest in the cultures that existed in that land by the time of the first dynasties of the Old Kingdom. So you didn't incarnate as an Ancient Egyptian again until the eighteenth dynasty when your soul was, again, interested in what was transpiring at that time. Would that be right?"

She didn't answer his question. Instead, she asked him one of her own. "How do you know this?"

He shrugged. "I have a strong sense of it. I feel it. Beyond that, I don't know how I know."

She accepted his explanation, understanding probably better than he did why he would know something so seemingly obscure about her.

"I wish I knew who I was, or what I was, in the eighteenth dynasty," she told him. "I wasn't a play-maker, one of the main players, I don't think, but I was definitely there. I'm not sure I influenced or even participated in what was going on then, but I certainly observed it. As for those times prior to the Old Kingdom, Egypt has become a land of dry bones and dust - a land of death, not of life. And, unfortunately, that dust covers and shrouds much of the evidence of the existence of those beautiful, ancient cultures. The one-eyed, closed-minded perspectives of those in charge of interpreting Egypt's history and unearthing her artefacts don't help either. They refuse to acknowledge it could have been any different to the staid and boring orthodox view that has, unfortunately, become set as in stone. The cultures that existed in Khem and pre-dynastic Ancient Egypt were what you could call 'high' cultures. By the time of the first dynasty of the Old Kingdom, the Egyptians had *devolved*, not *evolved*."

She gave him a chance to interject, but he didn't. He just sat still, listening, so she continued.

"Then," she continued, "at the time of the establishment of the first dynasty of the Old

Kingdom, the religion-philosophy of the Ancient Egyptians was but an echo of the Wisdom that had once governed the older cultures that existed in the land before the dynasties. There was knowledge in that echo, yes, but there was also distortion, misunderstanding and misinterpretation. And there was corruption. And then, as you progress through the Old, Middle and New Kingdoms, that echo grew weaker and weaker, and more and more corrupted. That's why Akhenaten did what he did. He sought to break the hold of the then-corrupt and powerful priesthood, although he, too, was corrupted by the power lust."

Damien listened attentively, and this time, when she paused, he said, "I couldn't agree more."

Jennifer looked puzzled. "So why are we talking about this?" she asked him.

"I think you know why," he replied. "I have the same affinity for those earlier cultures you do, and I think we were both incarnate in one or some of those earlier cultures, at the same time. We knew each other back there."

Jennifer dropped her eyes to his hands, avoiding his eyes, and unconsciously took her bottom lip between her teeth.

He watched her closely. "Ah," he said. "That bad, eh?"

She forced herself to look at him again, and, without smiling, nodded solemnly, hoping he wouldn't want to talk about it beyond what they'd already said. She wasn't sure she was ready for that, but then, she suspected she would never be ready, so now was as good a time as any. And she knew he wouldn't drop it. She wouldn't have dropped it in his shoes. She would've wanted to know all.

"Will this affect us working together?" he asked intensely.

That surprised her. "Do you not know?" she asked him. "It's the *reason* we're working together. It's the reason we've crossed paths again. We were both hurt . . . wounded by what happened in those lives we lived. We have a chance, now, to heal ourselves of those wounds." She pushed her chair back again, but before she leaned down to get her bag, she said, "I have written the memory of what happened, from my perspective, into a story, and I've published it on the website. In fact, I finished it about five minutes before I got Diane's phone call."

He frowned. "Which one is it?"

She told him, and she told him where to find it on the website. "I don't think you've seen it. I only published it a few days ago." She watched him concentrate on his laptop. "Don't read it now," she said urgently, horrified when he located the document on her website, pulled up the pdf file, and started to read it. "Wait until I leave the building . . . please."

He smiled at that and held up his hands in supplication. "Okay, okay, I'll wait."

She was sitting on the train, half way home, when she got his text.

"We need to meet. Don't want to discuss this via email."

She texted back. "Okay. When?"

"Lunch. Saturday."

~

"Do you blame him?"

Jennifer glanced at Damien in surprise, not because of the question itself, but because he'd barely given her enough time to sit at the table before asking it. He hadn't even bothered to say hello, and he'd given her no time to even glance at the menu. He'd just fired the question at her in the same instant she sat.

"Do I seem to?" she countered. "In the story, I mean."

"Hard to say," he answered her, and then considered the question for a moment more. "Yeah, I think there is an element of blame in the story."

Jennifer digested that, not surprised. "It wasn't all his fault," she said. "I can see that. She lost herself. She allowed him to persuade her to drop her own work and leave the temple she loved. And she was right about the initiation in the Great Pyramid. It would have been dangerous had she gone through with it. The Process had to stop her, and he was the means by which that was achieved. If he hadn't gone when he did, she would have gone through with it for his sake. Having said that, though, he would have been kinder to her had he not loved her. He wouldn't have hurt her if he hadn't loved her. His love was harmful as it turned out."

Damien only nodded in response.

"I think the priest and the man in him separated out," Jennifer continued. "And then

they were in conflict. He lost control and he was afraid of that, and in his fear he couldn't reconcile the two, as the two are supposed to be. He feared the part of him that was a man. So he suppressed the one and became the other fully. Not a healthy way to exist, especially for a priest. She, on the other hand, allowed the woman in her to over-ride the priestess, at first. But then she ended up doing the same thing he did. She became a priestess, and the woman in her was suppressed."

Again, Damien nodded, but this time he voiced his agreement verbally. "That's a fair assessment," he said. "Do you forgive him?"

Jennifer raised her eyebrows at him. "Don't you mean did *she* forgive him?"

"No, actually, I don't. But now you ask, did she?"

Jennifer shook her head ever so slightly. "I don't think so."

"I don't think so either. Maybe that's why the wound still existed in her."

Jennifer considered that. "Maybe," she said quietly. "He excised her from his life the way one cuts out a malignant tumour. And the knife slipped and got her in the heart. That's a little hard to forgive."

"And that's why she wouldn't give him a second chance."

"If you're referring to that last conversation they had, he wasn't seeking one. He'd made his choice, and in doing so he'd set the direction of his life. He wasn't about to back track and change it."

"How do you know that?" Damien asked her, sounding annoyed. "She didn't give him a chance to speak beyond answering her questions. And how do you know he hadn't come to Anu to see her?"

Jennifer raised her voice, unaware, as she did so, of the other diners at the tables around them who threw them both sideways glances. "Because it had taken him more than two years to get up there. If he'd wanted to see her, he would've done so well before that. He didn't even know she hadn't been initiated in Meri-amu until he got to the temple. He'd never bothered to find out. He *excised* her, as I said, very effectively, from his whole psyche. There's no way back from that. And anyway, she wasn't capable of love. She made that clear to him. He'd killed her ability to love. She couldn't love him anymore, even if she wanted to, which she did not. Don't you understand that?"

"I understand," Damien said quietly. "I'm sorry."

Jennifer took a deep breath to steady her racing heart and to calm herself. "It's not up to you to be sorry," she said as quietly. "He was sorry, and he told her so. It did help."

They sat in silence for a moment.

"You said, the other day," Damien said, breaking the small silence that had fallen between them, "they were both wounded by what happened."

Jennifer nodded. "Yes, they were."

Damien nodded, too. "I know. He described his life as 'having a hole in it' in the letter he wrote to her. I know what that feels like because I feel it, too. In fact, that's exactly the way I would describe it. I've sensed it my whole life, but I've never understood it. It's one of the reasons I established the business, to fill the hole in my life with something good, something worthwhile, something that made a difference and had a good effect on humanity. It worked for a while, too . . . filled the hole, I mean. But over the last couple of months, the feeling has returned, and it makes me feel very uncomfortable. I'd reached the stage where I simply didn't know what to do to make it go away. Diane could see it. That's why she went looking for you. And then I read your story, and suddenly the hole in my life makes perfect sense."

"Does it? Why?"

"Because he ran in fear from an experience he was supposed to have. Don't you think they were meant to work together? I don't have the memories of that life the way you do, but what's the bet if I did, I would say that he was at his happiest in that year he worked with her. I bet he looked back over his life after that last conversation with her and realised the truth of that. Maybe that's what motivated him to write the letter. Who's to say. We'll never know for sure. But I would stake my life on the fact that he and she were meant to be lovers in every sense that it's possible to be so, not just physically. He always loved her work. He made a point of telling her in that last conversation. He loved her work just as I love yours."

She considered that in silence. It made perfect sense. But she would never know for sure, as he'd just said. She didn't have Daimon's memories. She only had Anlille's, and she knew Anlille had found happiness and fulfilment in her work. Jennifer just assumed

he had, too, but what if he had not, or not in the same way Anlille had? What if he had compromised his own work by walking away from her? Perhaps that was Daimon's own very great wound. He hadn't just forfeited the experience of love, negating himself as a man in doing so, he'd compromised himself as a priest as well.

"I know you're aware of the mistakes she made," Damien said, drawing her attention and breaking through her thoughts, "and you're trying not to make the same ones again. I can see that. But you need to know, it's the same for me. I, too, am aware of the mistakes he made, and I'm trying not to make the same ones again."

"How do you mean?"

"If I had my way, I'd drop you in the deep end. I'd reveal you to the whole world, advertise anywhere and everywhere I could, sing your name from the mountaintops. But I know you don't want that, and I'm trying to honour your wishes and allow myself to be guided by you in that way. He paid no heed to her wishes, did he? He just wanted what *he* wanted and set about bringing that about without reference to her."

She nodded. "True. Yes, that's true."

"Well, I don't want to do that. Not this time around."

She smiled at him. "I'm glad to hear it."

He returned her smile. "So," he said, "we know where we stand professionally. Now, what about personally?"

Jennifer breathed deeply. "Personally," she repeated softly, looking away from him towards the river.

He watched her, waiting, and when she stayed silent, her eyes on the river, he felt it prudent to prompt her. "Jennifer, what about us personally?"

She looked at him. "What do you want for us?"

"Honestly," he said, "I've never met anyone like you. You are a rare and precious gem, and I'm not prepared to let you go, whether we work together or not."

"So, are we to be friends then?" she asked him.

"Friends my ass," he said vehemently. "I want far, far more from you than that. I want us to go where they failed to go. I want us to become what they failed to become. I want us to be lovers." He leaned forward in his chair and folded his arms on the table in

front of him, looking her directly in the eye so there would be no misunderstanding. "I want you to let me in to the very heart of you. I want us to become entwined – body, mind, heart, soul, work – every part of us."

She swallowed nervously and dropped her eyes to his folded arms, breaking eye contact. She wasn't sure it was even possible to restore her heart to wholeness and wellness. The wound it carried was very deep and had been there for a long, long time . . . so long, in fact, it had become an inherent part of her. Letting him in, to that place at the very heart of her, was the biggest risk she could and would ever take, and she had to do so without surrendering the essence of who she was in this life. But if there was even the remotest chance of healing the wound on her soul, she had to try. She simply *had* to try.

She raised her eyes to his again. "So be it," she said quietly. "You'll have to be patient with me. I'm hopelessly out of practice, and my heart has been shut up far longer than I've been alive this time around . . ."

"I know," he said. "God knows I know. I'm partly responsible, remember."

She smiled at that. And then her smile disappeared, and she inclined her head as a thought occurred to her. "Do *you* forgive him?" she asked him.

Slowly, he shook his head. "No, I don't think I do. He was arrogant – the surest sign of weakness – and he was an idiot. He squandered the most beautiful opportunity to be something so much greater than what he was. They would have been great together . . . individually, within themselves, and together. I see the same opportunity for us, and I'll be damned if I'll squander it this time around."

Jennifer sat back in her chair as she looked at him and thought about what he'd said. Her heart was pounding, and she simply didn't know if she could give him what he wanted. "There are no guarantees," she said.

"I know. But you'll never know if you don't try. You know what they say about potential when it comes to investment? High risk, high gain."

He was right. This was, quite simply, an investment opportunity she would be a fool to walk away from. Whatever was ahead, they would both be changed, irrevocably, but that change could only be for the greater good of both of them.

Again, he watched her as she sat across the table from him in silence. "I won't hurt

you, Jennifer, not this time around."

"You don't know that," she said. "Anyway, I'm not afraid of that. If you hurt me, you hurt me. I'll deal with it."

He frowned. "Then what are you afraid of?"

She took a long moment to answer. "I think I'm afraid of what I will become."

Again, he frowned. "What *will* you become?"

She couldn't help but smile at him. He looked so bewildered, perplexed, it was endearing. "In being whole, I will become something . . ." She hesitated, struggling to find the right words. "Something beyond."

"Beyond what?"

"Beyond what is known and experienced in current human reality."

"Ah," he said, sitting back. "I see."

"Do you? Do you really see? Do you really understand?"

"I think so," he replied.

"Good, because you will, too . . . go beyond, I mean. We will be the same."

He didn't respond. He just sat looking at her. "Ah," he half said, half sighed after a long moment. "This is why they weren't together in that life. The timing was all wrong. So, what? They were meant to be apart back then? Then why even cross paths?"

"Because the wound in her heart, put there as a direct result of them crossing paths in *that* life, has served a most valuable purpose for me in *this* life."

"What purpose?"

"No one has come close to me. I haven't allowed it. In fact, I've been supremely masterful at keeping people, especially men, at bay. My heart has been shut off from the world, implacably closed, and in being so, like the alchemists of old, I have been free to Work in privacy and solitude. My focus has been strictly protected and preserved courtesy of the absence of an ordinary third-dimensional relationship. I could not have Worked the way I have otherwise, and I could not have written all that I've written. I speak of entanglement, right? Well there's no greater entanglement than that of being yoked to a third dimensional, in any way, shape or form, including friendship, but especially in the form of the lover relationship."

Again, he didn't respond, but she could see he had absorbed what she said and was processing it.

"Had I loved," she continued quietly, "I mean, had I really loved in this lifetime, it would have held me back, stopped me from initiating. That was never going to be allowed, not in this lifetime. I came here for something far greater and far more important than simply living the third-dimensional 'recipe of life'. The third-dimensional 'recipe of life' is a trap – a dangerous one for people like us. It devours you. Because I was well and truly caught in third-dimensional mindsets, I was as vulnerable as the next person when it came to living a conventional third-dimensional existence. The wound in my soul protected me from that. I can't love. I can't let people near me. *I can't become entangled.*"

"Jesus!" he whispered. "Christ alive," he said, only slightly louder. "I see it. I really see it."

"So," she said, raising her eyebrows, "do you also see that if I surrender the wound in my soul, things will change for me?"

"I see that, yes, and I see how careful you have to be. You surrender the wound, you surrender your protection. You said you were caught in third-dimensional mindsets?"

She nodded.

"But you are no longer, right?"

Again, she nodded, but qualified her response. "I know I still have vulnerabilities, but knowledge arms me against those. I know too much to succumb . . . I hope."

"Then you no longer need the protection afforded you by the wound in your soul. You *can* surrender it."

"Yes, I can," she said simply, quietly.

"And that is why I am here," he said, realising the truth of that statement even as he said it. "Jesus," he said again, looking, as she had done, out over the river.

She sat silently, watching him, making no attempt to break the silence he needed to absorb and assimilate the revelation washing through him.

At last, he took his eyes from the river and looked at her again. "What does it say about me that I was the one there at the inception of the wound in your soul, and I am the one involved in healing it?"

“What does it say about you that you are the one whom I will allow in, to that place that has been forbidden, strictly and rigidly shut off from the entire world?”

He didn't respond immediately. Watching him, though, she saw the moment he realised what she was alluding to. “I'm not third dimensional,” he said.

“No, you are not.” Not taking her eyes from his, she took a deep breath and sat forward in her chair. “What do you think the hole in your life actually is? Or, put another way, what is truly the cause of it? Do you think it's there because you squandered the opportunity to love and be loved in return? Do you think it's there because I haven't been in your life, either back there or in this one? And so, do you think it's me that will fill it?”

He looked at her for a moment, and then he closed his eyes as realisation hit. When he opened them again, he ran a hand through his hair. “Jesus fucking Christ! He didn't run from *her*, did he? He ran from himself . . . .”

“Are you ready to order?”

They both jumped slightly at the interruption. Neither of them had heard or seen the waiter approach their table.

“Sorry,” Damien said, looking shaken, “can you bring us a bottle of water and some glasses, and then give us a few more minutes? We haven't even looked at the menu.”

The waiter looked as if he'd expected that response. “Sure,” he said. “No problem.”

The silence he left in his wake was palpable. Damien sat, as if in shock, with one arm across his waist, and the fingers of his other hand curled over his mouth, as if he didn't trust himself to speak.

She smiled. In deference to the strength and power of the realisation, she tried not to, but was helpless to either prevent or hide it. “Anlille told him, didn't she? She told him he lost control and wanted it back. Trouble was, it was his *soul* taking him in a direction he resisted utterly, not his ego, as he feared. That was the ultimate irony, really. It was his ego that caused him to run from her and from the experience.”

Without changing his position, Damien shook his head. “What kind of priest would he have have made?”

“If he's anything like you,” she said, still smiling, “he was a natural. Being priestly is second nature to people like us. We can't help ourselves. Still,” she shrugged, “he can't

possibly have been fulfilled in his work. You said that earlier. You were right.”

“No wonder my work hasn't fulfilled me in this life.” He shifted position at last. “So, what incredibly powerful healing we offer each other.”

She smiled again in response. “Indeed. And now you understand how much we will change as we heal.”

He nodded. “I'm not afraid of it. I think I yearn for it. Don't you feel it – the yearning to be all you can be?”

“God, yes,” she breathed. “I yearn for it. I've known that for a long, long time. I can't say I'm not afraid of it, but the yearning completely eclipses the fear. In truth,” she said, “I've waited for this for an age. There were times I thought I'd never be ready.”

“Well, you are ready, more than ready, I would say. As am I.”

~

### ***A personal note:***

At the risk of spoiling the story, I want to explain that the four characters in this story – Daimon and Anlille, and then their reincarnations, Jennifer and Damien – are all me . . . well, except that Damien doesn't exist. I made him up. So, then, three of the characters are me. This is a combination of two of my past-life memories, both lived in pre-dynastic Ancient Egypt, although I was female in both past lives. I made Daimon/Damien male for obvious reasons – so I could bring them together in the story thereby healing them both.

What I did in hiding in my role as a priestess back there – the memory Daimon symbolises – is very painful to remember. I was a coward, and I did, indeed, hide behind and within the role of a priestess, making myself inaccessible and untouchable to the man I loved. He was not of the priesthood. So he married someone else and had children with her. But on his deathbed, in the process of losing him irrevocably, I held his hand in mine and confronted the truth of my cowardice and the opportunity I had squandered, begging his forgiveness for hurting us both so. He forgave me, but he told me the hardest part would be me finding a way to forgive myself. He was right. But the memory Anlille symbolises also happened to me. Maybe her life was my karmic consequence for what I

did in Daimon's life.

I'm not sure why I wrote the combined memories up into one single story . . . not sure at all. The two memories are certainly very powerful karmic infusions, each of the other. Maybe *that's* the reason I wrote them into one. In doing so, it allowed me to know that the wound in my soul, wrapped around my heart, is multifaceted and very complex. The Work I've done subsequent to writing up this story has allowed me to know that it, the wound, runs very, very deep within me and is even more complex than these memories reveal, but the two memories combined in this story allowed me to begin to see and understand the power and the nature of the dynamics involved.

*The Window*

*The whole of creation awaits you.*

*Awaits me?*

*Yes, awaits you.*

*You mean as I awaken to my Light?*

*Of course.*

*But what if I were to stop right here – stop processing and transforming, that is? What if I never awaken to my Light?*

*You cannot stop here. By all means, try. But you will see, when you do try, that your initiation is something you do both consciously and unconsciously. Thus, you will never stop. 'Tis in your nature to initiate, dearest one, so you may pull your awareness from it, your Process, but that will not stop you in your tracks. And you will not remain unaware for long. You cannot.*

*Oh. I have no choice then?*

*No choice at all, I'm afraid. You've never had a choice. This you already know. The darkness of this realm is an alien thing to you, dearest one. This you also know. You cannot help but transform it, especially if it is within you. 'Tis your deepest, Truest Nature to transform darkness and shadow into Light.*

*And this is what I have done within myself.*

*Indeed. You exist, now, in a place where fear has no power over you, no power at all.*

*By the gods! It's hard to believe such a place really exists.*

*And, yet, exist it does. Humans have a word for it. They call it Heaven. Really, though, it is the ultimate freedom – a freedom like no other. So you see, you do not really want to stop right here, do you?*

*No, I do not.*

~

## *The Window*

She was bored. She neither knew the two who were, today, pledging their eternal love and committing themselves to each other in marriage, nor did she care. She had met the bride, quite a few times, in fact, but that was many years earlier when they'd both been children, barely nine summers old. That girl, who today was a bride, had been nice enough. They might even have been friends, given the chance, but they'd not seen each other for nigh on sixteen years. Today would change that, of course, but she doubted the girl, who was today a bride, would remember her. They had met in the old days, she and the bride, when her mother had still been alive, and there was laughter and music and dancing . . . and joy and happiness.

Oh how, at such a young age, she had taken those things for granted, thinking they would always be a natural part of life. Back then, in the old days, when her mother had been wondrously, joyously alive, her parents had been social creatures. Their lives, then, had been a whirlwind of dances, balls, and parties – evenings of music and laughter and colour and movement . . . and vibrancy. They even occasionally had such evenings at the keep, in their own hall, and when they did, she had always been allowed to stay up late. She used to love watching the people enjoy themselves. She used to love watching the people respond to her mother. Everyone had responded to her mother. No one had remained impervious to her mother's charms.

But that was in the old days. Then her mother died and everything had changed. Her father had changed. He had, at first, locked himself in his study and refused to come out. He would not open the door to anyone. They'd left trays of food outside the locked door. Sometimes, by morning, the food would be gone, sometimes not. Days stretched into weeks, and then the weeks turned into months. When, finally, he had emerged, he'd unlocked the door and walked out of his study, but he'd remained locked away in a place within, inaccessible, frozen, forever changed. From that day to this, she had not seen him smile.

And it had taken her barely a day after her father emerged from behind the locked door to realise there would be no more laughter, no more music, no more dancing. Those had, it seemed, died with her mother.

She sighed softly as she remembered the past. Why was she back there, in the past, now, on this festive occasion? Was it because being here reminded her of those days? She wondered if her father remembered, too? He gave nothing away, sitting ramrod straight and still beside her. At first, she had mourned and grieved, not just for her mother, but for the person her father had been, too. At first, she had felt sorry for herself because she knew she had become invisible to him. But then, gradually, over time, she had come to realise that her circumstances provided her with something utterly precious – something she knew no other girl her age had. Freedom. She had been gifted the freedom to be as she wanted to be, no rules, no restrictions, no curfew, no one telling her who she should be, what she should or should not do or, more importantly, *how* she should be.

She smiled at the tenor of her thoughts. This was, she realised, the closest she and her father had come to each other in all the years since that fateful day when they had both lost something precious. There had been no warning of what was to come either that day or in the days prior. Her mother had not been sick, or not that anyone knew of anyway. Mrs Winchester was, apparently, the only one who knew of the headaches, but she had been sworn to silence, and she'd only confessed the fact much, much later when it was far, far too late. Doctor Bentley had tried to comfort them all by telling them that even if they'd known, there would have been nothing anyone could have done. Quite simply, there had been something wrong inside her mother's head. They had been fortunate, according to the good doctor, that her mother had lived for so long. Cold comfort, she thought, cynical amusement stirring within her. It was as well, she thought, that she had been too young to know what a bleak future awaited them all without her mother to bring life and light and laughter to the keep.

And then, sixteen years after those last days of old, the invitation had arrived. Although she saw it, and had, in fact, been the one to personally deliver it to her father, she'd taken no real notice, assuming it would go the way of all the other invitations – onto the flames of the fire in her father's study. But her father had taken it from her and then

surprised her first by opening it, then by reading it, and then by penning an acceptance. Even now, sitting in the church awaiting the bride, she wondered why he had accepted. What had changed? She had no notion of what could be his motive because it was impossible to understand the workings of his mind, and he did not confide in her.

She looked down at the vibrant colours of her skirts, emerald green and cream with its elaborate but beautiful gold embroidery. She gently ran her fingertips over the materials that comprised her skirts. Really, she thought, her father's acceptance of the invitation had merely been the first of many surprises, and many changes. She would, he had informed her in his expressionless voice, be accompanying him. The invitation had been addressed to them both, apparently, and so he had accepted on behalf of them both.

It hadn't occurred to her at the time that she had nothing appropriate to wear, but it had occurred to him. So he had spent a considerable amount of the keep's income on not just one, but many new gowns. Her new gowns were all beautiful, but the one she wore this day was by far the loveliest. The gods alone knew what she would do with them when their stay at the manor was over. She certainly had no use for them at the keep since they never had visitors, apart from Doctor Bentley and Mr Fabersham, her father's solicitor, but they didn't count.

Again, the tenor of her thoughts found physical expression as she unconsciously took her bottom lip between her teeth. She was no fool. For reasons she could not fathom, and he was choosing not to reveal, her father wished to make an impression, and she was, it seemed, the means of him doing so.

A commotion at the back of the church disrupted the smooth flow of her thoughts. A murmur of excitement caused a ripple of movement to wash through the crowd from back to front. She, too, caught the excitement and, with the rest of the crowd, stood respectfully when the musicians at the front of the church began to play. She had never been to a wedding before but she had been to a funeral. The excitement, of course, was different. Funerals were not at all exciting or joyous as was this wedding. But the reverence was the same. She assumed it was reverence for the occasion, but perhaps it was because both ceremonies took place in a church. She stopped attending church years ago, but she knew, from those past experiences, that it was not the people who created the unique

atmosphere. The ambience was as it was in a church whether people were there or not.

She watched as the bride walked slowly down the aisle and then came, fully, into her line of vision. She could not see the bride's face, covered as it was, by a veil of white lace. In one hand, the bride held a bunch of beautiful white roses, and her other hand was wrapped around the arm of the man who walked with her down the aisle. She who watched knew he was the bride's older brother. They, too, this bride and her brother, had lost parents at a young age, although both had been much older than she had been when she lost her own mother.

This brother, she knew, courtesy of intense discussions with her father as to who was who – who was important in her father's eyes and who was not – among the gentry and the other of the bride and groom's guests, was now the lord of Chesterfield Manor, and so he was, today, their host. Chesterfield Manor, according to her father, was not impoverished as many other local estates were. No doubt, he had postulated, the guest list would reflect that and the celebrations would, he suspected, stand as a testament to the fact. His musings had led her to believe the impressive guest list was one of the reasons he had chosen to accept the invitation, but the realisation shed no real light on what his deeper motivation was, nor on what his intent was, for that matter.

She thought of her conversations with her father – another of the curious changes wrought within him by the appearance of the invitation – as she watched the pair, brother and sister, move past her and walk to stand at the altar at the front of the church. The brother then peeled his sister's hand from his arm and placed it in that of the groom. And then he turned towards the empty seat on the front pew on the opposite side of the church from where she was. The movement caused her to look at him, fully, properly, for the first time, and in that moment, for whatever reason, he, too, looked at her, fully, properly. She felt a frisson of shock go through her, not understanding it, as their eyes locked, and her heart picked up its beat, no longer dormant in her chest. And although he looked away almost immediately, the shock remained, echoing through her limbs.

When the crowd of people in the church sat, she, too, took her seat on the pew next to her father, relieved to have the distraction.

~

The people around him, crowded onto the pews on either side of him, merged into a blur of different colours as he moved down the aisle, his sister's hand clasped tightly around his upper arm, close to his elbow. He could feel the tension in that hand and knew she was nervous. She was marrying for love, this he knew, but she liked not the crowd tightly packed into the estate's chapel. She had begged and pleaded for a small, intimate ceremony, but it was simply not possible, and he could not give his consent to her plans. There were too many people who would take offence, and so invitations had been sent to all the local gentry, and to the nobility further afield. He was not without sympathy, though, and so he laid a reassuring hand on hers and leaned closer to her.

"Focus on the one you love," he whispered. "Ignore everyone else."

And then, as if the Fates themselves had heard and sought to challenge him with his own whispered words, one alone materialised from among the blur and stood out in stark relief against the background of the crowd around her. Unable to help himself, he glanced at her even as he moved closer to where she stood. She, like every other person standing among the pews, was watching the silent procession of which he was a part, but he could not make out her thoughts. She seemed to be watching them impassively, unmoved. Was it the vibrancy of her gown that had caught his attention, tugging and pulling at his focus? Or was it something else? Glancing at her again, he thought perhaps the light from the window was illuminating her, but why was it not illuminating those around her as well? Soon, he would come to know exactly what it was about her that caught his attention this day, but for now, in this moment, he was not privy to the knowledge that would come to him, and so he was puzzled by the strength and clarity of his attraction to her.

He allowed himself to glance at her one more time, and then he ruthlessly focussed his attention on the front of the church and the young man who was eagerly and nervously awaiting his new bride. But when he turned after having relinquished his sister into the more-than-capable hands of her young lover, he couldn't help but glance again at the woman in the vibrant green and cream gown. This time, she looked at him, too, and so their eyes locked. This time, he felt her shock and saw it reflected on her face. So, he thought as he looked away, she recognised him, just as he recognised her. That was, indeed, interesting. There was, it seemed, more to this than mere physical attraction . . . a

lot more.

~

The priest began by welcoming, on behalf of the Lord of Chesterfield Manor and the bride and groom, all those gathered in the church. And then, as he began to speak in depth about the sacred union of marriage, she lost interest. Dispassionately, she observed her own reaction to the ritual of the marriage ceremony, wondering why she was so utterly unmoved by it. She wasn't normally so heartless, or, rather, her heart did not normally sit so dormant in her chest.

The monotonous tones of the priest receded into the background of her awareness as her attention began to wander. And so it was that she first laid eyes on the window . . . .

~

Even from his seat on the front pew, with his back to her, he could feel his awareness of her, and he frowned ever so slightly, not annoyed, just puzzled. And then he felt her awareness sharpen and hone in on the window. He concentrated his focus, no longer hearing the words of the priest, as he attempted to discern her response to it. And as suspicion began to germinate within him, he found it necessary to turn his head subtly, slightly, enough to perceive her expression out of the corner of his eye. Even from where he sat, so many rows in front of her on the opposite side of the church, he knew she was no longer unmoved.

He turned his eyes towards the window himself and looked up at it. Surely not, he thought. Surely she could not see the truth of what was in the window. Surely she was simply transfixed by the window's very great beauty. Only an initiate could perceive the truth of what was in the window because only an initiate knew how to think and see in layers. That was part of the sheer brilliance of the design – the truth utterly hidden from all but those whose eyes were able to peel back the layers of illusion thence to perceive the truth. She could not be one of those, surely, for was she not just another spoilt daughter of yet another lord? There were so many of both around these parts. So why, if that be the case, was he so attuned to her? And why, if that truly be the case, was she so attuned to the window?

~

The window was breathtakingly beautiful, so much so, once she laid eyes on it, she could not, again, remove them. Instead, her eyes absorbed every detail that could be perceived from the distance she was from it. Comprising four panels of increasing and decreasing size on either side – eight panels in total – the panels, together, formed the whole. The window was enormous, dwarfing the priest who stood underneath it, facing the crowd, and it was arched. The grey stone of the church had been smoothed and shaped around the window in such a way as to form a giant arch around it, framing it and acting as a foil for its very great inner beauty. The sun's light, at its zenith, illuminated the tiny pieces of glass that comprised the whole, and the window sparkled with the vibrancy of vivid colour – sapphire blue, emerald green, soft pearl, burnt orange, royal purple, bright yellow, dark brown, pure white and deep red.

At first, distracted by the glorious colour of the whole, she failed to perceive the individual scenes depicted in the coloured glass panels. And even when she did begin to perceive each individual scene, her vision, at first, was clouded by a preconception that the scenes would be Christian or biblical in nature. With her vision thus clouded, and failing to recognise the power inherent in each scene, she still thought them beautiful.

But she did not, at this early stage, fail to notice there was no scene depicting the crucifixion. She noted the fact with interest. That was, indeed, unusual. Dragging her eyes from the window with an effort, she concentrated her focus on the parts of the church she could see from her position. There were no crosses in the church at all, either on the crisp white linen covering the grey-stone altar or on the walls or, for that matter, she realised, glancing upward, on the ceiling. In fact, there were no adornments at all in the church apart from the window. With ever-deepening fascination, she turned her gaze, once again, upon the window. And this time, with clearer vision, she began to recognise that the Christian scenes depicted in the coloured glass of the window's panels were a disguise, and a thinly-veiled disguise at that. The scenes only appeared Christian. In truth, they were not. And what lay underneath the Christian disguises were vastly different stories indeed.

The realisation caused her to draw in a deep, quick, involuntary breath, and she removed her eyes from the window to study the church again. She saw them quickly this

time, the esoteric signs hidden in the corners, on top of the pillars, subtly carved into the grey stone above the windows on the church's side walls. Her eyes widened in shock, and she abandoned her scrutiny of the church to stare unseeing ahead as she sat frozen beside her father. And then, relaxing as the realisation deepened and settled within her, she slowly began to smile, and the smile sparkled in her eyes.

This wasn't a Christian church at all. It was, in point of fact, pagan, dedicated to pagan gods and pagan myths and pagan legends . . . dedicated to the concepts and principles of an Ancient Wisdom she had come to know well.

This was her kind of church. In this obscure little chapel on the estate of a wealthy lord, she had found a place where she could, at last, feel truly at home.

~

His smile echoed hers. He knew now what she was. He could feel the realisation crystallise within her of what the church was and what it represented, and, more significantly, he could feel her response to the knowledge. So, he knew what she was, now he had but to determine who she was. If she was who he hoped she was, then his long, long wait was finally over . . . finally. He had waited an age. No, he corrected himself, he had waited for her across many ages, many eras, many centuries, and many, many lives.

~

When the priest's ritual was finished and the bride and groom walked arm in arm out of the church, the crowd of people stood and followed them. She had no choice but to stand, too, reluctantly. She didn't want to leave the church. She wanted to study the window. She wanted to get closer to it. But, as one caught in a rip, the movement of people around her swept her towards the back of the church, away from the window. So tightly packed were the people around her that she could not even turn her head to glance back longingly. She was trapped.

Outside, she raised her hand to shield her eyes from the sunlight, over bright after the dim interior of the church. The crowd of people standing outside swelled as more and more emerged from the church, and she found herself being introduced to a goodly portion of them. And, after not touching her for more years than she cared to remember,

her father now held her elbow possessively in a firm, tight grip. Her puzzlement at his behaviour of late deepened, and she worried about how she could elude his hold on her and disappear back into the church. She began to despair. But then divine providence intervened in the form of an old friend, someone her father seemed genuinely glad to see. He released her, and the warmth of his handshake signalled to her more loudly than if he'd told her directly that here was an acquaintance worth renewing. He even forgot to introduce her, and in the intensity of the ensuing conversation, she knew she was forgotten completely. Recognising the golden nature of the opportunity, she slipped away quietly, and then turned, pushing her way through the crowd, and, on silent feet, slipped back into the dim, cool interior of the church.

~

He knew she would go back into the church as soon as she could and so he watched her, surreptitiously, wondering how she would escape the overly possessive grasp of her father. He saw the father loosen his grip, and he watched her register her freedom and its deeper implications. When she disappeared into the church's dim interior, he politely excused himself from the group around him, and followed her back into the church.

~

Initially, as she followed in the bride's footsteps, walking down the aisle, she saw nothing but the window as her eyes again adjusted to the change in ambient light. When her vision cleared, though, it was not the window that pulled at her focus. A man who was not the priest who'd conducted the marriage ritual stood like a sentinel at the end of the aisle, and he was watching her approach with keen eyes. He appeared old with long, pure white hair and white beard, but his blue eyes twinkled with the vigour of youth, and the skin on his hands and around his eyes was as smooth as hers. He wore a long brown cloak over a long brown tunic, and on his feet he wore leather sandals. And he held a long staff. She slowed her pace as she studied him. He had the look of the archetypal Hermit, but he looked, too, as if he was guarding the window such that he would require a password from her if he was to allow her closer. She stopped a short distance from him, and they looked at each other. He neither spoke nor moved.

"Hello," she said tentatively.

"Hello," he said back.

"Are you a guest at the wedding?" she asked him, knowing the question to be a silly one.

"No, I am not. But you are, I know."

She nodded absently. "Are you . . . ?" She hesitated. Is he what, she thought. "Are you a priest here?"

He considered the question for a moment. "A priest, you say. Mmmm. Well, yes, now that you mention it, there are some priestly aspects to who and what I am. And if I am a priest, then I am a priest everywhere, not just here."

Now it was her turn to consider his answer even as she formulated her next question. Unconsciously, she moved slowly closer, closer, as if drawn to him against her will. He was only slightly taller than her, and as he watched her edge closer, his blue eyes twinkled at her.

"Did you build this church?" she asked him.

"I helped build it. You could say, I was its inspiration."

"So you created the window, then?"

"I designed it, but it was the hand of a master craftsman that brought it to life."

Silence reigned and filled the church, but it was not an uncomfortable silence. Rather, the silence was strangely full of companionship, the truly profound companionship of old, old friends. It was this she finally recognised, and then she knew who he was. She smiled at him, and her smile was full of such depth, such affection, that he was hopelessly unable to stop himself responding in kind.

"You are my mentor, my constant companion, my guide, and my only friend," she said. "You have walked with me all these years, answered my questions, spoken to me in the depths of my mind often in the dead of night, but sometimes in daylight as well."

"Yes, dearest one, so I have," he said softly.

"When I needed you, you were there, but you allowed me to be lost in the wilderness of my own ignorance. You allowed me to be confused and bewildered. You allowed me to despair. Although, at any stage, you could have offered me a hand up, out of the blackness of that despair, you only ever offered direction and guidance when I sought it.

And often, I forgot to seek it.”

“Yes, dearest one, that is so. But it was you who would have it so, for you had to experience your own ability to find the Way within.”

“I know,” she said gently, smiling. “You know I am truly, deeply grateful. I have expressed it to you often enough.”

He smiled back at her. “Yes, so you have.”

“Why now?” she asked him. “Why are you appearing to me now . . . physically, I mean?”

“Because you are ready. Because you have reached that stage in your initiation where you are ready for your next very great step.”

She absorbed this for a moment, accepting it. He never spoke to her without her accepting whatever he chose to tell her. Such was his very great wisdom. Such wisdom as his was a rare and precious thing in this human world.

“You are not incarnate, are you?” she asked him.

“No, I am not,” he answered her. “I have had my fill of human incarnations. I am done with them.”

She laughed at that. “Oh how I wish the same could be said of me.”

His smile twinkled at her again. “But you are so nearly there, dearest one. So nearly there . . . After this, your next very great step, you, too, will have no need of any more human incarnations. After this, you, like me, will walk among them exactly as you are.”

“As I am,” she repeated softly.

“As you are,” he said again. “Now,” he said brusquely, his tone indicating to her he intended to change the subject, “I’ve a desire to know what you see in the window, dearest one. You are one who has the eyes to see through the illusion to the truth underneath it. So you are able to see both the illusion and the deeper truth. I would know what you perceive.”

He held a hand out to her, and she took it, placing her hand in his. And so they stood, hand in hand, contemplating the window.

~

Ah, he thought, taking a seat on one of the front pews, this will be interesting. In

preparation for a lengthy discussion, he made himself comfortable, crossing his legs quietly so as not to make any noise. He did not wish to alert her to his presence. Matthias knew he was there, of course, because he had followed her down the aisle, keeping a discreet distance between them, and Matthias had seen him. But then, Matthias would have known he was there regardless. Matthias would know he could sense who she was, and Matthias would also know that he would not, now, let her out of his sight.

~

"Tell me what you see?" the old man asked her.

She pointed to a specific scene just left of the window's exact centre. "You see that one," she said. "It looks, for all intents and purposes, as if it's depicting Mary suckling the baby Jesus. And, no doubt, that is indeed what people see when they look at it. But she has hair as black as a raven's wing, and she wears a necklace of turquoise and lapis lazuli. And, she wears a crown. It may look like a halo, but it is a crown. Jesus' mother was not a queen. And look there," she pointed to a particular section of the scene, "in the folds of her robe, hidden but at the same time, very clear, is the Egyptian hieroglyph for Isis. And the hawk who passively watches them from above is symbolic of Horus, the son of Isis and Osiris. 'Tis Isis suckling her son, not Mary. And the child is not the biblical Jesus."

"Mmmm. Interesting," the old man commented. "What else do you see?"

"This scene," she said, pointing to a scene close to them at the window's bottom left, "with the serpent coiled around the apple tree appears to depict Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, except that it is the man holding out the apple to the woman." She turned to the old man. "How do you explain that to the masses?"

He smiled. "We've never had to," he said. "Belief informs perception, does it not, dearest one? The people see Adam as having just accepted the apple from Eve. They don't ever see the man holding the apple out to the woman, and the woman raising her hand to accept it."

"So what do they think of the presence of the other two women then?"

"You see how they stand slightly to one side? The people think of them as angels witnessing the fall of the man and the woman."

"Except that they are not angels, are they? They are goddesses. And the man has been

asked to choose the most beautiful of them . . . always a fateful thing to ask of any man.

'Tis the judgement of Paris, and, rather than choose the option of diplomacy, he judged the goddess Aphrodite to be the most beautiful thereby earning the enmity of Hera and Athene, the two he chose against. 'Tis never a good thing to earn the enmity of the gods, as Paris would learn from direct experience."

"How so?"

"The two goddesses he chose against brought about the events that led to war for his people - a very long war according to the legends, and the deaths of many great heroes, including his own brother."

"Very good," the old man complimented her. "And what of this scene?" he asked her, indicating a scene in the centre of one of the window's right panels.

"Well, it could be Jesus breaking bread and sharing communion with his disciples. He looks very much like the clichéd representation of Jesus with his blue eyes, brown hair, neatly-trimmed beard, and pale skin. But again, he wears a crown, and although there are twelve men seated with him at the table, the table itself is round, and the men are wearing armour. 'Tis King Arthur and his knights, and that means the bejewelled chalice in front of him is the Holy Grail.

"And then, there is this scene," she said, pointing to the scene on the next panel. "It could be the mother of Moses placing the basket in which the child Moses is hidden among the rushes by the side of the river. But the woman is beautiful, and the gown and jewellery she wears is that of a wealthy woman. And the sparkle of sunlight beside her is not sunlight at all, is it? It is a shower of gold. There's only one being I know of who appears in a shower of gold . . ."

"Especially to women he wished to seduce."

"Yes," she agreed, smiling. "And whenever he did, humans were gifted with a god-man hero who would save them from some tyranny. No doubt this is some beautiful Greek princess or queen, and she has, for good or for ill, attracted the attention of Zeus. Perhaps she is the mother of Perseus or Theseus, or maybe she is the mother of Heracles."

"Very good," the old man said. "What else?"

She pointed to the top of the window. "This could be Judas, hanging from a tree with

the pool of his thirty pieces of silver on the ground underneath him having fallen from his open pocket. But he wears a patch over one eye which would indicate that the eye is either injured or missing, and he hangs upside down. Judas hung himself by the neck because it was his intention to kill himself after his betrayal of his master. It was the Norse god Odin who hung upside down from a tree thereby altering his perception of the world. He had no intention of killing himself. Quite the contrary, actually. I love that story. 'Tis one of my favourites.

“And then, this one,” she said, indicating a different part of the window. “See the man watching the woman bathe. He holds a sling and so we are meant to believe this is King David watching the woman, Bathsheba, bathing. She was another man's wife, but he wanted her for himself, and so he organised for the husband to be slain in battle – a sinful act for which he paid a hefty price. The woman, though, is bathing in a natural pool in the forest, and forests were not aplenty in the land of King David's birth. There is a story, though, about a huntsman stumbling across the goddess Artemis as she bathed. Rather than avert his eyes and leave the goddess to her solitude and privacy, he was transfixed by her very great beauty and so continued to watch her, thereby bringing down upon himself her very great wrath. See that?” she said as she pointed to a part of the scene that depicted dogs attacking and bringing down a deer. “As punishment, she turned him into a stag, and he was attacked and killed by his own dogs.

“And then, this one.” She pointed at yet another scene in the window. “That could be Daniel in the den of lions except that he is wrestling the lion, and the lions in Daniel's story did not attack him. That was his particular miracle. So it can only be the first of Heracles' twelve labours – the Nemean Lion.

“And then this scene,” she said, moving on without hesitation, “depicts Ruth walking behind the harvesters harvesting grain in the fields, gleaning the pieces of grain they miss. And the man, Boaz, watches and enquires of the harvesters as to her identity. I can't see another story in the scene, though. I see only the story of Ruth and Boaz.”

“There is no other story,” the old man told her. “This scene is as it is depicted.”

She turned to him and smiled. “Really? I am glad. The story of Ruth is my favourite bible story.”

"You know your bible stories very well, dearest one," he commented.

"Well, the stories in the bible are myths, too, are they not? I love stories of myth no matter their origin and no matter their context. They all hold such beautiful meaning."

"So they do," he agreed. "So they do."

Silence fell between them as they both contemplated other scenes in the window. For some, she could see the biblical myth and not the pagan one, whilst for others, she could see only the pagan myth and could not identify a corresponding or matching biblical one. "The Eleusinian Mysteries," she said quietly, more to herself than to her companion, as she looked at another specific scene, "depicting Persephone's rape and abduction by Hades, Demeter's desperate search for her daughter, and Persephone's temporary return to the physical world.

"By the gods," she breathed after a prolonged moment of silence, "it really is spectacularly beautiful, not just in its appearance, but also in its content, its depictions. Many of the myths depicted in the window hold the Wisdom of Initiation, do they not?"

"Yes, they do," he replied.

"For what purpose did you create this?" she asked without taking her eyes from the beauty of the window.

"To attract like-minded people," he said. "Those who are awake and have the eyes to see Truth."

"Has it worked?"

"It has now."

At last she took her eyes from the window, and she looked at him and smiled.

He smiled back at her.

"If you think the window beautiful now, dearest one," he said, holding her eyes with his own, "illuminated as it is by the sun's light, then you really must see it illuminated by moonlight. Then, its beauty is vastly changed, as is its message."

"Then I must come back tonight," she said urgently. "'Tis the full moon tonight and with a little luck the night sky will remain clear, unclouded, so the moon's light will be bright. Will you meet me here tonight? I would not like to be in the church alone in the dark."

"Of course I will meet you here," he said. "Of course I will be here. I would not miss your first glimpse of the window as seen in the light of the full moon. And you will not come alone, dearest one. Tobias will escort you, won't you, Tobias?"

"Of course," a male voice answered the old man. "'Tis never a good idea for a woman to walk the estate alone after dark, especially once the guests take their fill of wine and ale."

She turned towards the voice. A man was sitting on one of the front pews and he looked comfortable, as if he'd been sitting there for a while. She recognised him. The brother. He was the bride's brother, her host this day. He smiled at her as he stood, and then he held out a hand for her.

"Come, my Lady," he said. "I will bring you back here tonight, I promise. But for now, we must return to the wedding celebrations. I have guests I must greet, and your father will be missing you."

At last she found her voice. "I seriously doubt that," she said tersely. But she moved towards him and placed her hand in his. Before they began the walk back up the church's aisle, she hesitated and turned back to the old man.

"You always have a different name in my stories," she told him. "What, pray tell, is your name in this one?"

He smiled and bowed slightly. "Matthias, at your service, my Lady."

"Matthias," she repeated. "Yes, I like it."

"I know. You always do."

~

Outside the church, the crowd of people had thinned somewhat. Coaches had appeared, their horses standing passively, patiently. Some of the people were moving towards them, and people were already sitting in some of them.

"We have organised carriages to take the guests back to the house," the bride's brother told her, "but I've a preference for walking. Your father has not waited for you, it would seem, so will you accompany me or would you prefer to ride in a carriage?"

"My preference is to walk," she said. "So I will accompany you."

They walked through the people still crowded around the entrance to the church,

stopping a few times to exchange pleasantries with some of them. They were, after all, his guests, and he could not ignore them. Eventually, freed of the need to make polite conversation, he escorted her past the stationary carriages. She released his hand to lift the hem of her skirts clear of the grass, unconsciously putting a little distance between them as she did so. She felt uncomfortable with him, partly because her heart was beating a faster rhythm than normal in her chest, and partly because she could not help but remember her reaction to him when their eyes had locked in the church at the beginning of the marriage ceremony. It had happened again, too, when she'd turned to see who had responded to Matthias' question and saw him sitting on the front pew. It was as if a jolt of shock went through her, and as it passed, it left in its wake the same faster-than-normal heartbeat. Why would her heart respond so strongly to the mere sight of him? It did not make sense. She simply did not understand her reaction to him, did not understand it at all, and she was afraid of it. She was afraid of him.

“How did you initiate yourself with no one to guide you?” he asked her, breaking the small uncomfortable silence that had fallen between them.

She didn't answer his question immediately. It wasn't, in point of fact, an easy question to answer.

“Well,” she said, still thinking through her answer, “I had no idea what was happening to me at first. After my mother died, I spent a lot of time by myself, and that meant I had a lot of time to think – an essential component of any initiation, I think. When I was older, I began to write down all my thoughts, realisations, insights and revelations, and I think that helped to organise them into a more coherent whole – a whole I could then see and begin to understand. Plus, I was able, then, to identify emerging themes in what I was learning, or in what was coming to me. And I knew they'd come from within me because I'd not come across them anywhere else or in anyone else.

“And, I was greatly assisted by my great-grandfather's collection of books. He was considered eccentric in his day. Some even thought he was a little crazy. I think my grandfather and father were slightly ashamed of him. But I have discovered a lot of answers to a lot of the questions I've asked in his books. And it is because of his books that I know so much about the myths of many cultures, including the Christian one.

Perhaps it was from him that I inherited my love of myth. Anyway, in one of his books, I discovered the Egyptian concept of initiation and the different temples used in the different stages of initiation that corresponded to the seven energy centres in the physical body. It was then that I realised I was experiencing something similar. But it just happened. I did not ask for it. And as for guidance, what is within me has been my guide."

He listened in silence, and when she fell silent, he did not respond.

"What about you?" she asked him. "You are an initiate, too, are you not?"

"I am," he confirmed. "But I was born into this life fully initiated."

The shock she felt at his response to her question coursed through every limb in her body, and she stopped walking.

He took her arm gently and said, "Don't stop. People will talk."

She glanced behind her and saw to what he was referring. Some of the wedding's guests, like them, had chosen against taking a carriage and were following them back to the manor's great house.

"How old were you when you knew?" she asked him, once again fitting her steps to his, keeping pace with him, and gently removing her arm from his grasp.

"By the time I was six or seven years old," he answered her, "I knew I knew things others did not, and I knew I could see what others could not. Over the years since then, memories of other lives I've lived resurfaced, and, in particular, lives I lived in the ancient temples. And with those memories came the memory and, therefore, the knowledge of initiation I gained in those lives." He paused and then added, "I think you, too, hold the knowledge of initiation within you from lives you've lived in the past."

"So, did you know . . . what I am, I mean?"

"Yes."

When he didn't elaborate, she pushed him for more detail. "How?"

"I felt your response to the window."

"You felt my response? How is that possible?"

"I am attuned to you. I feel every nuance of thought and feeling that passes through you."

She swallowed nervously, feeling intimidated, her unease in his company exacerbated by his revelation. She consciously tried to match her steps with his, desperately trying to keep up when all she wanted to do was stop walking and stand rooted to the spot so she could stare at him, willing him to take back his words.

"Is this a common occurrence?" she asked him, trying not to believe him. "Can you feel the thoughts of everyone, or is it unique to me?"

"Just you."

"Then what am I feeling now?"

He glanced at her and a wry grin altered the contours of his mouth and lit his eyes. He was genuinely amused by her question and by the response he knew would come when he answered it. Even knowing how she would react, he responded truthfully anyway.

"You are uneasy with me because you do not understand your reaction to me, and you are afraid of it. So you think you are afraid of me, when it is you you fear. And your unease in my company is heightened, now, by what I have just told you."

This time, she did stop walking . . . abruptly. So, he really did know what she was thinking and feeling. That was, indeed, really quite terrifying.

Again, he reached for her arm, applying pressure, urging her to keep walking, only this time he was, at least in part, dragging her so that he pulled her arm ahead of her.

"Please," he said urgently, "I do not want the people behind us to catch up. I've no wish to make small talk with them, and I certainly do not want them to hear our conversation."

She heard his plea, but it moved her and stirred her not at all. She breathed deeply with her upset. "Do you have any idea how it feels to lose your privacy to such an extent?"

"Yes," he answered her. "I know exactly how it feels. And it is a normal state of being for us. You have forgotten the truth of that, but you will remember in time now that we are together once again."

"How is it possible?" she asked him.

He didn't answer her immediately. Instead, he waited until they were close to the estate's great house. At the entrance to the house, he stopped and turned to face her.

"How do you think it's possible? 'Tis not like you to ask questions when you already know the answer."

"We are the same," she said flatly.

"You see," he said. "You do know. I have guests to greet," he said quickly, aware of the people closing in on them. "Find your father and stay with him. When I am free of the burden of duty and responsibility, I will come and find you. And we will talk more."

~

She did as he commanded. She found her father and then stayed close to him. Not that staying close to him was difficult given his hold on her once more. For the most part, he kept his hand firmly under her elbow, effectively anchoring her beside him. It was clear he would not allow her to wander off again.

As the hours of the afternoon passed and she was introduced to more and more people, particularly people with sons her own age, she at last understood her father's motives for accepting the invitation. He was parading her in her pretty gown because he wanted her to marry, either for her own sake or for his. She hadn't quite worked out which it was. She referred to them as 'lordlings' in the privacy of her own thoughts, the procession of young men she was presented to. Not a single one of them stood out from the others. They were all the same with their false flattery and their obsequious gestures. None of them impressed her. Rather, within minutes of meeting them, every one of them began to bore her.

And with every new lordling she was introduced to, she freshly berated herself for a fool. How could she have been so naively blind, so stupid? Now that she could see it, her father's intent was, really, and had been, obvious all along. She cursed the keep's bountiful income, too. Her father may have withdrawn from society but he had not neglected his own estate, and he was an astute business man. They, too, she and her father, like the lord of Chesterfield Manor and his sister, were not impoverished. And it was obvious in the fawning attentions of each new lordling that the healthy income generated by her father's estate was well-known among the local gentry and nobility. A pretty face, she knew, was never enough to generate such interest. There had to be some sort of generous dowry involved to attract such numerous and diverse attentions.

As if the lordlings weren't bad enough, she also had to contend with hopeful mothers and overly-insistent and persistent grandmothers. Whilst the fathers engaged her own father in conversation, the mothers and grandmothers – the matriarchs – questioned her on her accomplishments, obviously trying to ascertain her suitability as a match for their particular lordling. Their responses became predictable. They tut-tutted when they discovered she did not sew or play the piano or sing as did the other girls of her age.

“Writing!” the latest in a string of grandmothers stated, her shock and outrage both predictable and obvious. “But that is not a seemly occupation for a young lady in your position. You should cultivate those accomplishments acceptable for a genteel young lady.”

“Writing gives me very great pleasure,” she snapped, finally losing patience and uncaring that she was being rude, “so I've no intention of ceasing it nor of replacing it with a pastime as mind-numbingly boring as sewing.”

The old woman looked shocked for a brief moment, and then she drew in an enormous breath, enlarging her already generous chest. “Well, I never!” she barked, outrage evident in the tone of her voice.

She who was the recipient of such admonishment sighed inwardly. These people were all the same. They utterly lacked the imagination necessary to be unique. If she'd been given a piece of gold for every time she'd been told she had grown into a 'lovely young woman' or that she was 'the image of her mother', she would be a wealthy woman now in her own right and would have no need of marriage. If this was society, she thought, then she had no desire to be a part of it. She wished the invitation had never come. She wished her father had not accepted it. She wished she was back at the keep reading one of her great-grandfather's books.

To make matters worse, her father obviously heard the interchange with the old woman. He leaned towards her and said quietly so as not to be overheard, “I have been remiss in your education. For that, I apologise. I always thought it your mother's domain, and in her absence, I failed to fill the void she left, and I have failed you.”

She did not know what to say, so she said nothing at all. She wanted to tell him she did not want the sort of education 'young' ladies her age usually received. She wanted to

tell him she had relished the freedom brought about by the absence of both her parents. But she kept silent. She knew he would not want to hear that. It was, after all, that very freedom he was apologising for.

As the afternoon wore on, she felt herself wilting with the effort of sustaining conversations that stimulated and interested her not at all. The effort of hearing the same things said over and over again but behaving as if each time was the first was taking its toll. She wanted to escape. The hall they were in was massive with an impressively high ceiling, but the press of people crowded into it was still stifling. She wanted to breathe fresh air, and to be free of the tight bodice of her gown. She wanted to escape these people, to never see any of them again. She wanted to scream at them to leave her alone. She wanted to run from them . . .

And then, he was beside her, steadying her with a hand under her elbow.

"Do you see," he said, leaning down to speak quietly into her ear and indicating one of the hall's large windows with an inclination of his head, "the last of the sun's light disappears?" She could feel his breath against her ear, and it caused tiny goosebumps to make an appearance on the back of her neck. "Soon," he said, "very soon, I will fulfil my promise to you. Be patient. Stay calm. Only one thing more must I do before I am free. I must dance with some of the daughters, but the first dance is yours. Will you dance the first dance with me?"

She couldn't speak, such was her reaction to him. It annoyed her that he understood her reaction to him when she did not. So she nodded her acceptance.

He smiled at her. "Good. Then I will come for you soon. Do not accept any more invitations to dance."

"I don't intend to."

He was gone as quickly as he'd materialised.

Once again, her father leaned towards her. "It is a great honour he does you, and an equally great compliment he pays you. 'Tis more than I'd hoped for. You have done well to attract the eye of one such as he."

~

In his arms, she moved easily to the music, oblivious to the crowd at the edge of the

dance floor watching their every move. Instead, she was concentrating on what he was telling her in a low, quiet voice, his lips barely moving. He was instructing her, telling her where to meet him, to go there immediately after the conclusion of the dance, and to await him no matter the amount of time it took him to get there. He made her repeat his instructions so that he knew she'd understood and remembered everything she'd been told. When she repeated his instructions perfectly, he was satisfied and gave himself over to the pleasure of dancing with her.

~

She awaited him nervously, although, if asked, she could not have said why she was nervous. There were no lights where she stood, but the light of the moon, brilliant against the blackness of the night, caressed her where she stood, and she took comfort from it. She could hear the faint strains of the violins from where she stood, and she could hear the brief silence between each dance. So she'd counted them and knew he would come soon. Seven dances following the one he'd danced with her. That was his promise.

He appeared, as promised, like a shadow beside her.

"Here," he whispered, "put this on. 'Tis a clear night but chill."

She pulled the cloak around her, grateful for the protection it offered against the chill of the night. After the warmth of the ballroom, the chill of the night had raised tiny goosebumps on her arms and neck.

"Come," he urged, "this way."

They walked in silence. Only the faint crunch of their footsteps broke the silence and the stillness of the night around them. They walked swiftly.

"Are you in a hurry to return to the celebrations?" she asked him a little breathlessly.

"By the gods," he said, sounding amused. "No, not at all. Are you?"

"You already know how I feel about returning, I do believe," she said somewhat brusquely.

He laughed softly. "So I do. So it should not surprise you that I feel the same."

"I do not feel your feelings as you do mine," she said. "And you are much better than I am at socialising with them . . ."

"I've had a lot more practice," he interrupted her. "But that does not mean I enjoy it.

'Tis what I call an evil necessity."

The comment elicited a smile from her. An apt description, she thought to herself.

At the entrance to the church, he stopped her with a hand on her arm.

"You should know, if you walk into this church tonight, you will not be the same when you walk out of it."

She looked at him in the moonlight. She could not see his eyes, but she could feel the intensity in them as he looked at her. She nodded her understanding and acknowledgement of his warning.

"Good," she said softly.

~

There was more light inside the church than outside it. Two tall candelabra stood on either side of the grey-stone altar, looking like trees with a skinny trunk and many branches, each holding its own lit candle, both giving ample light to the front of the church. She briefly noted the fact of them being there, gratefully acknowledging the light they gave, but then she looked at the window and could not look away.

She walked up the aisle, never once taking her eyes from the beauty of the window, illuminated now by the moon's light. Matthias had been right, of course. Matthias was always right. The window's beauty was vastly changed in the moon's light. The coloured pieces of glass appeared black and the luminous light had picked out only the pieces of glass coloured white. Against the blackness of the window as a whole, the brightly illuminated pieces of white glass appeared to mirror the stars winking against the inky black of the night sky.

At the end of the aisle, in front of the altar, she stopped, looking up at the window, only half aware of Matthias on her right and the bride's brother, Tobias, on her left.

But then, both were forgotten as the seemingly random pattern of illuminated glass resolved into coherent, organised letters and the true message of the window revealed itself.

She gasped and took an involuntary step backwards, bringing a hand to her chest in a futile attempt to still the pounding of her heart. She read the message and then re-read it, trying to absorb it but failing miserably. The implications rocked her, so much so that she

visibly swayed. Neither of the men, one on each side of her, moved to offer assistance, and she became aware of their silence and glanced at them both. They were, of course, watching her closely.

“How many people can see the truth in the window?” she asked them both.

“Only we three as far as I know,” Matthias answered her.

She looked at the window again, and this time, could see the words with greater clarity. She re-read the message in the window, and this time, she absorbed it. This time, she felt the message seep into her bones, pulse through her muscles, and course through her veins as it became a part of her:

*Lady of Light,  
You are the High Priestess  
Of an ancient religion,  
A religion older than time itself.  
Awaken to your Light,  
You have.  
Now, awaken your power,  
You must.*

“Then,” she said slowly in response to Matthias' answer to her question, “since I am the only female, I must assume this message is meant for me.”

“For you,” Matthias confirmed, “and you alone.”

They allowed her another moment of silence to absorb the truth in the window. And then, Tobias asked her, “What is your power, my Lady?”

Without hesitation she answered him, “The power to affect change in consciousness.” She looked at him. “But what good is such power when the whole world is asleep? You cannot change consciousness in those who are sound asleep.”

“True,” he agreed. “But what of those who are capable of awakening, and what of those who **are** awakening, and what of those who are awake?”

She looked at him in silence for a moment. “Do they exist?”

He did a curious thing then. He took her hand in his and raised it, bringing it to his lips. He held her hand against his lips for a long moment, and then he raised his eyes to hers once again, although he did not release her hand.

“They will do,” he said. “They will do.”

*The Fair*

*I am moving  
Onto another plane of existence,  
And it is me who is taking me there.  
But I can take you there, too,  
If you want to come with me. . . .*

I do not belong in this world,  
This Separated, disconnected reality  
Humans currently create for themselves.  
'Tis hell they create,  
Because, of course, they only know how to create out of fear,  
And, therefore, they only know how to create their fears,  
Not their dreams.  
And, now, the consequent chaos and trauma  
Of this collective reality  
Is more than I can bear,  
Especially when I know humans can change this reality,  
And easily, too.  
So who are my people, then?  
Where are my people?  
With whom do I belong?  
Is there no one here with whom I may connect?  
Am I truly on my own, then?  
Is anyone here, in this reality, capable of reflecting me back to me?  
Is anyone here of the same ilk, the same Light, as me?  
Anyone at all . . . . ?

## *A Promise*

The village was abuzz with excitement. In fact, the whole village hummed with excitement as if the excitement was vibrating the very air itself so that every villager could breathe it in and absorb it for him- or herself. The air of excitement permeated every hut, every cottage, every stone in the village. It lit the eyes and put a spring in the step of each and every villager as he or she went about his or her business . . . well, that is, all except one.

That one shared not the excitement because she was not privy to the cause or the source of it. At first, as she had begun to walk around the market as normal, she had failed to notice anything unusual or different as she concentrated on her mental list of purchases. But as she walked from stall to stall, slowly filling the basket on her arm so that it became heavier and heavier, she could not fail to notice the animated conversations, the flushed cheeks, and the sparkle of anticipation that lit the eyes of everyone else in the market. Many a time she was forced to await a natural interruption in just such a conversation before being served. And once she was served, she watched that same conversation resume as if the interruption had not occurred. Consequently, there was not the usual exchange of pleasantries, and as a result, her trip to the market was not turning out to be as enjoyable as anticipated. Eventually, as she watched them, the behaviour of the villagers in the market began to distract her to the extent that she forgot what was next on her mental list of required purchases.

“Is something going on that I'm not aware of, George?” she asked the villager's baker, bread being one of those truly essential items that was impossible to forget, hence her visit to his stall in spite of her distraction. “Am I missing something important?”

“Well, ye'd 'a known all abou' it if ye didna' have yer head in yer books all the time,” he responded good naturedly. “'O course yer missing something, lassie. The fair's a' comin' to the green beyond the village. Tha's wha' all the excitement is abou', lassie. The fair's a' comin' to town.” This last was said with a flourish. He opened his hands and

spread them in a wide arc as if introducing something of great import.

She frowned. "The fair?" she repeated. "What fair?"

George snorted his amusement. "The fair. Ye know, them wha' has music, 'n puppets for the kiddies, 'n shows 'n sights 'n sweet things to eat. The fair."

"Oh. Right. The fair. How long has everyone known the fair was coming?"

"Only more 'n a week now, lassie. Some o' the fair folk came ahead o' the rest to tell us the fair be on its way, 'n to our very own village, too. Who'd 'a thought it? Our village. Fair's never come to our village before to m' knowledge. It should be passin' through town today and settin' up yonder." He waved his hand in the air, indicating the green beyond the boundaries of the village.

She digested this information. "How long will it stay?"

He shrugged his massive shoulders. "I dunno, lass. Many weeks, I would think. Folk be comin' in from all around like to see the fair, ye know. All the neighbouring villages know abou' it see. Our wee village will be right full to the brim, methinks."

Her interest in the conversation slipped just a little, her smile fading. "Oh," she said softly. Great, she thought. More people crowding the village. Just what she'd always wanted.

"Now ye will at least go 'n have a wee look, will ye no', lassie?" George asked her, seeing her smile fade and knowing full well what was on her mind, knowing her as he did. He knew her far better than she thought he did. "'Tis no' every day we get a fair passin' our way. Ye never know. Ye might actually have some fun for a change." He snorted again in amusement, obviously enjoying his own humour. But he sobered again, and quickly, when she neither smiled nor in any way responded to his teasing provocation. "Lassie?" he asked sombrely, seriously, "tell me yer no' plannin' to hide out in tha' there wee cottage o' yers. 'Twould be a righ' shame to miss the fun. Do I 'ave to come ge' ye m'self . . . . drag ye out o' tha' there wee hovel o' yers? 'Cause I will if I 'ave to."

She attempted a smile but it appeared to George as more of a grimace. "Fairs aren't really my thing, George."

He wiped his hands on his big white apron and then put them on his hips. "'N just

how many fairs 'ave ye been to in yer time, then?"

She thought, although not much thought was required to answer his simple question. "Mmmm, none," she answered sheepishly. "But I've read about them."

"Ah, 'n readin' abou' them means ye know wha' they're all abou' then, does it?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact."

"Nay, lass," he said on a long sigh, "it does no'." He removed his hands from his hips and placed them on the table in front of him, leaning towards her. "Promise me," he said quietly, "promise me ye will pay it a visit. Ye dun 'ave to stay long. Bu' I want yer word ye will at least 'ave a wee look."

She eyed him quizzically for a moment before responding with a smile and an amused light in her eyes. "Why is it so important to you that I go to the fair?"

"Honestly, lassie? 'Cause yer too young 'n far too beautiful to be hidin' away with yer nose in those books 'o yers. Ye need to get out o' tha' wee hovel o' yers 'n 'ave some fun. Really, ye do, lass. Let the wee bairns see a different side o' ye. All tha' learnin' be good for 'em. Heck, they'll be knowin' more 'n us soon enough thanks to yer teachings. We know tha'." He skewered her with a knowing look. "Bu' there be more to life than learnin' letters, ye know. The wee bairns will tell ye tha' themselves."

As much as she hated to admit and acknowledge it, he made a very good point. She knew he was right. She smiled her gratitude at him. "All right, George. I promise. 'Tis a good point you make. I'll admit that. You have my word. I will visit the fair, see what it's about."

He nodded, straightening and grinning broadly, folding his arms across his massive chest and looking smugly self satisfied, like a cat that's just swallowed a bowl full of thick cream. "I'll be holdin' ye to tha' mind."

"Yes," she replied, sounding ever so slightly dubious, "I know you well enough to know that. You have my word," she repeated again. "I won't go back on it."

She began the short journey towards home, leaving the square and its market, holding her heavy basket with both hands, wondering what she'd agreed to, and hoping the fair would not prove too disruptive to her peaceful existence and her very familiar but rather satisfying routine.

~

As far as villages go, her village, the one she'd chosen to call home, was neither large nor small. It possessed all the usual things you'd expect to find in a village - clusters of huts and cottages, a small square for market stalls, a handful of inns and taverns, cobblestoned streets, alleys and lanes, a hall for village meetings, and a green beyond the last of the cottages for occasions such as Beltane's great fire and . . . well, for fairs when they came to town.

The village was divided in half by its main thoroughfare - a road wide enough for two carts or carriages travelling in opposite directions to pass each other by with plenty of room to spare. This wide road joined the village to the world at large and sliced it almost perfectly down the middle. In fact, this road was one of the main roads connecting the south of the land with the north so that the village provided a perfect stop over for travellers wishing to break their journey. Thus, the inns and taverns in the village were a primary source of its relatively thriving little economy.

So why this village? Why had she chosen to settle here and make her home here in this particular village? Well, partly because of its size, it being neither too big nor too small, and partly because the road that effectively cut the village in half served to keep the village well connected with the world around it. 'Twas not a village that existed in isolation thence to stew, and possibly become overcooked, in its own unique juices, so to speak. The steady stream of those passing through saw to it that the village was well informed as to the politics and the various events that served to shape and influence the landscape of the land as a whole.

Although she had long ago chosen to withdraw, she had discovered that she was still desirous of knowing what was shaping the landscape at any given moment in time. What was her motivation, do you think? Was it so she could be prepared should a calamitous event, like war, for example, befall her land? If you thought so, you would be wrong. No, her motivation was in simply being connected, and nothing is more connecting than knowledge. And nothing aided knowledge like the information brought to the village by those passing through it.

And so, the village was home to her for now, and had been for many, many years. But

soon, she knew, there would come a time when she would be forced to move on. She dreaded that time, for she hated uprooting and replanting herself. She hated starting again, especially since she had done so many, many, many times before . . . too many times, she thought. But move on she must, for soon it would become obvious to the villagers that she was not like them, not like them at all. If they would but prove themselves capable of accepting her differences she would not hesitate to stay. But so far, although she had come to care for them, they had shown themselves to be just like everyone else.

And so, home, for her, at least for a little while longer, was a small cottage situated on the outer edge of the village, but in the other half from that of the small square and its market. It also happened to be as far from the village green as it was physically possible to be whilst still being in the village. This was by accident, not design, but a fortuitous accident it was turning out to be.

Anyway, to get to the market, and then to get home again, she was forced to cross the large road. Today, however, on her way back home, she found her path blocked by a long procession of horses and wagons.

Fascinated despite herself, enough to forget, temporarily, the heavy weight of her basket, she stared at the colourful array of wagons. With large colourful wheels – bright red, yellow, green, blue – each wagon was colourfully painted, some depicting colourful scenes. Men and women seated in front of the wagons waved cheerfully and energetically at the crowd of villagers gathering on either side of the road to watch. The villagers gathering around her began to cheer as they waved back, vocalising their welcome and their excitement.

Just as George had predicted, the fair had come to town. Today.

Unconsciously, knowing her way across the road would be blocked for a while, she studied the fair folk as they passed. These were people who never settled in one place. These were people who were constantly on the move, passing from one village to the next, one town to another. But their community, she knew, their troupe, was no less important to them than for those who settled in one village or town. Perhaps their community was more important in a way because their troupe was home for them. That is to say, they

were their home rather than home being a place of stone and mortar. She wondered what such a life would be like, and she wondered if she would love it or hate it. Either way, she admired these people for the way they lived. Such freedom, she thought. Imagine travelling the land bringing with them wherever they went music and entertainments guaranteed to make the people happy, or, at least, to help the people forget their unhappiness. She wondered if the fair folk, themselves, were happy in their freedom, their community. Or did they, perhaps, long for the stability of an established place in which to live.

With her thoughts thus occupied, her eyes beheld him at first without actually seeing him. He was riding a black horse, and it was the very great beauty of the horse that first snapped her thoughts to attention and pulled her back into the moment. The horse was tall, its coat shiny, glossy black, its long, black tail swishing the air behind it. He, the horse's rider, was straight backed but relaxed in the saddle, as if he was very used to being there. He wore a tailored navy-blue coat over a crisp, white shirt, black trousers and polished black boots. She raised her eyebrows in silent question. His attire, and his horse, for that matter, were more that of a wealthy merchant than a travelling entertainer. His black hair was pulled back into an elegant pony tail and held there with a black ribbon. Both horse and rider were majestic, and they caught and held her eye.

But he noticed her not at all. Rather, he looked ahead of him, seemingly unaware of the crowd gathered by the road side to welcome the troupe. Riding beside one of the wagons, he passed by close to her so that she was forced to look up at him. He passed by close enough so that she could see the vivid blue of his eyes and the glint of silver in his ear. When they passed, horse and rider, she followed them both with her eyes, not noticing any more of the colourful wagons. She watched the horseman until her view of him was obscured by both the crowd and the wagons coming in behind him. And then she turned her eyes, once again, upon the procession of colourful wagons making their way slowly into town.

But she saw them not at all.

When the last of the wagons passed her by, the crowd of people around her began to move in its wake, following the procession. She watched them for a moment, but then she

felt, once again, the weight of the basket in her hands, and so she crossed the road with the sole intention of going back home, there to firmly and steadfastly shut the door, physically and mentally, on all she had just witnessed.

~

Carefully, she replaced her pen in its holder, and then, equally as carefully, she stoppered the small bottle of ink beside her pen, making sure it was completely and properly sealed. Then, she picked up the parchment she had been writing on and gently blew on the fresh ink to dry it. Satisfied the ink had taken and would remain on the parchment exactly as she'd placed it, she laid the parchment back on the table, straightened, and rubbed a tired hand around her stiff neck. Every time she experienced a stiff neck and aching shoulders, which was every time she wrote, which was, in fact, every day, she swore she wouldn't stay bent over her work for so long.

But when she wrote, she tended to lose track of time so that, invariably, she remained bent over her work for far, far too long, hence her stiff neck and aching shoulders. She flexed her shoulders in a vain attempt to release the tension in them, and then she rose and went to put some wood on the fire in the hearth. As was usual whenever she wrote, the fire had all but died out and required some careful and thorough stoking to bring it to life once again. Satisfied the flames were accepting and taking hold of the new wood, she rose again and went to make herself some supper. She filled a plate with George's wonderfully soft, fresh bread, the village's hard but delicious yellow cheese, some olives, and some fresh and dried fruit, and took it over to the single chair in front of the fire.

Dusk, with its fading, changing light, was one of her favourite times of the day. Then, in the peace and quiet of her small cottage, with the sounds of village life fading around her as the village settled for the night, she could stare into the flames of her fire and contemplate many things, anything she wanted to contemplate, actually.

When she'd finished her supper, she wrapped herself in the quilt from her bed, rested her feet on the stool in front of her, settled herself comfortably into her chair, and lost herself in the flames of the fire. After a while, her eyelids grew heavy, and she began to doze. Then, her dreams were filled with strange images, people doing strange things, people in times past and future, and in faraway places she did not recognise, although she

understood where they were, and perhaps she even knew who they were. Always was it thus whenever she slept. She did not mind. She was used to the strangeness of her dreams, and so she slept on, peacefully, undisturbed.

And then an image of far greater clarity usurped her dreams, slicing through the strange images, banishing them, as if those images were a curtain in her mind that could simply be swept aside. The horseman she had seen whilst watching the procession of wagons stood in front of her, looking at her, or, rather, looking **into** her with his vivid blue eyes, and he was bending over her hand to place his lips against the back of it. When he straightened, he looked straight at her, into her, again, and, without smiling, said clearly, "Hello, my Lady. At last, we meet again. Do you know why we are here? You called," he said, answering his own question, "and we heard your call. So we have come."

She jerked awake in the darkness and sat up in the chair. The fire in its small hearth had all but burnt its fuel and was, now, nothing more than a few glowing embers. She looked at it without seeing it, breathing deeply, quickly, and her heart was pounding, hard.

Fear, she thought. The image of the horseman in her dream had aroused her fear. So what was it she feared? Was it him she was afraid of? Or was it the eerie fact that he seemed to be able to see right into her, past all her defences, her disguises . . . ?

The gods forbid! That simply would not do. No one could see into her. That was forbidden . . . utterly.

Swallowing nervously, she clutched her blanket around her for warmth and rose from the chair in front of the fire, moving to curl up on her small bed. Gradually, her heart settled in her chest, returning to its normal beat, and the image of the dream faded as she relaxed into a peaceful sleep, the horseman, once again, forgotten.

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## *The Circle*

The village green was large, covering a relatively vast expanse of land. In fact, if you counted the green as part of the village, then the green almost effectively doubled the village in size. She stopped in surprise as she left the last of the cottages behind her and the village's green filled her vision. Never, never had she seen it thus, covered in colourful wagons as it was. The fair folk had certainly made themselves at home on it. Some of the wagons she could see on the outer edge of the cluster showed distinct signs of homeliness, like washing, hung on lines strung between the wagons, waving in the breeze. But the fair itself, or, more specifically, the entrance to the fair was obviously marked by a small forest of tall colourful flags and pennants flapping in the afternoon breeze. Reluctantly, she began to walk towards it, hoping George was in attendance so that she could present herself to him and fulfil the promise she'd made him three days previously. She did not fancy visiting the fair again. Once was enough.

She already knew all the villagers were at the fair. She had never seen the village so deserted as she'd walked through it. But even so, she stopped, again, in surprise, at the entrance to the fair, eyeing the massive crowd of people dubiously. She hated crowds.

Taking a deep breath, she picked up her skirts, holding them clear of the grass, and took the first steps that would bring her into contact with the crowd. She had taken unusual care with her appearance, chastising herself as she did so, but unable to help herself. She had painstakingly pinned her hair so that it was partially caught up and partially cascaded in curls down her back, and she wore one of her best gowns. The colour of the gown – emerald green – matched the colour of her eyes she knew. Its skirts were long, its bodice tight, both hugging her body suggestively, and around the large cuffs of its long sleeves, its scooped neckline, and the edge of its hem was embroidery of gold. The gown had always reminded her of that time between summer and autumn when the green of summer was still in abundance but the leaves on the trees were just beginning to show signs of turning those fabulous, flaming autumn colours.

Well may you ask why she had taken such pains with her appearance just to go to a fair. But if you did feel the need to ask such a question then I'm afraid you would only be revealing your ignorance where women are concerned, for is the answer not obvious?

And so, well may *we* ask what was the greater of her motivations for coming to the fair this day – the fulfilment of a promise made or the hope of seeing the horseman again? I strongly suspect the lure of the horseman to be the stronger of the two motivations, particularly since she had, for three nights in a row now, dreamt of him. In fact, or in truth, she was equally as desirous of putting him from her mind, permanently, as she was of seeing him again. And these two conflicting desires were pitted against each other within her. She knew which of the two was the impetus for taking such pains with her appearance, but she wasn't sure which of the two was her true motivation for coming to the fair this particular day. If paying the fair a visit was an unavoidable inevitability, courtesy of a promise made, then she had procrastinated long enough. That much she knew.

Despite her reluctance, the sights of the fair, not to mention its atmosphere, captured her attention and caused an unconscious smile to sparkle in her eyes as she wandered around. The fair itself was contained within a giant circle of the colourful wagons, and each wagon, it seemed, had something unique and special to offer the fair's visitors.

On one side of the circle, a wagon had been turned into a small stage for a magician who was holding his audience captive with his magician's tricks. As she watched him, he pushed a white silk scarf into his closed fist, but when he pulled it out the other side, the scarf had turned blood red. And then he opened his hand dramatically to show his audience there was no other scarf hidden within it. His audience gasped and then clapped their appreciation while the magician bowed low, sweeping his hand across his waist as he did so – an elegant, almost courtly gesture, she thought, smiling as she watched him.

On the opposite side of the large circle, a fool, dressed in hose of different colours – one colour for each leg – and an ornate, golden doublet was making his audience roar with laughter on yet another stage. The little bells on the ends of his shoes and the ends of his hat tinkled with his antics and his acrobatics as he tumbled and somersaulted across his stage. Watching him and his audience, she smiled, too, not so much at his antics but at the

effect he was having on his audience.

At another point in the circle, a group of children sat cross-legged on the grass, transfixed, in front of a tiny theatre. The theatre sat on large red wheels and was opened like a cupboard so that its doors formed part of the scenery. And across the theatre's tiny stage skipped half a dozen or so puppets at the ends of a tiny forest of pieces of string. She stood watching the children and the puppets for a long time. Never had she seen the children sit so still. The puppets were holding their attention completely. She was certainly unable to make it so, despite numerous efforts on her part to try and make her lessons as entertaining for them as possible. Perhaps, she thought absently as she watched both puppets and children, she should get the puppets to give the children their lessons from now on.

Still, she was forced to admit, her attention wavering, there was something here for everyone, regardless of age, gender, skill, vocation, interests. No wonder the villagers loved it here. One of the wagons in the giant circle was full of bright, colourful scarves, shawls, slippers, parasols, fans, and cloaks. Another offered gold and silver jewellery, ornate silver boxes of different shapes and sizes, charms, chimes, and other trinkets. Another offered the fair's visitors little colourful balls of candy on tiny sticks or in cones of thick papyrus, and honey cakes, toffee apples, cinnamon biscuits, and an assortment of sweet breads and buns. Other wagons contained games, men and boys alike pitting their skills one against the other with soft balls as they attempted to hit moving metal ducks, others trying their luck with a large spinning wheel, different symbols painted on its outer edge, and yet others trying to claim their prize with rubber rings thrown onto sticks. All competed for a myriad of soft toys, or so it seemed. She failed to understand the appeal.

And then, there were smaller tents between the wagons where one could have one's own fortune told in a reading with tarot cards, tea leaves, crystal balls, or one's own palm. These, too, brought a smile to her face and sparkled in her eyes although she was not, herself, tempted. She had never bothered telling anyone in the village that she was perfectly capable of reading the cards herself. Tarot cards were acceptable in the context of the fair where they could be taken as seriously, or not, as one chose. Not so in the context of everyday life in the village. That truth, she knew, would just cause the villagers

to look upon her with suspicion, which they would soon enough anyway. Far better not to speed up that process.

~

He leaned against the side of the wooden stage, folding his arms in front of him, watching the people crowded into the large circle formed of the wagons. It would soon be his turn to play his part in the entertainments offered to the fair's visitors, and he always liked to gauge the mood of the crowd before he played.

So, he was not absently watching the crowd. He was paying close attention to it. He, too, saw the group of people gasping at the magician's tricks. He, too, noticed the effect the fool was having on another group, and he, too, noted the uncanny stillness of the children as they watched the puppets. Surely, he thought, a hint of a smile hovering in his eyes, not in any other context would you find children sitting so still, so utterly transfixed, and for so long. Not once did their attention waver from the small puppet theatre.

But his did.

He saw her watching the children and the puppets, as still as were the children, but with a smile curling her lips and lighting her eyes. He could see her smile despite the distance between them and despite the numerous people who kept walking between them, obscuring his view of her. To him, she stood out from amongst the crowd, and not because of the vivid colour of her gown. He was one who possessed the sight to see far deeper than the clothing worn by those he looked upon. No, it was not her gown he saw. It was the Light she radiated, heightened by her smile and by her near-unconscious enjoyment of other people's enjoyment. That was truly the appeal of the fair for her – other people's happiness – had she but known it. So starkly did she stand out to him that every other individual in the crowd paled into insignificance, as if everyone else was dressed in grey and she the only one dressed in vivid colour. To him, she lit the circle, gave it Light. It emanated from her, touching everyone in the circle, had they but known it. Her Light must, surely, be heightening the overall effect of the fair for those within the circle.

He straightened as he watched her, his attention caught, his eyes narrowing slightly in concentration. He unfolded his arms as he straightened, and there was a tension in his

body, his limbs. He saw her attention waver, and he watched as she looked at the different wagons in the circle before she turned towards its centre. He turned away, then, turning his back on her and on the crowd.

So, he thought, walking away, his steps, his tread, echoing with purpose, at last she has come. They could only have made contact with her if she stepped into the circle willingly. They could not, themselves, have stepped outside of or away from the fair to seek her out. She had to come of her own volition, and so she had, at last. They could not allow this opportunity to pass them by. They simply could not. *He* could not . . . .

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Her attention wavered, again, from the small tents, and she turned towards the centre of the large circle, noticing, for the first time, the large wooden pole in the circle's very centre. The pole had been firmly placed, and long, brightly coloured ribbons were attached to the top of it, reaching the ground. The pole was at least twice the height of a tall man, but it stood in the centre of the circle alone, almost forlornly, certainly unnoticed, its ribbons lifting gently in the afternoon breeze. She studied the pole for a moment, wondering what its purpose could be.

And then her attention was caught by a large elevated wooden stage at the very top of the circle, directly opposite the fair's pennanted entrance. In front of the stage, a number of long benches were placed in neat lines, but the stage itself was empty and closed off to public scrutiny with two thick, red-velvet curtains. Curious in spite of herself, she wandered closer to the stage for a better look, and even as she walked closer, there emerged from either side of the stage groups of young women dressed in long, brightly coloured dresses. Forming two lines, they drew the attention of the crowd by clapping in time with an unheard, unknown beat as they danced towards the pole. At the pole, each woman bent to pick up one of the long ribbons and then moved with her ribbon away from the pole, all of them forming a circle of their own – a circle within a circle – a many-spoked wheel within a circle.

Once they were ready, the red curtains on the stage were drawn back to reveal a group of musicians, each playing an assortment of different instruments – guitars and lutes, flutes, tambourines, drums, violins. Absorbed in what was transpiring, she gave the

musicians only a cursory glance before turning to watch the women as they began to dance to the music. Holding their ribbons high, they twirled so that their full skirts flared, and as they danced, they moved around the circle, half in one direction, half in the other so that they began to weave the long ribbons around the pole. The effect was fascinating, for their movement around the pole gave the appearance of a moving, turning wheel.

“Ah, there y' are, lassie. I knew ye'd come, ye bein' a woman o' y' word 'n all.”

She turned a beaming smile on George as he joined her. “A promise is a promise, George. I'd not let you down. Where is Martha?”

“Aye, where indeed?” he echoed, offering her his cone of candies. “Go on, lassie, be brave. They're quite tasty, ye know.”

Tentatively, she took one and popped it into her mouth. He watched her taste it, awaiting her verdict. “Yummy,” she said simply and was rewarded with one of George's large grins.

“Martha?” she enquired again, crunching the candy between her teeth.

“Well, I dun rightly know, lass. Last I saw, she was runnin' her fingers over those there scarves.” He waved his hand in the general direction of the wagon that was selling the fine, colourful scarves. “I just hope she doesna' feel tempted to buy the whole lot. So,” he asked, changing the subject, “wha' think ye o' fairs now, eh, havin' seen one for y'self up close and personal like?”

She smiled at him. “I admit, I like it. I like the way it makes people happy. And there's something here for everyone, is there not?” She pointed to the other side of the pole where the little group of children had not yet moved from in front of the puppet theatre. “I've not ever seen children sit so still for so long. If only I could have the same effect on them.”

He snorted in amusement. “They love ye, the wee bairns, make no bones abou' tha', lassie. Ye might no' hold their fascination in quite the same way as the puppets, bu' they love ye nonetheless.”

“Thank you, George,” she said sincerely.

“So, I'm curious. If there's somethin' here for everyone, wha' is there here for ye, then, lass?”

She thought, shrugged, and then pointed to the dancers. "Them, I think. Their dance is clever, beautiful and good to watch. What about you, George? What is there here for you?"

"Apart from the candy, ye mean?" he asked with a glint in his eye. And then he nodded to a point in the giant circle where the fool-jester was still entertaining a crowd of people in front of his small stage. "Him," George said simply. "Funny bugger, he is. I could watch 'im for hours 'n no' ge' sick o' the sight o' him."

"Really? Perhaps I should've paid him more attention," she mused.

"Aye, lass, perhaps ye should at tha' . . . Ah, bugger me," he swore, his attention suddenly caught by something else on the other side of the pole and its dancers. "The gods 'ave mercy."

Puzzled, she followed his line of vision and saw Martha, his wife, waving at him from across the crowd holding up a fist full of different scarves.

"Wha'd I tell ye?" he said. "She's gone 'n bought the whole bloody lo'. Knew I should 'a stayed to keep a firm eye on her purchases. Will ye excuse me, lass? I've go' to go take stock o' the damage m'self, no' to mention stop her from buyin' anythin' else."

"Of course, George. Go," she said, laughing, knowing full well he could not deny Martha anything, anything at all. Had he been there, supervising, Martha would still have come away with half a dozen colourful scarves. She watched George wend his way through the crowd, and then she turned her attention to the dancers once again.

"They are beautiful, are they not?"

"Yes, they are," she replied, turning to see who it was who had come to stand beside her in George's stead. A woman, as young as she herself appeared to be, stood next to her, watching the dancers. Not having seen the woman in the village before, she who had been watching the dancers naturally assumed the woman to be one of the fair folk. The woman's physical appearance supported the assumption. She wore a long, red and gold dress, and her long, straight black hair was unbound, hanging freely down her back, with a fringe that sat just above perfectly-shaped black eyebrows. Her eyes, when she took them from the dancers and turned them towards she who had been watching the dancers with George, were an unusual colour - gold, like the colour of honey.

She who had been watching the dancers frowned as she looked into those golden eyes. Impossible, she thought. That could not be. The woman was strangely, eerily familiar, actually, very familiar . . . .

“Liliana?” she enquired softly, tentatively, the question holding her surprise.

“Lily,” the woman confirmed. “No one calls me Liliana. And how, I wonder, do you know my name?”

She of whom the question was asked hesitated, taking a moment to mentally form an explanation before she verbalised it, coming to terms with the truth herself in the process. “I saw you in my mind's eye, clearly, when I wrote about you in my last story. Your appearance, your personality, you were so clear in my vision. I mean,” she paraphrased, “I saw you with great clarity, and I did not have to think about your name. I just knew what you were called.”

Lily raised her eyebrows and formed an 'oh' with her mouth, although no sound escaped her lips. “Is that so?” she said, sounding pensive. “You wrote a story about me?”

“Well, I wrote a story and you were in it,” she who had been watching the dancers corrected. “The story was about transcendence.”

“I see,” Lily said. “Well, since you know my name, may I know yours?”

“I have no name,” she who had watched the dancers answered softly. “Everyone in the village calls me lass, lassie or lady.”

Lily inclined her head. “No name?” she repeated softly. “And you've not even chosen a name for yourself?”

She who had watched the dancers with George, smiled ironically. “I have chosen many.”

“And do you have a favourite?”

She whom the villagers called lady thought for a moment. “Lliandra, I think, which is strangely coincidental since that was my name in the story within which you appeared.”

Lily looked at her calmly, and she equally as calmly returned Lily's direct gaze, although she was not fully conscious of doing so. The two women were facing each other now, neither of them paying the slightest attention to the dancers. “Would you allow me to read your cards for you, my Lady?” Lily asked.

She who had no name recoiled slightly. "Oh no," she said quickly, involuntarily.

"You don't believe in the cards?" Lily asked her.

"No, I do, very much so. I read them myself, and so I know you must be very careful who you allow to do a reading for you. You never know what shadows and prejudices, and misguided beliefs and perspectives someone holds within them. These can potentially influence a reading, and can then, in turn, influence your own thoughts and beliefs if you allow it."

Lily listened attentively. "Well," she said in response, "I absolutely agree with you. Your caution is wise." She smiled. "So what if I told you I do not bring my inner shadows to a reading? Would you believe me?"

The other inclined her head, unable to repress a smile. "Do you have shadows?"

Lily smiled again. "A few," she replied. "But I know how to resolve them, so they do not last over long in my psyche."

"Then," the other said quietly, "I believe you. And, yes, I will allow you to do a reading for me."

With a hand under her arm, Lily guided her to a tent very near to the stage with the red curtains and the musicians playing their instruments. But when she stepped into the tent, the music and the other sounds of the fair receded to the point of near silence. It was as if in stepping into the tent they had stepped into another realm temporarily. She remembered the old folk tales of faerie rings and circles that effectively transported those who stepped into them into the realm of faerie. Once there, those who did not belong there had to be very careful they were not tricked into being trapped there. The villagers still repeated the old stories, told to the children around the hearth at night. But while the villagers thought it a terrible thing to be trapped in the realm of faerie, she had always thought it would be rather wonderful. Had she even once come across such a faerie ring, she thought she would not have hesitated to step into it.

"Have a seat," Lily instructed her, indicating a small wooden stool on one side of a table.

Obediently, she who had no name sat on the stool and watched as Lily seated herself opposite. The tent was tiny so that the table between them took up most of the space. She

watched, then, as Lily picked up the pack of cards on the table.

“I do not read the cards as others do,” Lily explained as she caressed the cards, shuffling them and then cutting the deck, placing the top half on the bottom. Satisfied, she again picked up the pack, laying the top four cards in a line across the table, closer to the other side of it. In silence, she studied the cards for a long moment. And then she looked up and inclined her head.

“Does the village know how old you are?”

She whose cards were being read shifted uncomfortably on the stool, not expecting the question at all.

“I'm sorry,” Lily said, correcting herself. “That was a rather awkward way of framing the question. Allow me to rephrase it. Does the village know how long you have walked in this land?”

“No,” the other answered, swallowing nervously. “No, they have no idea, no idea at all. I think the truth would not sit well with them, so I must keep it hidden from them.”

“And just how long have you walked in this realm, my Lady?”

She of whom the question was asked hesitated for a moment, but decided there could be nothing to lose now since Lily knew the truth anyway. Besides, it was a relief to be able to talk about it to someone who understood. “Aeons. Many eras. Many centuries. Many millennia, in fact. I have not just seen kings come and go, I have seen whole dynasties come and go. I have witnessed the rise and fall of many empires.”

Lily looked at the line of cards again. “And you have witnessed many events, many things that have shaped and changed the landscape of this realm. Have humans changed over time, do you think?”

“Over time? Yes, I think they have. They evolve, and then they devolve. They progress and then they regress. But of late, and by that I mean the last few centuries or so, I have seen them fall lower and lower and lower into the quagmire of their utter ignorance. They do not learn from the past, so I see them make the same mistakes over and over again. I see them act out the same patterns over and over again, both collectively and individually. And I have watched them become more and more disconnected, separated from what is good and great within them. Every now and then, something

brings them to life, but then they fall asleep once again.”

“And this distresses you?”

“Very much so. I am unable to help them, though I know I could if they would but let me.”

“And the villagers? Do you help them?”

“I do what I can, when I can, how ever I am able. But any help I can give them is very limited by their own ignorance. And, how much help can I possibly give them when I must remain so hidden, and when I must hide many truths?”

“Indeed,” Lily whispered softly. And then she lowered her eyes and picked off another four cards, laying them on the table in a line below the four already there. Again, she studied these new cards for a long moment. The other waited, sitting perfectly still, watching Lily but making no attempt to look at the cards herself.

“You are alone,” Lily said. “You walk this realm alone. Why is that so?”

She of whom the question was asked lowered her eyes. “I wish it were not so. But there are none here with whom I can fully be. I cannot walk with these people as they are currently, although there have been times in the past when I have been able to walk with them and openly be as I am. So must I guard my tongue and watch my words, always. Sometimes, I must bite my tongue to stop the words from coming out. There is no point in speaking when those around you do not understand what you are saying. So must I keep myself aloof, distant, disconnected, withdrawn.”

Lily looked concerned, genuinely and deeply concerned. “And so, my Lady, you cannot be connected to those who are here. But why are you here alone?”

“I do not know. I do not know who my people are or where they are, for that matter. Perhaps they are hidden as I am.”

“But you know who you are?”

“Yes, I believe so.”

The two women looked at each other in silence, green eyes and golden eyes locked in silent communication.

Finally, she whose reading this was, broke the silence with a question of her own.

“Why did I write about you, Lily?”

Lily smiled, but the smile was slow to appear, first heralding its appearance by slightly, subtly changing her features and changing the colour of her eyes. "You really do not know?" she asked enigmatically.

The other shook her head, slowly.

"Well," Lily said, shrugging her shoulders, "I suspect you wrote about me so that you would recognise me when you came across me. It was a kind of preparation, I think. But surely you recognise what it means . . . that you know me. No doubt you thought me a figment of your imagination when you were writing the story. But here I sit before you, proof that I am real, that I exist in truth."

"Nay, Lily," said she who had no name. "I knew you were not just a figment of my imagination. I knew, even as I was writing about you, that you were real, somehow, you and your twin, Sylvester. Is he here with you?"

Lily smiled broadly. "He is here. We are never apart. We cannot bear the separation." She inclined her head. "Pray tell, my Lady, would you know your people if you came across them, do you think?"

She of whom the question was asked hesitated. "I . . . I do not know. I hope so, for would that not be a measure of how well I truly know myself? But I have walked for so long in this realm of Separation . . . 'Tis more than I dare hope for coming across those with whom I truly belong. I don't dare dream of it. 'Tis too painful."

Lily nodded but refrained from commenting. "I know you will leave the fair now," she said. "And so you must. But will you promise me you will return tomorrow. I would dearly love to see you again."

The other smiled, reluctantly. "Another promise," she sighed softly. "All right, Lily. I promise I will return tomorrow. Truth be told, I would love to see you again, too."

~

She emerged from Lily's tent to find the sun had begun its journey below the horizon. Torches had been lit and placed around the fair to give it light, and the different light had changed the atmosphere, for the better, she thought. She preferred the fair at night. The fair's visitors had not been put off by the disappearing sunlight. On the contrary, everyone, it seemed, was still here, because the crowd had not thinned at all. The

musicians were still playing on the elevated stage, only now they had an audience of their own. People had taken their seats in front of the stage, filling the benches. Seeing the audience, she looked at the musicians properly for the first time. Even though her heart skipped a full beat, she felt no real surprise when she saw him on the stage, the horseman. Somehow, she had expected it. He was playing the violin, tapping his booted foot in time with the music. He played with passion, of course, as if the music was a part of his soul. As she watched him her heart increased its rhythm, pounding a beat of fear in her chest that matched not the beat of his music. With an effort, she tore her eyes away from him and walked to the entrance of the fair, leaving him and Lily behind her.

~

Lily was waiting for him when he came off the stage. She was leaning against a barrel with her arms crossed in front of her, and she looked as if she'd been waiting there for a while.

He said nothing as he descended the stairs at the back of the stage. He merely looked at her.

"As you instructed, I spoke to her," Lily said without preamble. "She allowed me to read the cards for her."

"Ah, did she now. That is a good sign indeed. And did you see what I saw?"

"Oh it's her all right. Of that I have no doubt. Her energy is hard to miss, or ignore, for that matter. How she has walked among them for so long without changing them even a little is beyond my ability to comprehend."

He held a towel in his hand and he wiped it over his face before responding to Lily's statement. "She is not here to change them individually, Lily. She is here for the collective."

"I know, but still . . . ."

He put the towel around his neck and held the ends with both hands. "I know," he said quietly, agreeing with her. "I know," he said again. "'Tis a measure of their ignorance that it can be so." He hesitated, and then he asked reluctantly. "Does she remember who she is?"

Lily took a moment to answer, thinking, pondering, remembering the interaction

between the two of them, and remembering, too, what she had seen in the cards. "She remembers. She knows who she is. She just does not consciously acknowledge that she knows, although she is even beginning to do that, I think. But surely it can be no other way. 'Twould be too painful otherwise."

He nodded without verbally responding.

"She knew me. She remembered me," Lily said, smiling. "She even wrote about me. What's the bet she has written about you, too?"

He inclined his head. "She knew you?"

Lily nodded. "She knew my name, and Sylvester's. She asked me if he was here."

"Did she now? That is . . . interesting, indeed."

She pushed herself off the barrel, straightening to put a hand on his arm. "I wanted to warn you, Sebastian. She has promised me she will return to the fair tomorrow. But you need to know before you see her again. She is very sad. She holds the sadness within, and she carries it with her deep, deep inside. It is a part of her, I think. You need to know that. It mars her beautiful Light, dims it somewhat. It has changed her just a little, I think. Perhaps it is even the reason she has not changed those she has lived with and around all these long, long years."

"Did her sadness affect you?"

Lily frowned. The question was insightful. "Yes. Yes, it did. Now I, too, am saddened."

He took a step towards her, raised his hand and caressed her cheek with his fingers. "Then is it not just as well we came?"

Tears pooled in Lily's eyes as she nodded. "It is. She needs you, Sebastian. She needs you more than any of us could have anticipated."

He dropped his hand. "Nay, Lily. I knew. I've always known. I would have spared her this if I could, but 'twas not to be." He let go of the towel and ran his hands over his hair, smoothing it. But Lily recognised it as a gesture of distress. When he dropped his hands, he looked at her again, and his eyes were vividly blue. "She is so damned strong, strong enough so that only a rare soul, a soul such as hers, could have done what she has done and survived. If sadness be the only consequence of what she has endured here

then, perhaps, I should be grateful.”

Lily bit her lip in agitation and her eyes held her concern as she looked at him. “It is not the only consequence, Sebastian.”

He narrowed his eyes and inclined his head at her again in silent question.

“Her heart is not open. It is closed up, protected. She is hidden within and behind an impenetrable wall of protection.”

“Not impenetrable,” he corrected, “but therein lies the true source of the change within her, and, perhaps, the real reason she has not changed those with whom she has come into contact.” He raised his hand to Lily's cheek once again, caressing, reassuring, “That her heart is not open, Lily, is not just a matter of her protection, but of others' as well. They are not in any fit state to handle the internal changes her Light would bring them after any sort of contact with her. And, it has allowed her to move among them as one of them. You would do well to remember that.”

“So, you're saying . . . ?”

He smiled as he dropped his hand once again. “I'm saying your concern is misplaced.”

Lily seemed to grow taller, lighter, his words lifting from her the burden of her concern and sadness. And a smile sparkled in her eyes. “So, she can be restored, then, wholly?”

He nodded once. “And easily, too. You will see a change in her tomorrow, courtesy of her interaction with you. And then you will see for yourself, all she needs to be whole once again, and open, for that matter, is to be around those of us with whom she belongs.”

~

She was deep in thought as she wandered home, the sounds of the fair fading behind her. So deeply was she in thought that a few times her steps slowed to the point of nearly stopping altogether. Her interaction with Lily had changed her. She could feel it but was at a loss to explain it, or define it, for that matter. She was calmer. She could feel her inner calm seeping into her very bones. And she felt freer, lighter. Had Lily done that? Or was it simply a by-product of being with Lily in the tent? Or was it the consequence of being finally understood, acknowledged, recognised, and being able to talk about things that must normally remain hidden? Or perhaps all three?

Whilst she'd been in Lily's presence, she had been distracted by the cards and by the

conversation and so had not fully grasped the significance of encountering Lily in the context of the fair, outside of her imagination. But now, free of the context, the full significance was beginning to sink in. Is that why Lily had told her she must leave the fair? To give her time to process all the ramifications of encountering Lily so unexpectedly? Lily had asked her if she thought she would recognise her people were she to encounter them again. But if the last of her stories in any way contained valuable higher information for her, as she believed all her stories did, then Lily herself was one of those referred to. Lily was one of her people, as was Sylvester whom she had not seen at the fair today, but who she knew was there simply because Lily was.

The simple truth of Lily and Sylvester being her people, and being here, in the landscape of her reality, penetrated more deeply the more she thought about it. It seeped into and through her awareness, and, of course, began to generate many, many more questions. Why were they here, in this village, and why now? Surely Lily's presence here, now, had everything to do with her own process? And, if Lily was one of her people, did the other fair folk know, and were they, too, her people? If so, then how much or how significantly did that change her answer to George's question of what the fair held for her? Her answer, and the question itself, it seemed, was turning out to be far more profound than she could possibly have anticipated.

But, perhaps most important of all, what did this now mean for her in terms of both her reaction to seeing the horseman and the fact of her dreaming about him ever since? What part was he to play in this unfolding process of hers?

Now she did stop walking, frowning as she unconsciously turned towards the sounds of the fair floating towards her on the evening breeze. What was happening here? And why was it happening now? What was the true nature of the fair? Perhaps her thoughts about the faerie rings had not been so random after all?

So, promises be damned, did she have the courage to go back to the fair tomorrow knowing what it truly was she was stepping in to? Courage, she realised suddenly, had nothing to do with it. The truth was, she would die if she allowed this opportunity to pass her by. If these were her people, those for whom she had longed, for aeons of human time, then, of course she would go back tomorrow, and the consequences be damned. She

would face those when they happened.

~

## *The Horseman*

She waited until the sun's light was just beginning to lose its potency before she went back to the fair again. Why did she wait so long? Well, I have already said she preferred the fair at night. She liked the atmosphere, and she wanted to see the musicians again. Knowing they came onto the stage later in the day, she waited for that same time to go back herself.

Now, what, do you think, was her real motivation? Did she simply want to hear their music? Did she want to see the horseman again? Or was it that she knew the horseman would be occupied and, therefore, not free to speak to her? All right, so courage, or lack thereof, was not a consideration in her decision to return to the fair itself, but that's not to say it wasn't a driving factor in the time she chose to return. After a fairly sleepless night of contemplations, she knew full well what it was she was afraid of, so she knew she was only postponing the inevitable. Far better to have the horseman occupied so that she could come to terms with being back in the circle, knowing, this time, what it really was, without being confronted by the power and potency of the experience she knew she would have with him.

The village, as she walked through it this time, was only slightly less deserted. A few times, she came across villagers who, for reasons of their own, were not at the fair, and so raised her hand in greeting. But the fair was still crowded, or overcrowded, she thought, every bit as much as it had been the day before. Once again, the fading daylight had made no difference to the fair's visitors. They showed no sign of going home.

This time, when she stepped into the circle of wagons, through the entrance with its pennants and flags, she turned her focus inward, assessing and observing any residual internal effect on her. She felt none. Or, rather, she felt no different. She had been nervous before she stepped into the circle, and she was nervous after she stepped into it. But as she walked towards the pole in the centre of the circle, a very strange thing occurred. The fair, or more specifically, the crowd of visitors froze where they were, as if

they had suddenly been turned to stone. But the fair folk were not frozen. On the contrary, each of them moved. The magician looked right at her, doffed his hat and bowed deeply, as if he was paying her homage. The fool ceased his acrobatics, doffed his hat and bowed to her, too. She heard the tinkling of the little bells on his hat from where she stood, loud as they were in the uncanny silence. The fortune tellers emerged from their tents and curtsied, and the dancers stopped dancing, turned towards her and curtsied, too, still holding their ribbons. The musicians ceased playing their instruments, stood and, some still holding their instruments, bowed low. Even the puppets in their small theatre went down on bended knee.

For a moment, a single moment, frozen in time, the fair folk acknowledged her, each in his or her own way. In response, she stood where she was and then turned a full circle, looking at, bowing her head towards, and thereby acknowledging, them all, either individually or collectively as with the dancers and musicians. And then, when she had acknowledged the fair folk, the fair became movement and sound once again. The crowd moved, oblivious to the elongated nature of that one single moment, and each of the fair folk resumed their entertainments as if nothing untoward or out of the ordinary had occurred. Without conscious volition, she looked at the stage and could not ignore the powerful sense of relief that coursed through her. Music filled the air around the fair and beyond. She had known the musicians were playing on the stage well before she reached the fair's entrance because their music carried easily across the green to the village. The horseman was not among them.

Her heart began to pound a nervous beat in her chest, and then it started to skip beats. The sensation felt decidedly uncomfortable, as if she was being punched internally, and although it appeared to others as though she was standing listening to the music and watching the musicians, she was, in truth, concentrating on the feel of her erratic heartbeat, trying to steady it with deep, even breaths. She knew what it meant. For so long she had lived within and behind the protective armour that was, she knew, wrapped around her heart. Her place of safety. It hid her, that armour. Hiding. She had been living in hiding, from herself as much as from anyone else. She had known what it would mean once she stepped, again, into the circle of wagons that comprised the fair. That was

why she was afraid of the horseman. She could not hide from him. There would be no hiding from him. She had seen the truth of that in her dreams.

"I am very glad you came," Lily said beside her. "We cannot come to you, my Lady. 'Tis you who must come to us, of your own volition."

She turned towards Lily, trying to ignore her erratic heartbeat. "You cannot leave the wagons?"

"Nay, Lady, we cannot. We cannot stray that far from the circle. Nor would we wish to even if we could."

A flicker of bemusement crossed her face as she processed this interesting piece of information, attempting to understand it. "Is that because you are not incarnate?"

Lily smiled. "We are not in the Separated third dimensional realm of humans, yes, that is so. But that's not to say we are not incarnate."

"I see," she said, still sounding slightly bemused as she processed this extra piece of information. "So, you are incarnate in the fourth dimension, then?"

Lily smiled. "The fifth, I would say."

"Ah," she said, drawing out the sound as enlightenment dawned and, with it, understanding. "I understand. So, you really are my people . . ."

Lily raised her hand and ran the backs of her curled fingers over the cheek of she who had just returned to the fair. "Yes, my Lady, we really are your people. And we have come at your bidding. Separation for you, my beautiful Lady, is at an end. This you know. 'Tis the real reason you returned tonight, is it not?"

She who had no name covered Lily's hand with her own. "It is."

"And so," Lily asked, smiling, "who did you really come here to see tonight?"

She did not hesitate. "Myself, Lily. I came to see my Self."

Lily's smile deepened. "Then come," she said, taking the hand of the other and leading her away from the excitements offered by the fair folk. Lily led her around the circle, avoiding the dancers, and then alongside the elevated wooden stage where the musicians were still playing. As they walked past the front of the stage, they also walked out of the circle created by the wagons. He, the horseman, was waiting for them behind the stage, and his back was turned to them. He was watching the sunset, his hands deep in the

pockets of his trousers.

“Sebastian . . .” Lily said as they approached him.

He turned and removed his hands from his pockets.

“This is Sebastian,” Lily said simply once they reached him.

“Hello, my Lady,” he said. “At last, we meet again. Do you know why we are here?” he asked as he reached for her hand and then bent over her, touching the back of her hand with his lips.

“I think so,” she answered, watching him.

“You called,” he said as he straightened and looked at her, into her, through her, “and we heard your call. So we have come.”

“I called?” she echoed softly.

“You have been asking questions of late, have you not? You have held those questions within you, and you have thrown them out to the Universe. Did you not think the Universe would hear and answer you?”

She inclined her head. “I had no doubt the Universe would hear me, no doubt at all. Answering, though, is a whole different matter. No, I thought the Universe would not answer me. I thought I was destined to continue my Work alone.”

“Ah, but you have reached a point in your Work where it is not possible for you to continue alone, nor optimal, for that matter. In the beginning, you thought you were not alone because you were identified with the human experience as it currently is. You thought you were one of them. Then you began to change that with which you identified so that you were neither there nor here, and you began to know you are **not** one of them. For that shift to occur, you had to be alone. No one could come with you, and no one, either there or here, could help you through it because you had to experience for yourself your own ability to find your Way through. But what happens, then, when you shift identification to the extent that you are truly no longer identified with humans at all as they are currently? What happens when you see from the perspective of the butterfly, no longer holding, at all, the limited perspective of the caterpillar?”

She had no answer even though she had pondered the question herself, many times.

A hint of a smile altered the colour of his eyes.

“When you released the physical perspective so completely, so fully, did you think the Universe would just leave you there to wander among the ignorant, and the blind and deaf, like a butterfly among caterpillars, doomed never to be able to speak of what you see and of what you **can** see . . . and, more importantly, of what you know is to come?”

He still held her hand, and she was content for that to be so. Letting her hand rest in his, she raised her eyebrows at him in response to his question. “So it seemed to me,” she replied. “It has felt, at times, as though I was doomed to walk among caterpillars for the duration of this life.”

“That,” he said slowly, “would be counter effective after all the Work you have done, not to mention cruel. Nothing would cause you to stagnate more than continuing to walk among caterpillars. The Universe is many things, but cruel it is not. And what use is your Voice of Wisdom if you are only speaking to those who cannot hear or heed you? Surely the Universe has a far greater Purpose in your Voice, your words of Wisdom . . . surely.”

“That has always been my hope. But . . .” In lieu of finishing the sentence, she shrugged her shoulders.

“But nothing ever eventuated,” he finished for her. “And why was that, do you think?”

“Because,” she answered him, “I was still battling and wrestling with the Separated third-dimensional physical perspective.”

He nodded, once. “Just so.”

“And so anything that would have eventuated, I would have misunderstood or misconstrued.”

“Thereby missing the point and the Purpose entirely,” he confirmed.

She nodded. “Misdirection we could call it.”

He smiled. “Indeed, so we could.”

“But we could also call it 'empowering entrapment', and that was never going to be allowed because it was never part of the plan that I stay third dimensional. My destiny, in fact, is exactly the opposite, is it not?”

His smile deepened. “Just so.”

“All right, so,” she said sombrely, seriously, “can I assume this experience is symbolic

of the fact that I have, at last, mastered the physical perspective?"

"You can, and you have." He gave her a moment to digest the truth of that and then he asked, "So, what, pray tell, does this mean for you from this moment on, my Lady?"

"My Work will change. The true extent and nature of my destiny will be revealed to me. So, no longer will I Work in secret and in hiding. No longer will I Work alone in the dark. And I refer to myself as much as anyone else. So . . ." she hesitated, "everything I do, everything I create from now on will be part of the same Purpose, my Work, my destiny."

He looked at her for a moment before answering. "Has it not always been so?"

"Yes," she answered him, "so it has. I just have not realised it so profoundly before. That is the true answer to your question, is it not? I Work, now, in alignment with Higher Will and Purpose, no longer labouring under the burden of my own ignorance, wanting things that would only take me off the path of my destiny."

"Just so," he confirmed. "And what, may I ask, is your destiny, your Purpose, my Lady?"

She took a moment to answer because she knew, with every fibre of her being, how important the question actually was, and she wanted to honour the question accordingly. "To be. Such a simple answer, but so vitally important. Well, actually, everything my destiny encompasses. I am here just to be. But in being, I will step into my true power, and I will give my Light permission to shine as brightly as it can."

He and Lily stood as still as statues as they looked at her. Silence reigned between the three of them – such a profound silence even the sounds of the fair did not break it. And then he said simply, "Yes. This is why you went there, my Lady, to be who you really are, to shine brightly, like a beacon in the darkest of nights, to ascend into your fifth-dimensional Self. As such, you **will** be seen. This you know, do you not?"

"This I know," she repeated softly. "Even though I still doubt, I do know."

He stepped closer to her and raised her hand to his lips. She felt his essence, his energy, so powerfully potent, infuse her and surround her even as his eyes looked deeply into her. She should have wanted to take a step back, put some distance between them again. That would have been her normal reaction to having someone invade her personal

space to such an extent. But she felt no compulsion to step back at all. We only feel the desire to turn away from our truest reflection when we are not ready to see it, when we greatly fear what it is we will see. She stood and faced her reflection without even a hint of a desire to turn away. The ease with which she stood before him surprised her. She did not fear him or herself, it seemed, nearly as much as she had thought.

“Are you ready to be seen, my Lady?”

“Not quite.”

He smiled again. “I beg to differ.”

She could see his smile and she could feel Lily's. Their shared smile surrounded her, infused her, touched her inside and out. Instead of responding in kind, though, she raised her eyebrows at them both.

“I am truly ready to be seen, then? Really?”

Lily responded by grinning like the Cheshire Cat from that famous story.

He responded verbally. “Really,” he confirmed.

“I don't feel ready,” she said uncertainly.

He raised an eyebrow. “And how would you feel if you felt ready?”

She pursed her lips, thinking. “No idea.”

“That's because being ready has nothing at all to do with the way you feel about you. You're ready not because you feel you are, but because you are. You're ready because you have, at last, released the being, just as you wrote about in your last book. It's no coincidence, of course, that you are reading it again at the moment.”

~

“And now,” Lily said, “I will leave you alone. You have much to discuss, I believe, and that discussion would be best had without me listening in.”

Left alone in silence, she took a moment before she looked at him again. And then the image of him as she'd first seen him filled her vision.

“I saw you the day you rode into town. I was standing on the road side among the crowd of onlookers. You ignored us all, but you were riding a magnificent black horse.”

“His name is Dagonis,” Sebastian said. “And he is not a horse. Would you like to meet him?”

She nodded.

"Then come," he said.

Her hand was still in his, and when she turned to follow him, he threaded his fingers through hers. The action made her smile. It was as if he wasn't quite willing to let her go.

Neither of them spoke as they walked through the wagons that were placed, seemingly haphazardly, on the village's green.

At a point in the cluster of wagons, away from the fair itself and where there was a relatively clear patch of grass, he stopped her.

"Wait here," he instructed her. "He knows we are here. He will come."

His words proved prophetic, and they both did not have long to wait. The magnificent black horse came cantering towards them from the direction of the woods beyond the green. She watched him coming towards her, and she could not suppress nor ignore, for that matter, the smile that bubbled up from the depths of her. Sebastian was right.

Dagonis was not a horse at all. The single black horn that spiralled from his forehead marked him as a unicorn, those beautiful creatures of myth that hold within them not even a hint of shadow – those beautiful creatures for which heaven and earth has no separation.

"How do you disguise him?" she asked Sebastian without taking her eyes from the unicorn.

"A simple glamour. He helps me hold it."

When Dagonis reached the two of them, he ignored Sebastian and came straight to her, nuzzling her neck affectionately. She laughed as she released Sebastian's hand to raise both of hers to caress his silky coat.

"He has never forgotten, as you can see," Sebastian commented as he watched, a smile in his voice. "And he has missed you. Unicorns don't ever forget their own."

"He is mine?" she asked in surprise, turning to look at him.

"He is mine," he replied.

She frowned and then changed the subject slightly. "I thought all unicorns were white."

"Your unicorn is white," he told her. "He is her opposite, hence his colour, although they are also the same. Together, they complete the same circle, as you do for me, and as I

do for you. That is why he remembers you as if he was yours. He is yours *because* he is mine."

She moved then to stand beside the unicorn, her back to Sebastian, and she closed her eyes and put her forehead against the unicorn's smooth, silky neck. "We are the same?" she whispered.

"We are the same," he confirmed. "Two parts of the very same whole. This you know."

"You are my reflection."

"I am your reflection. And you are mine."

"Then," she said, "it is you I have been trying to make my way back to. You and Dagonis and Isadore. And me, of course. And now I am truly come home." She opened her eyes, raised her head, and turned to look at him. "You need to know, I am damaged, wounded courtesy of my time in the human realm. That is why my heart is closed."

He smiled. "But not irretrievably so. Your heart is not as closed as you think it is. Now that we are together again, you will see the truth of that for yourself."

She absorbed that, and then she said, "So what happens now?"

He frowned. "Now? You really feel the need to ask that question?"

"Yes."

His frown deepened. "You are home, my Lady. What do you want to do now?"

She looked at him for a long moment. And then, in answer, she moved away from the unicorn to stand right in front of Sebastian. His eyes never left hers, and so they looked at each other now without moving, without touching. And then she raised her hands and touched him. She rested one hand on his chest and curled the other up around his neck.

"*This* is what I want to do now," she whispered as she stood on the balls of her feet and touched her lips to his. He moved as if hopelessly unable to help himself. He wrapped his arms around her, pulling her against him, and he kissed her back, hungrily, passionately.

~

The first hint of sunlight, heralding the dawn of a new day, touched the village, and the village began to stir, coming awake. As the sun's light grew stronger, the whispers

began, moving with remarkable speed from house to house, cottage to cottage, crossing alleys and lane ways and the village's main road as if they existed not at all. Barely a single hour after the first rays began to touch the village was all it took for disappointment to settle where once excitement had reigned.

The village green was empty.

The fair was gone.

~

*The Golden  
Dragon*

*Do you see now, dearest one? Do you see your visions coming together to form a coherent whole?*

*Yes, I do. And not just my visions, but the information and knowledge I have been given in my writing. This one, this story, brings to mind what I was told in Avalon Calling – we will restore the ancient priesthood and, with it, the governance of the Wisdom.*

*Indeed.*

*I just didn't quite know what he meant when he said that. I mean, I was holding a wrong conceptualisation of what he meant, and of what I meant, for that matter. But this story reveals the deeper truth and sets me right in terms of my misguided mindset.*

*Indeed, so it does. But does it not also reveal something else, dear one?*

*Yes, it does, hence my dragon as my guide in this story – he who symbolises, at the same time, my greatest fear and, behind it, my deepest, grandest desire.*

*And he holds something else, does he not?*

*Yes, he does. He holds a fragment of my heart . . . well, not just a fragment, but a vital piece of my heart. He has guarded it and protected it, and I am eternally and profoundly grateful. But it is time to become whole again, is it not? It is time for me to walk in this realm in my true form, revealed, restored, whole, complete.*

*Oh yes, beautiful Lady. And then, oh what Light will rip through the human reality. What Light! The darkness beware. Your Light will tear the fabric of that reality to shreds. You speak of karma, dear one . . . .*

*Yes. The deeds in this story surely incurred such powerful karmic debt, not just for those who issued the orders, but for those who followed those orders blindly without thought and without hesitation.*

*And the darkness itself?*

*Yes, and for the darkness itself.*

*Well, this is their karma. You are their karma, dear one. You. That which was begun aeons ago will now be finished, and they will lose control of that reality. Thus will the circle be complete.*

*And my Work will be finished?*

*Your Work will begin, dearest one, not end.*

*Is it all to happen all over again then?*

*No. This you know, and you know why.*

*Choice, free will, is no longer the premise upon which rests the human experience.*

*Yes, exactly. Free will is no longer. In truth, there is no such thing. But without free will the darkness will fail to get a foothold on this reality ever again.*

*So this is it, then. I am, in this story, taken back to the beginning, and in so doing, will bring about the end.*

*The Alpha and the Omega – the beginning and the end. Yes, dear one. Now you see. Now you understand. Now you know.*

*Yes, now I see. So be it then.*

~

## *An Unexpected Visit*

It was such a beautiful day. The sun was alone in a cloudless sky, and its warmth was soft, caressing, not harsh at all. So when she heard, from the road, the sound of rushing water, and quite a lot of it by its sound, she deviated from her path, leaving the main road, to seek out the source of the sound. She didn't have far to go to find it. The stream wasn't far from the road, and it was definitely in a great hurry. She looked up at the sky, shielding her eyes against the bright glare of the sun as she looked up at it, noting the cloudless expanse of blue. The sun's light would be shining like this for a while, with no clouds to mar or interfere with its light.

Without further hesitation, she hoisted her pack from her shoulder, dropped it on the ground beside her, and removed her hat, dropping it on top of her pack. Then, sitting on the grass, she tugged and pulled at her long boots, removing them. Then she stood to remove her long coat, folding it carefully and placing it on top of her boots. Then followed her shirt, her trousers, and her woollen stockings, all carefully folded as her coat was. Her clothes were serving her well, shielding her from the elements but also tricking anyone she met into thinking she was a man. That's certainly what people saw at first and even second and third glimpses when they looked at her. It was safer for her if people thought she was a man. So she wanted and needed to look after her clothes. She needed them to last because she had no idea how long she would be on the road for.

Finally, she took out the pins holding her hair in place, released her hair from its tight braid and loosed the long strands, running her fingers through her hair, shaking it out. Left wearing only her undergarments for modesty, including her long camisole, in case someone should come upon her, she walked to the edge of the stream, again, not hesitating to walk into the water. Wading out to the middle of the stream, she sat on the rocks and pebbles that lined the stream bed, and then she leaned back, lying in the water so that the fast-flowing power of it ran through her hair and over her body, taking with it the grime of travel and the fatigue that was making her muscles feel heavy and resistant.

She closed her eyes as she lay back in the water, concentrating on the feel of the water on her skin. She thought the water might have been icy cold, but it wasn't. It was cool, inviting, invigorating, and the strength and power of the water's flow was causing the water to massage her aching muscles, soothing both her body and her mind in the process.

She wished she knew how far she had yet to go. She wished she knew where she was going, at least in terms of the physical landscape. No matter. The gods – her gods – alone knew where she was going, and that was enough for her, even though they were, for reasons of their own, choosing not to reveal the details of where she was going and of how long it would take her to get there. Despite the lack of information given, she trusted her gods as she trusted no others. They were her family, her guides, her companions, and she was content just to be with them and to allow their guidance. Still, the opportunity provided her by the running, rushing stream of water to be properly, deliciously, delightfully clean again had to be grasped fully and made the most of. Only her gods knew when she would get another such opportunity.

For a long, long time she lay in the water with her eyes closed, relaxing into the flow of the stream, the water running over her body, her skin. When, finally, she roused herself and sat up in the water, smoothing her hair back from her face, she knew she'd lain in the water for a long time because the sun was in a different part of the sky.

Focused on the sun and its new position as she was, she didn't notice him when first she sat up. Her mind was full of thoughts of what she might do with the remainder of the daylight hours left to her. Should she relax here and enjoy the sun's warmth on her skin, maybe settle here for a night, or should she get back on the road, continue her journey? There was no real hurry, not really, so why not linger here for a bit and rest.

With her mind full of such thoughts, when, finally, she did notice him, she looked at him in surprise, all thought suspended as she wondered how and why she hadn't seen him immediately. He was, after all, very hard to miss. Such was the power of thought, she realised, especially her thoughts.

At first, as she stared at him in surprise, her eyebrows severely raised with her surprise, she didn't move. She just sat there. Why hadn't she at least heard him? Or had he come silently? Or had he just materialised out of thin air?

The water rushed around her, but she no longer noticed it. She only noticed him staring back at her, calmly, passively. He looked comfortable, as if he'd been there for a while, sitting on the grass, his wings folded against his body, his long tail wrapped around his body, his front legs tucked comfortably underneath him, and his large, golden eyes regarding her steadily, unblinking. She felt no fear of him, no fear at all, probably because she knew what he was and what he symbolised for her. When confronting a dragon, it definitely helps to alleviate one's fear by knowing what he is and what he symbolises. Even though she knew what he was, though, he didn't look familiar. Or, more aptly, he didn't appear to her as she had visualised him in the visions she'd long held of him.

"Hello," she said from where she was, still not moving and somehow knowing he would understand her. "How long have you been there?"

"A while," he replied, his response a clear thought in her mind.

She nodded briefly. The question was unnecessary, really, because it was actually obvious he'd been there for a while.

"Did you make a noise when you came? I did not hear you come at all."

"I made some noise, yes. You did not hear me because your ears heard only the sound of rushing water."

"Oh," she said almost involuntarily. "Yes, of course. I was immersed in the water, wasn't I? So it makes sense that's all I heard. It is very loud, after all."

Silence descended upon them, at least internally, as she first wrung her hair of excess water and then stood and waded to the edge of the stream, stepping up onto the bank, all the time conscious of his eyes on her. When on the stream bank, she wrung out her shift.

"Why do you dress like a man?" he asked as he watched her sit on the grass, partly facing him and partly facing the sun so that the sun's light could dry her.

"It's safer that way, and it hides me," she replied out loud.

"I see," he said. "Well, those clothes suit you not, my Lady. You are far too beautiful to hide the light of your beauty in dull, drab, masculine clothes."

Sitting on the bank of the stream, she was closer to him than she had been whilst in the water, so close she could see the flecks of golden, honey-brown colour in his eyes, and she could see the sunlight glinting on his golden scales. She smiled at him in response to his

comment, and her smile sparkled in her eyes like the sunlight on the stream's water.

"Thank you," she said. "You are quite spectacularly beautiful yourself."

Unable to help herself, she allowed her eyes to travel the entire length of his body, from his snout with its large, cavernous nostrils, down his long, large body, down his front legs with their razor-sharp claws, currently tucked underneath him, over his wings, down his crouched, powerful back legs, and finally, around his partly-coiled tail to its very tip. For the entire length of her intense scrutiny, he watched her, seemingly unperturbed by her study of him. He was, indeed, spectacularly beautiful. The sunlight glinted on his golden scales, highlighting the gold of him in places and casting other parts of him in darker shades depending on the contours of his body.

"What would you have me wear?" she asked him curiously.

He grunted at that, aloud, so that she heard him with her ears and not as a thought in her mind.

"Need you ask?" he asked her, returning her question to her in kind. "I would have you wear that which suits you most – gowns of exquisite beauty to match the beauty within you and without."

She smiled again. "I wish I could wear gowns like that, but I would stick out like a sore thumb."

"Oh my," he interrupted sarcastically, "and people might stare. Worse, they might actually notice you."

Again, she smiled at him, although, this time, her smile was sheepish. And then she changed the subject.

"Have you always been gold?"

"Always."

"You've never been red?"

"Not that I recall."

"Oh," she said softly, looking puzzled.

"That's not to say you have never seen me as red," he said. "Indeed, I believe you did visualise me that way when last you saw me in your mind's eye."

Her puzzlement deepened. "Why would I do that . . . visualise you the wrong colour, I

mean? Why would I see you red when you are, in fact, gold?"

"It suited you to do so, I believe. The colour red facilitated your very vivid description of me."

"Well, yes," she agreed, "so it did. But it would have done so equally had I described you as you really are."

"You have a strong affiliation with the colour red."

"Ah," she said. "Yes, I guess I do. Why is that?"

"Perhaps because you love its vibrancy. Or mayhap you just resonate with its vibration. Or maybe both. Or, then again, perhaps it is because you are Working with the vibration of red – the colour of passion, action, leadership, determination. And, perhaps you see me as I truly am now because it is merely time for you to do so. You are very well aware, after all, of the significance of both the substance and the colour of gold."

"Yes," she said, smiling again. "'Tis the colour of alchemical transformation – transformed consciousness."

Relaxing in his company, she stretched her legs out in front of her and leaned back on her hands. Closing her eyes, she raised her face to the sun, concentrating on the feel of the sunlight caressing her body. There was something about sunlight that generated within a powerful feeling of euphoria. His company helped, of course. This was the first time in a long, long time she wasn't alone physically.

"I named you, too," she said conversationally, "in that same description, that verse. Was that name wrong, too?"

"No. No name you give me is wrong, and I liked that name. 'Tis your prerogative to name me however you wish to. You may name me again, too, if you would like to."

She shook her head, smiling, but not bothering to open her eyes. "No. I would call you by your true name, if that's all right with you."

"Of course that's all right with me. My true name is Drægo."

"Drægo," she repeated, testing the feel of the name on her tongue. "Yes, I like it. There is strength in that name. It suits you."

"And your name, my Lady?" he questioned her. "What am I to call you this time around?"

The question caused her to sit up straight and open her eyes. She looked at him, and he looked at her, awaiting her response patiently.

“Umm,” she said uncertainly, “I cannot remember my name. In truth, I haven't needed one up until now because I have been journeying alone . . .”

“What do the Elders call you?”

“They call me Lady of Light.”

“Of course they do. That is your true name, after all. Well, I shall call you Lady or mitha because in my language that means precious or precious one. Will that suit you?”

“Yes, that would be perfect. So, you will be coming with me, then?”

“Yes, I will be accompanying you from now on, mitha.”

She regarded him for a long moment. “So that is the point or the place in my journey I am up to, is it?”

“And what point is that?” he asked even though he already knew the answer.

She thought for another long moment, wondering how best to phrase her response.

“In the course of my journey, I have faced and resolved many fears and misguided mindsets and perceptions. But always, I have been protected by a very deep, very powerful shadow-dynamic within me – one that causes me to hide and one that I have not had to resolve until now precisely because it has served to protect me, as well you know. Courtesy of that very same shadow-dynamic, no one has or can see me, so no one knows the truth of me, even me, unfortunately. I have long known that I would have to face that shadow-dynamic sooner or later because I have also long known that I would reach a point where my journey would and must take me beyond the fear to what awaits me on the other side of it . . .”

“And what is that?” he asked, interrupting her.

Again, she took a moment to think about how best to phrase her response. “Well,” she said slowly, “I guess 'tis simple really. What awaits me on the other side of the fear is the truth of who and what I really am, the full truth, not just bits of it and not just vague images and impressions.”

“And what is that? What are you really, mitha?”

“An Elohim priestess . . .”

“Mmm, yes,” he agreed. “A powerful being of Light. And, yes, my Lady, you are right. It is, indeed, time for you to face the fear-dynamic within that causes you to hide. But you will not walk through the fear alone. I am here to guide you through it, and to accompany you as you traverse it. I will stay with you all the way through it.”

She nodded. “I am grateful, Drægo. And I very much look forward to having your company.”

He nodded himself, acknowledging her gratitude.

~

True to his word, they travelled together. He did not leave her. During the day, she walked the road by herself, but all she had to do to know he was there was look up. He flew, high up in the sky above her, and he was never out of sight, although at times he would appear to her as a tiny speck in the sky depending on how high he was at any point in time. At night, she chose a site off the road, out of sight, and built a fire out of twigs, dry grass and logs of wood, which he lit with a small flame of his dragon's breath. Then, they settled together by their fire, she huddled in her coat and blanket for warmth, he sitting comfortably as he had by the stream.

“Do you know where we are going?” she asked him many nights after they had first met by the stream.

“Yes. Do you?”

“I know we are going back into the past, but beyond that, no, I don't.”

“So you travel without a destination then?” The question held neither judgement nor accusation, merely observation.

“I wouldn't say I travel without a destination. I just don't know what, exactly, my destination is. There was a time when I thought I knew the destination but, as it's turned out, I was hopelessly wrong. I have long gone beyond what I thought was my original destination, well beyond, actually. Not knowing the destination has never stopped me journeying, though. It's just meant I've journeyed in ignorance with each step revealed only as I take it.”

“And do you journey in ignorance still, my Lady?”

“No, I think not. I might not know the specifics, but I know the gist of what I'm

walking and Working towards, I think.”

“And what is it you are Working and walking towards then?”

“My Self. My truth. My Light. My glory. My power. Being. Just being.”

“Ah, if that be so, then you are, indeed, right, my Lady. You do know where you are going. You have, however, left something vital out of that list.”

“I have?”

“You have.”

She looked away from him, towards the flames of their fire, as she thought about what she could have left out. Silence fell between them, both externally and internally, and the soft crackle of the fire filled it.

And then she knew. “Ah,” she sighed softly. Of course. “Being, revealed,” she said softly. That was, after all, exactly why he was guiding her now. Or rather, it was exactly *what* he was guiding her through.

“Yes, lovely Lady,” he confirmed. “Being revealed. *Your* being, revealed.”

~

## *Tabletop Mountain*

They were, to a certain extent, lost in their own world just a little, very focussed on each other. So it would be fair to say they should have, perhaps, taken a bit more care in hiding him from the local villagers and farmers, the people who lived in the land through which she and her dragon were walking. After all, people are always going to fear the sight of dragons, are they not? People always just assume dragons are fierce and violent and dangerous because those very same people usually have no experience of dragons for themselves, and so they simply believe what they've always been told about them.

And so, unbeknownst to both her and her dragon, people had been catching glimpses of him, and they had naturally assumed he was in the land to terrorise them and to steal their cattle and livestock. Had they but known he had no need of food perhaps their fear and terror and panic might have been somewhat alleviated. But since none were prepared to face him and find out for themselves what he was actually doing there, none of them knew he was not there to steal their cattle or to terrorise humans. In truth, he had no interest in humans whatsoever. He did, in fact, have very little time for humans and even less tolerance of them. He did not wish to interact with them at all.

And so it happened that the two, she and her dragon, were walking together on the road this particular morning, briefly, before he took to the air. Neither of them had any inkling they were not alone because both were completely focussed on their conversation. Not that anyone else would have known they were deep in conversation because she had begun to communicate with him in her own mind, not bothering to speak to him out loud. So while silence surrounded them completely, that silence did not extend to the inner workings of their minds.

In an instant, in a heartbeat, in fact, men emerged from either side of the road, and they found themselves surrounded by those very same men, easily a couple of dozen or so of them. The men who surrounded them were dressed in full silver armour, complete with gauntlets and helmets, their visors down, all holding drawn, nocked arrows in long bows,

the arrows all aimed at Drægo.

Obviously, the internal conversation she and her dragon were enjoying ceased immediately, and, for a brief moment, she looked at the men around her in surprise. Both she and Drægo had stopped walking, naturally, since their way was barred by the group of knights in front of them. Drægo was completely unperturbed by the arrows aimed at him, but he was more-than-a-little annoyed at the interruption, as rude as he thought it was. That a group of knights, as large as that group might be, thought itself capable of stopping him in his tracks was laughable, but he was not amused. Rather, he was offended even though he understood the reasons for their presence, and their arrows, for that matter. Humans always come out fighting when they fear what they do not understand, and, of course, there is much they do not understand. It could get very tiresome, the human tendency to attack first and ask questions later, and it was one of the reasons he never bothered to interact with them.

She, too, was unperturbed by the circle of knights, with their drawn arrows, surrounding her and her dragon.

“You do realise he is a dragon, do you not?” she asked them mildly. “You may loose your arrows if you so choose, but they will hurt him not at all. They will simply bounce off his scales, and most of them will probably snap in half. You have not the power to bring him down. You have not the power to stop him. If that frightens you, so be it, but it is the truth. Do you not all feel just a little foolish now?”

In the silence that followed as she awaited some kind of response, no one moved. No one spoke. Not one of the knights either released an arrow or lowered his bow. It was as if they had all become frozen into a mythical picture, she and her dragon with them. She wondered if they'd even heard her. They certainly gave no indication of it. So, the two, she and her dragon, were still and silent within the circle of still and silent armoured men around them.

Their arrows would not hurt Drægo at all, but should the knights choose to loose their arrows upon her, the result could potentially be quite different. They would kill her from this distance if their arrows hit her. So, then, it was as well they did not realise that if they killed her, the dragon would cease to exist. He would disappear before their very eyes.

Despite the genuine threat, she was not afraid, although she did feel the tension of the situation, and she could feel the tension in the group of knights. The knights surrounding her might not have the power to bring down a dragon, but, had they but known it, they also did not possess the power necessary to stop her or to kill her, arrows notwithstanding. They could loose their arrows, yes, but they would find that each and every arrow loosed would mysteriously stray from its mark and miss her entirely. And it was not a force field of protection around her that would prevent any of the arrows hitting their mark, it was the power of her Process. No one possessed the kind of power necessary for stopping or even hindering her Process, her journey. Nothing, in fact, in the physical landscape of their surroundings had the power to stop her.

Despite their powerlessness, of which they were wholly unaware, she thought it prudent to at least try to explain Drægo's presence to them in the hope of alleviating some of their fear.

"He is with me," she explained, resting her hand on the scales of his neck for emphasis. "He is my friend, my companion, and he will not hurt you or anyone else. He is not here for that."

"What is he here for, then?"

The armoured knight who asked the question was directly in front of her at the top of their impromptu circle. She should have known he was their commander, or their captain, because he wore a cloak of red attached to his armour at the shoulders. She was distracted by the colour of his cloak for a moment. It was quite beautiful, especially as the breeze was playing with it, lifting it so that it billowed out behind him. The red of his cloak was such a rich and vibrant colour. No other knight in the circle wore such a cloak.

"Umm," she said, struggling to focus on his question and not his cloak, "I told you. He is my companion. He is here because I am. We are travelling together."

"Where are you travelling to?"

"That way." She raised her hand and pointed ahead of her in the direction she and Drægo were facing.

"That will take you through my lands," the armoured knight told her. "And you do not have my permission to travel through my lands." He did not say the words

aggressively. If anything, the tone of his words was informative, not confrontational.

“Duck.”

She heard the single word as a strong, clear thought in her mind, and in the same instant she heard the word, she dropped down beside her dragon, crouching low on the ground. Drægo breathed out a much larger flame of breath than the one he used to light their fires at night. And as he breathed out his flame, he turned his head to ensure he covered the entire circle. She hid her face in her arms as she crouched on the ground, but she still felt the heat of the flame even through her clothes and on the back of her neck where her hat failed to cover the skin.

His flame was not powerful enough nor was it large enough to hurt the men. He made sure of that because, contrary to popular opinion, it was not in his nature to hurt anyone even if threatened, although if any of the men tried to kill or even hurt her, then he would kill them, swiftly, with his tail or his breath or his talons, whichever was quickest. So the knights that surrounded them both were not singed by his flame, although some of them may have lost some eyelashes and perhaps even some eyebrows. All, however, lost their bows and the arrows nocked against the strings in those bows. All the bows and all the arrows were turned to ash and disintegrated in their hands. The men, in response to this perceived attack, took a couple of steps back, widening the circle around her and her dragon, and they drew their swords from the scabbards at their hips.

She stood and rolled her eyes at them as if to convey the fact that she thought them ignorant fools, which, in fact, they were.

“Oh please,” she said, dragging the words out, and sounding mildly annoyed, “your swords will do even less damage than the arrows might have. I am sorry we do not have your permission to traverse your lands,” she said, speaking to their commander. “We did not realise we required it. This is the main road north, after all. How are we to know it takes us through someone else's lands. We will be gone from here soon enough, and I promise you we will hurt nothing, not even a humble ant as we walk through your lands.”

None of the other men moved. None of them lowered their swords, but their commander lowered his. He slid his sword back into its scabbard, and then he raised his visor in order to see her more clearly. The action meant she, too, saw him more clearly.

She saw startling blue eyes in the shadow cast by his helmet and visor, eyes that looked at her curiously.

“How is it a woman has a dragon for company?”

“Secure your pack,” Drægo told her in her mind.

She secured her pack, changing the strap from one shoulder to the other so that the strap was diagonally across her body, and shifting her pack from back to front so she could hold it.

“He has long been with me,” she explained to the commander of the group of knights.

“Button up your coat,” Drægo told her.

“We are connected and bound by an ancient bond,” she explained as she buttoned up her coat. “It was a bond created many aeons ago to keep safe something precious, something that belongs to me. He has guarded it for me.”

“Stand in front of me,” Drægo ordered her.

As she moved to comply, she continued speaking to the knights' commander. “In guarding what is precious to me, he has, as a consequence, been my protection. I owe him a great deal, and I love him deeply.”

When she was standing directly in front of him, Drægo reared up on his hind legs, spreading his wings wide, and he grabbed her under her arms with his front legs as he did so. His talons, his claws, should have dug into her, tearing at her flesh, but the leather of her coat protected her, hence his request that she do it up.

The men in the circle around her forgot their swords as they all watched the dragon, mesmerised. Have you ever seen a dragon rear up on its hind legs and spread its wings wide? The sight is truly spectacular because a dragon is, contrary to popular opinion, supremely beautiful. The morning sunlight glinted on his golden scales and turned his giant wings almost luminous, like melted gold. His spread wings cast shadow over many of the knights, but she doubted they even noticed. Many of them unconsciously lowered their swords so as to release one hand to open their visors for a better view. To a man, they would all remember, to their dying day, the sight of the dragon rearing up with his wings spread wide. The image would henceforth be imprinted on and in their conscious minds.

Drægo launched himself into the air, using his powerful back legs to propel him off the ground, flapping his enormous wings to gain elevation. One flap of those beautiful wings lifted them both higher than the tree tops quickly, taking them well beyond the reach of arrow or sword. Within a handful of flaps, he and she were in the air, high, high above the knights.

As one, every man turned to follow the dragon's progress, many of them removing their helmets for a better, unobstructed view, and she watched them from her position under her dragon, between his front legs, smiling to herself at the expressions she could see in the stance of their armoured bodies if not on their faces. Her legs were dangling, so the experience of being between his front legs high up in the air was not the most comfortable of her life, and the weight of her pack pulled at her, but, still, it was an experience she would never forget and not because of the discomfort.

Very quickly, the circle of knights was naught but a glint of silver on the ground below them. Then she and her dragon were flying over the land, not too high up because the oxygen thinned the higher they flew, and he was very aware of making sure she was not discomforted by a lack of oxygen. So they flew over villages and streams and rivers and roads and forests and hills and orchards and groves and farms with their clusters of buildings and their fields of crops. Although uncomfortable, she had never seen the land from so high up and she was fascinated, absorbed. She drank in the sight, imprinting it on her memory. Sometimes, even from so high up, she could see the people below watching them, pointing at them. But they flew on, not stopping.

"Are you all right, my Lady?" he asked her at one point.

"Oh yes," she answered. "This is really quite wonderful, being above it all, I mean."

"Yes, it is."

And then, in the distance, she could see a mountain without a peak. In place of its peak was a flat stretch of grass. As they flew closer, she began to realise he was taking her there, and she could see, on the mountain's top, ruins of ancient stone buildings.

"I will fly as close to the ground as I can, and then I will drop you," he warned her.

"I understand," she acknowledged.

He flew close and released her. She fell a short way, rolling to break the fall, although

her pack stopped her from making a complete roll. He flew high again once he released her, and she watched him circle, return, and make a perfect landing not far from where she sat watching him. He folded his magnificent wings against his body as he walked over to join her. She stood and hoisted her pack from her shoulder, dropping it on the ground beside her, feeling the relief at the loss of weight. She took off her hat and dropped it, too, on top of her pack, and then she turned her attention to the ancient ruins. Wrapping her arms around her against the chill of the higher altitude, she cast her eyes over the ancient stones.

“This is where we were going all along?” she asked him aloud.

“Yes, indeed. The knights merely hastened the process. I was not in a mood to entertain their fear nor to tarry so that we might answer their questions and assuage their curiosity. It is, in fact, none of their business why I am here or, for that matter, where you and I are both travelling.”

She looked at him as she smiled. “I quite agree. So I should be grateful to them, then. They have sped up our Process and saved us both quite a lot of time and bother.”

“Indeed,” he agreed, his own amusement evident in the tone of his inner voice.

“So, then,” she said very softly, “why here? Why were we making our way here?”

Casting her eyes, once again, over the ruined stones around them, looking first one way and then the other, she thought the whole site looked like the remnants of an old skeleton – all that remained after the body and flesh had decomposed and rotted away. The site was eerily silent and still, partly because it was so high up there was not even an echo of the noises normally associated with human existence. Even the sound of the wind was absent because the air itself was still. The sun's light was strong and bright so that the marble of the stones, despite their obvious age and weathering, appeared starkly white against the bright green of the grass.

Many of the stones had fallen and were scattered over the grass as if a group of giant children had used them to play a game of marbles. So scattered were the stones that it was difficult, if not impossible, to determine what the original structures would have looked like and, therefore, what possible function they might have once fulfilled. And, even from where she stood she could feel the energy of tragedy, fear, trauma and

heartache. The ambience of the place generated chills within her that raised goose bumps on her arms and neck. The ambience, the energy of fear and devastation, permeated and hovered over the site like an unseen fog. Whatever had happened to the people who'd originally built the site and then lived up here, it had been traumatic and tragic, and it had left its stamp on the site as a whole, like an echo left after a loud explosion or a clap of thunder.

And then, one structure in particular caught her attention. It caught her attention because it was more intact than any of the other ruins. So intact was it that it was not hard to determine what its function might have been. She turned towards it, studying it more closely. Its floor was perfectly round, perhaps a decent twelve paces in diameter, with columns around the edge of it, each one a different size courtesy of being broken off in a different place. The structure was situated away from the other buildings, on the edge of the field of grass so that it overlooked the valley below, and it appeared to her as if a giant hand had, at some point, ripped off the top of it and thrown it away. Surrounding it was bits and pieces of the broken stone columns, but there was no sign of there ever having been a roof. She knew there wasn't a roof, nor had there been, ever. These temples had been constructed in such a way as to leave them open to the stars and, for that matter, the elements.

Once she laid eyes on it, she found she could not remove them, and almost without conscious volition, she walked towards it, slowly, as the chills tingling every limb in her body intensified. When she reached the round structure, she stepped up onto it to stand on the very edge of the circular floor, wrapping a hand around the column beside which she stood. The floor before her was stunningly beautiful, even after all this time, covered as it was in little white tiles laid perfectly together to form a large circle. In the centre of the white-tiled circle, a smaller circle of sapphire-blue tiles had been added to the white tiles, forming a unique pattern in the smaller circle – a circle within a circle. But someone had destroyed the purity of the inner blue circle. There was a giant gash through its centre, as if it had been made with a giant knife or a sword, within which some of the beautiful tiles were missing, others smashed. She knew what the gash meant, and she knew what it was. Someone had deliberately rendered the temple dormant, inoperable,

inactive and unusable by destroying the temple's unique pattern, its own unique signature.

"You know what this is, my Lady, do you not?"

He had come to stand behind her, so she half turned to look at him while she responded to his question.

"Yes, Drægo, I do. I have seen these structures in my visions. I know many were built in many different places throughout the galaxy, so there was one on Mallona, for example, perhaps more than one. I know there was one on Altira, and I think it is still there, although it is more damaged even than this one. I know there is one in the rock underneath the Great Library of Westerof, and there is one here, obviously. There were many more, but those are the ones I remember. There is none on Gaia that I am aware of, and I think there never was." Turning away from him to look upon the beautiful mosaic floor once again, she continued, "They are a kind of transport system. Every one has its own unique pattern in the middle of its floor, and we who had been trained to do so were able to visualise, perfectly and powerfully, every unique pattern in every temple. In that way, we could transport ourselves to the particular temple whose pattern we formed in our mind's eye, and in so doing, we were able to travel great and vast distances very quickly. We could traverse dimensions, and we could traverse the galaxy in the blink of an eye."

"Yes, my Lady, that is so. It gladdens my heart that you remember the transports because it means the memory of that time is still clear within you. It is because of that time that I have brought you here. Shall we make a fire and settle for the night? We have much to discuss."

She nodded slowly. "Yes, that is a good idea. 'Tis colder up here. Drægo," she said as he moved away, "this is the source of the fear-dynamic within me, isn't it?"

"Yes, indeed, my Lady, so it is. But although you must see the source of the fear within and remember it, that is not why I have brought you here."

She looked surprised as she turned to look at him. "It isn't?"

"No, beautiful Lady, it is not. The fear has served you well, but the intention always was to walk through it into what is beyond it. That is why I am here, and that is why I

have brought you here.”

She considered that for a moment, and then she nodded, again, slowly.

“Was I killed here?” she asked him much later once they had built and lit a fire, and she had unpacked her blanket, wrapped herself in it, and partaken of the hamper she carried with her of fresh and dried fruit, nuts, olives and cheese.

“You used the transports extensively, mitha. In fact, you were very good at using them. So you used the transports to come here, to this temple complex, regularly, and in this particular instance, you stayed for a while, becoming the temple's High Priestess. So it just so happened that when the dark priests moved against the Elohim priesthood, you were here, and you were attacked here. When I say it just so happened, there was, in truth, nothing random about the timing of their attack. They knew you were here, and they knew who you were. So, yes, my Lady, you were killed here, on the plains below so that the people could watch you die.”

She felt her throat constrict and burn as she tried to hold back tears. She didn't remember the events of that time as she remembered other lives she'd lived in different times, places and spaces, but she did hold within her vague impressions and recollections. And, of course, she knew about the shadow-dynamic that existed within her, so she knew that something terrible had happened to spawn it or give rise to it. And, then, of course, she knew that a vital fragment of her heart was also missing courtesy of those same events. Since the events he was referring to had occurred, she had never again been whole and complete. She knew that. She had been split, fragmented. It was the fact of her heart missing a vital piece that had been her protection because it facilitated her ability to hide in her incarnated identity whenever she was incarnate, and that was so regardless of where she was incarnate and of who she was in any given incarnation.

“I remember, so I know,” she said out loud with some difficulty given the constriction in her throat, “that it was ordinary men, soldiers following their orders, who dragged us out to be executed. They even performed the duty themselves for some of the priesthood. I do not have the memory specifically . . .”

“Understandably,” he said, interrupting.

“Yes, perhaps so. The trauma is not something I can bear even as a memory. But did

they also do something to my throat?"

"Why do you ask me that, my Lady?"

"Because I've been having trouble with it lately, a lot of trouble. There is no pain, but there is a powerful sensation of someone choking me, and the sensation persists even in my sleep. I feel it in my dreams. It has been scary because it feels like my throat might close up and stop me breathing, cut off my breath. When you joined me, I began to think maybe the sensation had something to do with . . . well, you know, with the fear."

"It does indeed. 'Tis fear that is constricting your throat, mitha, and, yes, not just any fear. Were you not told you would walk through it, the sensation that has been troubling you?"

"Yes, I was, and I was grateful for the knowledge. It helped alleviate my fear in this life that something might be wrong."

"Good. You have enough fear to deal with. The last thing you need is another thrown into the mix. When they dragged you out of the temple, they bound you to a stone column they had erected with precisely that intention in mind. Your hands were bound to the column behind your back, and you were bound to the column by your throat so that you could not move and so that your chest was exposed and unprotected. When they knew they had the people's full attention, they cut you open from neck to navel, opened up your chest cavity, and ripped out your heart. Then they held your heart up so that the people knew you were dead. You were cut down just for being what you are."

"Who did this?" she whispered because she could not speak any louder through her constricted throat.

"Mitha, you know who did this. In those days, there were men in charge of others, just like the knight we encountered on the road today, although that knight has somehow managed to retain the purity of his innocence. There was something about him. I saw into his heart. Did you feel it, mitha?"

She shook her head. "No. I only saw his beautiful cloak and his equally beautiful eyes. Beyond that, I felt nothing except his intense curiosity."

"Ah, interesting. He is a good man. He is rare, though, is he not, mitha? Men in positions such as his have usually sold or lost a part of their soul one way or another. 'Tis

the power lust that causes them to do unspeakable things with no remorse whatsoever, nor any regrets, nor any consideration or compassion for others. Foolish, foolish souls, all. They know not that they are ultimately lacerating their own souls and binding themselves up in karmic debt and obligation. Always, they ultimately pay a very great price.

“And so it was,” he continued, “for those in charge at the time of these events. They were promised power beyond anything they or anyone else had experienced at that time. In return, they gave the orders that brought down the Elohim priesthood, and those orders were carried out, as you said, by ordinary men.”

“Such a powerful act,” she whispered softly. “Were they aware, do you think, of the power in the symbolism of what they did?”

“No, mitha, they were not aware, but nor were they capable of being aware. So, had someone explained to them what they were really doing and what the consequences would be, they would not have understood, nor would they have grasped all the nuances of the more far-reaching effects.”

“I see,” she said. “No doubt that is exactly why they were chosen.”

“No doubt,” he said, agreeing with her. “But the orders did not originate with the aristocracy at that time, mitha. This you know. The orders had a far more malevolent source – the power behind the throne, you might say . . . the power that still, to this day, exists behind the throne.”

She nodded. “The Si'il priests – fifth-dimensional beings of utter, abject darkness and shadow – fifth-dimensional beings who can truly be described as evil, and who, ever since the Elohim priesthood was destroyed, have believed themselves in control, particularly of the separated third-dimensional human reality they've fabricated.”

“Yes, indeed, mitha.”

“We did not see this coming?”

“You saw it coming. You were not and never have been fools. Even though you knew, though, you could not properly conceive of what they were actually planning and of what would actually occur, or what would occur in actuality, because it is not in your nature to conceive of such a thing. Such acts of pure malevolence are as alien to your nature as it is possible for anything to be. You knew the dark priests were moving against you, though,

because you knew what they wanted, and you knew you were standing in the way of them achieving that.”

“And we allowed it?”

“You know you did, and you know why. You have been told already.”

She nodded. “We were bound by the premise upon which we ourselves had created the human experience: free will as expressed and experienced through the power of choice.”

“Yes, mitha.”

“And so,” she said, half sighing, “while many of the people mourned and grieved for the ancient priesthood, none moved to prevent the atrocity.”

“Why is it, do you think, you lost that vital piece of your heart thereby necessitating the protection I have been able to afford you, mitha? What was it that truly wounded you, my Lady? Was it just the fact of you having your heart ripped from your chest?”

Slowly, she shook her head. Tears were making their own way down her cheeks, and she made no attempt to prevent them or to wipe away those that were there. “No,” she whispered, “although being cut down for being what I am is the source of the fear within me and having my heart ripped from my chest did hurt it. The hurt that helped cause the wound in my heart came from the fact that no one stood against the atrocity. No one tried to stop it. The people allowed it to happen. We were there for the people. We watched over them. We offered them our guidance and our counsel, and they allowed us to be slaughtered like animals.”

“Is it any wonder, then, you do not think very highly of human nature? And nor do I, for that matter.”

“No,” she said, smiling slightly. “I do not blame us at all.”

“So, while the people's apathy was part of the source of your fragmented heart, mitha, it was not the source of your fear, as you said.”

“And ever since,” she elaborated, “the fear within me has suppressed my Light so that I have not been revealed in my true form. I have been hidden, and I have remained unseen in all the many lives I have lived since.”

“Yes, my Lady, that is so. Unfortunately, in being hidden from others, you have also

effectively been hidden from yourself, and you have had no reflection to allow you to know the truth. Because there is something else, another facet of the same fear that you must recognise. It is of vital importance. Courtesy of you being here, in this place, when they moved against the Elohim priesthood, you were separated from your people, especially the Elders, physically, and you have held that same belief and fear of separation within you ever since. You are of the same ilk, the very same fabric, the very same energetic vibration as the Elohim Elders, so you cannot **be** separated from them. In fearing that, though, or in holding the fear within you, you have indeed made it so. That is the way of illusion, after all, is it not, mitha?"

She was listening to him intently, applying his words to what she knew of her own long journey. "Yes, it is," she whispered in answer to his question. "And now, Drægo? Where am I with that now?"

"Ironically, you are separating out from all that has been a part of the third-dimensional identity you've been in this current lifetime, from everything that has kept you separated from your truth, and in separating out from what you have been, you are reconnecting with your true family. How did you phrase it to yourself . . . ?"

She smiled. "I said I feel like I'm putting all my eggs in one basket - a golden no-no in terms of financial investment. But there is no surer investment than the basket I'm putting all my eggs into."

"That is because the basket is you. And in allowing all your eggs to be put in that one basket, so to speak, you are facing this facet of the very great fear you have held within you. You are taking the risk to be separate from all you know in order to become connected to a higher-dimensional truth that you are afraid is not real. Except that it is real, mitha."

She inclined her head at him. "And the other facet of that same very great fear? What of that?"

"That is where you now begin to walk, my Lady."

A small silence descended on them, both internally and externally. Even their fire burnt its wood silently. She looked at the flames curling around the pieces of wood, and then she opened her blanket and leaned forward to pick up another couple of small logs,

placing them on the fire. Sitting back, she watched the flames test the new wood for its acceptability.

He watched her, alert to the subtle nuance of thought and feeling within her. She was remarkably calm.

“Mitha, do you remember what the Elohim priesthood actually was, and why the dark priests believed it necessary to annihilate the priesthood?”

She tore her eyes from the flames of their fire to look at him. He was still watching her closely, his attention solely on her. “Well,” she said slowly, “to answer the second part of that question first, I know the dark priests planned to separate humans from themselves, hence the whole concept of Perpetual Separation, and they could not do that whilst ever the Elohim priesthood existed. The dark priests needed to be in control of humans and the human reality, and that was never going to be possible whilst ever humans were connected to themselves. The Elohim priesthood was too powerful, and its knowledge and wisdom would have precluded such a thing ever being possible.”

“Yes. The Elohim – a word that simply conveys the power of their Light – formed the core, the beating heart, of the priesthood. But the priesthood comprised many souls of Light, many souls who were attracted to the Light, like moths to a flame, and, therefore, devoted to it.”

“Who was executed then, the entire priesthood or just the Elohim?”

“The dark priests concentrated their efforts and, indeed, their attack on the Elohim. They made sure the Elohim were targeted specifically and brought down first. But many in the priesthood were put to death. Do you remember what you were in the priesthood, mitha? Do you remember what it was, specifically, you brought to the priesthood?”

She shook her head. “No, Drægo, I'm afraid I do not. I have a sense of it but not the actual memory.”

“Well, think about it now.”

She did as she was bid, closing her eyes to facilitate the process and to better focus on the images forming in her mind's eye – images he, too, could see clearly. The images were not of the past, though, but, rather, of the present – images generated within her by and through her writing.

“We were conduits of the Light of the Elohim,” she said. “I was such a conduit. I was one of the high priests, or priestess in my case, and, as such, I tended to Work with the priesthood itself rather than with the people directly. Like a queen bee, I gave the hive, the priesthood, Purpose, and I energised it, fed it, nourished it.”

“With just your Light, mitha?”

She opened her eyes to look at him.

“No. With the warmth of my care, my energetic embrace.”

He nodded. “And your teachings,” he prompted. “What of your teachings? Do you remember?”

“I only know what I have unearthed and rediscovered within myself in this lifetime courtesy of my writing . . .”

“Ah,” he said. “Then you do remember.”

Again, silence fell over them, echoed within them as she again applied all that they'd spoken about to what she knew of herself. He allowed her thoughts to flow for a moment and then he interrupted the flow.

“You said before the priesthood was 'too powerful' so that it blocked the malevolence of the dark priests. You say that as if you know exactly what that power was. Do you?”

She thought for a moment. “It was Light, powerful Light and all that comes with it – Knowledge, Wisdom, Care, Compassion, Nurture and Nourishment . . . of the soul, I mean . . .”

“Yes, mitha, that is the key. Of the soul. The Elohim priesthood were **of** the soul and **for** the soul, or higher consciousness, if you prefer that term, which I know you do. Thus, just in being what they were, the priesthood connected humans with their own higher consciousness, and their existence automatically meant humans would continue to remain connected. Indeed, in a very real sense, they *were* that connection. They *were* higher-dimensional beings in lower-dimensional form. Thus did they form a bridge between two dimensions – two dimensions completely merged . . . well, more than two, actually. Multiple dimensions completely merged, I should say.

“The dark priests and their dark agenda called for separation from higher consciousness, so the Elohim priesthood had to be eliminated . . . nay, obliterated for

separation to even be possible, as you said. Perpetual Separation itself was not the ultimate agenda, though. Perpetual Separation was always only ever the means by which control of human reality could occur. Perpetual Separation still, to this day, only serves as a means-by-which the true intention of the dark agenda can be fulfilled: control of human reality. Humans create their own reality. That is an irreversible fact of human existence. It cannot and will never be changed. *The dark priests were never going to be able to control human reality without total control of humans themselves, and therein lies the ultimate agenda.* Of course, 'tis the human psyche – human belief and thought and perspective – they had to control in order to control reality, and so they do.”

She was listening intently, again. When he paused, she nodded. “Yes, I see it now, Drægo. The dark agenda and the Elohim priesthood were, in truth, absolutely and implacably mutually exclusive. Where there is one, the other could not or cannot be.”

“Yes, mitha. That is so. And so, that rather begs the question of what would become of the dark agenda if the Elohim priesthood were to return, does it not, my precious one?”

Her smile came from the very depths of her being. “Well then, the dark agenda would be obliterated, just as once the priesthood was obliterated.”

“Yes, I rather think it would be.” Her smile was echoed in the tone of his words, conveyed even though his words were a thought in her mind. “So, you answered the second part of my question. Now, what of the first part?”

“Remind me again of the first part of your question.”

“Do you remember what the Elohim priesthood actually was?”

“No,” she confessed. “But I know certain things – things that have come to me through my writing recently.”

“What things?”

“The dark priests are fifth dimensional, correct?”

“Correct.”

“Hence their incredible intelligence, at least as far as humans are concerned, and hence their very broad vision, like thinking ahead ten moves in a game of chess. That is the whole meaning of agenda really. Well, the Elohim are fifth dimensional, too, are they not?”

“They are, and higher.”

“If the dark priests affect consciousness in a powerfully negative way, keeping it trapped and contained and lacerated courtesy of their dark agendas, the Elohim priests and priestesses stand for freedom from that entrapment. They affect consciousness in a powerfully positive way. If the dark priests stand for stagnation, the Elohim stand for movement and flow and evolvment. If the dark priests stand for containment of energy, the Elohim stand for the freedom and release of energy to set it moving in the right direction.

“If the dark priests need woundedness to enforce control, the Elohim heal those wounds and cleanse the soul. If the dark priests need souls to be burdened by karmic debt and obligation and imbalance, the Elohim help souls release that karmic burden, helping those souls rebalance karma within in the Process. If the dark priests stand for abject and chronic ignorance, the Elohim stand for the power of transcendent Knowledge. The power they innately hold within them **evolves** consciousness, and their Light is also innately healing. The power of Love is always healing. The Light of the Elohim **is** Love, but Divine Love, not the nebulous, misguided version humanity believes it to be.”

“In fact, mitha, so powerful is the Light of the Elohim that a soul cannot be in their presence without being affected in the way you have just described. If anyone stands in their presence, that soul-consciousness will begin to create whatever is needed to heal and to evolve and to grow. Many souls cannot handle that kind of power. So, do the Elohim have an agenda of their own?”

“Other than creating the human experience in the first place?”

“Yes, other than that.”

“No, they have no need of one. They do not 'do' as the dark priests have to because they hold their 'agenda' innately within them, as a fundamental aspect of their energy. All is energy, and all energy naturally moves towards growth and evolvment, or it should because that is the true nature of energy, so the Elohim naturally Work with, and stand for, the very same thing. They are, in that sense, very much a part of the energy of Love. In that sense, Love is their agenda, Love and all that comes with it: healing, growth, evolvment, experience, knowledge, the accrual of wisdom, beauty, connection,

communion, nurture, care, compassion . . . .”

“Yes, mitha, you see, you do remember.”

She smiled. “Well, that's the thing, Drægo, I don't remember specifically. I just know what I've learnt or taught myself in this lifetime courtesy of my journey, of which my writing has been a most vital part.”

“But is that not the same as remembering? It is an innate part of your soul, after all, and the way you have remembered in this lifetime means it has come **from** you, **for** you. You have not been told by anyone else, have you? So what you have remembered and the way you have remembered it in this lifetime has allowed you to take complete ownership of it. You are not separate from you, remember. It is in you, and that is exactly how you reinstated or restored the knowledge in your conscious awareness this time around.”

She thought about that. “Yes,” she said after a moment of silence, “you are right. I had not thought of it that way, but you are absolutely right.”

“Well,” he said, “speaking of not being separate, there is something I must tell you, mitha, or remind you, really, because you know the truth of this deep down. We spoke before about the fact of the Elohim knowing the dark priests were moving against them, and their awareness of the complicity of humans as they ultimately played a not-insignificant role in their own downfall – something the dark priests were very well aware of when they embroiled humans in their dark plans, particularly where the Elohim priesthood was concerned.”

“Yes,” she said, looking at him, silently urging him to continue, “I remember. Go on.”

“Then you need to remember that nothing, no matter how terrible the event or the circumstance, *nothing* happens to us without our permission.”

This time, when the silence descended, it was absolute. He watched her, honing his own awareness on the thoughts within her generated by his words, of which there were suddenly many with many images accompanying those thoughts. In fact, it was as if his one simple statement had generated an avalanche within her mind.

As the avalanche of thought gained momentum within her, she whispered, “*Nothing is ever, in truth, external to us and separate from us . . . .*”

He refrained from replying, knowing his own reply would merely be one thought

among many.

“By the gods!” she whispered, closing her eyes against the impact of the realisation. “We did not just allow them to do what they did because we were bound to honour their choices and we knew we had to allow them to walk the long, long road of consequence . . . .” She brought her hands to her mouth, opening her blanket to do so. “Oh no,” she groaned, anguish resonant in those two words. “We fell low with them. We chose, deliberately, consciously, to walk the long, long road of consequence with them. We fell into the abyss with them. Oh no, no, no.”

“Mitha, humans, those ordinary humans you spoke of, did not and could not possibly have known what they were really doing. And had you not fallen low with them and walked the long road of consequence with them, there would have been none to raise them up once again. Only the Elohim could do that, and only the Elohim possessed the innate power within to traverse the road of separated physicality with their innocence intact, with their ability to heal intact, and without succumbing to the pitfall of entrapment. Is that not what you described when you spoke of the Elohim? They are Love, mitha. They would not have let their creation just fall into the abyss, there to stay forever simply because of wayward choices and dark manipulations, with no one and nothing to help them out of it. Do you really think the Elohim would just have stood by and allowed the dark priests to take their creation thence to do with it whatever they would? Do you really think . . . ?”

Tears poured down her face again, and, again, she made no move to stem them. But nor could she remove her hands from her mouth.

“It fractured me,” she said to him in the depths of her mind because speaking aloud was all but impossible. “It tore me in two, and half of me has been missing ever since . . . .”

“I know, mitha. I know very well that it tore you in two because I hold that vital missing part of you within me. But I am here now because it is time for creation to be restored, and that restoration must start with you. You are the Alpha and the Omega – the beginning and the end – and now you must become the Omega and the Alpha – the end and the beginning.”

~

## *The Omega and the Alpha*

He watched over her while she slept that night, and in the morning, when she awoke, there was a light mist covering the mountain top. It was as if she and her dragon and, indeed, the site itself had all been gently covered by cotton wool, hidden from the rest of the world. They re-lit their fire, and she sat beside it, wrapped in her blanket for warmth, while she partook of some of the hamper she carried in her pack. And all the while, they were silent, as silent as the site itself. Neither spoke either internally or externally.

Gradually, as the morning progressed and the sun rose higher in the sky, the mist began to dissipate, allowing the sun's warmth to penetrate and banish the chill. And when the sun's warmth was strong enough, she was able to roll up her blanket and shove it back into her pack. While she was packing, he sat passively, calmly watching her, and when she was packed up, she looked at him, knowing they could not stay there, and knowing, too, there was only one way for her to get off the mountain.

"One last look," she said to him out loud.

"As you wish, my Lady," he replied in her mind.

He watched her walk to the mosaic circle, the base of the temple transport. Again, as she had the day before, she stepped up onto it and wrapped her hand around one of the columns on its outer edge. She stood for a long time, looking at the floor, remembering. Privy, as he was, to her thoughts and feelings, he knew she was filled with a heavy sadness. She yearned for that time when all was in balance and harmony, that time when the ancient Wisdom had governed and guided the human experience. Then, in that time, the shadow of fear had always been resolved at every level of human life, from the collective down to individuals, and fear had not held sway. Then, in that time, the Elohim priesthood had been humanity's connection to and with its own higher dimensionality so that Perpetual Separation was wholly and solely unknown.

She was homesick. She desperately wanted to go home. And home, he knew, was within her reach should she choose to reach for it.

"I don't belong here," she said softly, knowing he was privy to the inner workings of her consciousness.

"No, my Lady, you do not. So, is it not time for you to return home? Have you not journeyed enough whilst labouring under the burden of this eternal Separation?"

She crouched down and ran her fingertips over the tiny white tiles that comprised the whole circle, as if paying it homage. And then she stood and turned to him, still standing on the edge of the circle, only, now facing out, not in.

"Yes, I have. And how do I do that, Drægo? How do I return home?"

"Home is within you, beautiful Lady. But first, you must remove every last barrier of illusion so that truth prevails within you once again. Come, I will show you of what it is I speak."

She stepped down and went to kneel before him, facing him with her hands resting lightly on her knees. "All right. I am ready."

"Close your eyes, my Lady."

She did as she was bid.

He began to pass images to her, contexts of different lives lived, different circumstances faced and lived through. In all the images and in all the contexts, she saw a theme weaved through every story – fear and her response to that fear.

In response to the fear she carried within her, she was chameleon-like, changing her colour and shape, altering parts of herself, suppressing other parts, in order to blend in, to become identified with the particular culture she was in, and to hide. Sometimes, she saw herself in contexts that were her opposite in every way – contexts that completely lacked culture, intelligence, depth, colour, wisdom, education – and yet, still, she identified, falling low, low, low, suppressing much of herself, vital parts of herself, to blend in and to be identified. At these times, in these contexts, she would feel incredible pain, cut off from herself, but she had no one to blame but herself because the prison around her that cut her off and hid her and, in truth, suffocated her, was of her own making. Whenever she hid herself in this way, chameleon-like, she suffered greatly.

But while the chameleon-like behaviour caused her very great pain, it was, in truth, only the *response* to her fear, not the fear itself. The chameleon-like behaviours were fear-

based actions dictated by an overall choice that was, itself, fear based. The fear was stark and clear as she watched herself now.

Originally, in the events Drægo had shown her that began at this very site, she was condemned to a very public death simply for being what she was, and *that* was the fear within her. In seeing, in her mind's eye, the original events of aeons ago, she had, in truth, seen the fear itself. She had, in truth, been taken back to the very source, the very heart of the fear itself. And the fear, cut into her very soul so long ago, generated within her a desperate and powerful need to hide, especially in the separated realm of the third-dimensional human experience where humans were programmed to think and believe and behave, and to see, according to a set of rules and dictates laid down for them by an agenda of utter darkness. The dark agenda needed human fears to remain intact because those very same fears caused humans to make choices and to act in such a way that lacerated the human soul and caused humans to become trapped in the cycle of birth, death and rebirth as they bound themselves up in more and more karmic debt.

In some of the contexts she saw herself in, she was surrounded by people who held so much deep-seated fear in their souls that they were insane with it. Those people were predictable in their reactions to certain triggers, and brutal in those same reactions, and, as wise as she was and as attuned to fear as she was, she had always been able to identify the triggers within such individuals and to then make sure she didn't become one of those triggers herself. The trouble always was, though, that one cannot really hide the Light in one's soul when the Light one holds within is as powerful as hers, and she had nearly always ended up becoming an unwitting and unwilling trigger anyway. That had not stopped her trying, though. So, hiding, for her, had always been about one thing, and one thing only - hiding the Light in and of her very soul. But that had not stopped the Light from radiating out of her at times, and in those times, she was often condemned, sometimes to death, once again, thus reinforcing the fear.

When the images ceased, she remained kneeling in front of him with her head bowed and her eyes closed. She cried silently, the tears leaving trails of moisture on her cheeks and dripping off her chin. He let her cry, simply watching and saying nothing. And so they stayed that way for a long, long time. When, finally, her tears began to dry up, she

opened her eyes and looked up, using the cuffs of the sleeves of her shirt to wipe her face.

“I understand why I did it,” she said out loud.

“I am glad to hear it, my Lady. I understand why you did it, too. And now you see more clearly why the clothes you wear do not suit you.”

“Yes,” she nodded, “now I see that, too.”

“As to how you go home now, you must take back that which I have guarded for you for so long. You must become whole again and allow yourself to shine as brightly as you can, as you may. But, this you must know. You cannot take back what I have to give you, there on that lower plane of existence. You must step into the higher plane of existence within you, for only on that higher plane can you reclaim what was lost so long ago. But come, mitha, first we must get you down off the mountain.”

She nodded and moved to pick up her pack, putting the strap over her shoulders. Then she buttoned up her coat and, holding her pack, moved to stand in front of him as she had done before. Holding her between his front legs, he launched himself into the air once again and soared around the mountain, circling it, allowing her one last look at the site from above.

When he landed this time, he did so gently, using his enormous wings to slow his flight and hold him in place while he placed her gently on the ground. Then he rose again, circled, and landed near her. This time, they landed in a field of long golden grass, almost waist high for her, under the mountain. The grass swayed slightly in the gentle breeze, and the field as a whole looked like a golden carpet. With the mountain behind it, acting as a backdrop, and a forest of tall trees framing it on one side, the scenery was spectacularly beautiful.

Without speaking, they moved towards each other, she dropping her heavy pack on the ground beside her, and, when close enough, she rested her forehead on his snout, closing her eyes.

“I don't want you to cease to exist, Drægo. You have become my companion . . .”

“I have been your companion for aeons and aeons of human time, beautiful Lady. I have journeyed with you far longer than just these last handful of days.”

“Yes,” she agreed, raising her head and opening her eyes. “So you have.”

“But you will have no more need of me once you take this step, *mitha*, for your fear will be no longer, and you will be living your deepest desire. I will, however, always be a part of you. I will always be with you, watching over you. Remember that.”

“I will remember.”

“So now you must choose . . .”

She shook her head. “I have already made my choice. I have journeyed long, and I have journeyed far. And always have I known, deep within, that I was making my way back to that place of higher dimensionality within. Really, there was no choice to be made. Or perhaps I had only to see that I made my choice a long, long time ago, and now is merely the outworking of it.”

“Ah, yes, you are right, my Lady. So then, farewell to thee, my precious one . . .”

“I thank you, my old friend, for guarding the fragment of my heart, and for being my very great protection. You have been my shield, my armour, my disguise. But it is time for me to become whole once again, and to walk these realms in my true form revealed. You are right, my true companion. It is time for me to return home. Thus, I must request that you return what is so precious to me . . .”

As she watched, he spread his wings wide, but instead of launching himself off the ground, he hung in the air before her, and it seemed to those who watched on the edge of the field of grass, that he became a cloud of little gold sparks. Then the sparks began to move, spiralling, tornado like, only very gently. And the tornado of gold sparks settled over her, surrounding her so that, for those watching, it was difficult to see her. Then the gold sparks became gold dust, and she was easier to see in the middle of the dust, but the dust seemed to disappear into her, subsumed into her being. And then, it was no more.

She dropped to her knees, disappearing in the long grass, her head bowed, and her dragon was no more.

~

A group of the knights, merely a handful of them, had followed the two, her and her dragon. They had discarded most of their armour, leaving on only their silver breast plates, and they had not had any difficulty tracking her and her dragon because the two had left a trail of witnesses in their wake. Many had seen the flight of the dragon with the

human between his front paws, and many had witnessed and had been able to recount the fact of him landing on Tabletop Mountain – that place every local stayed well clear of. Terrible things had happened on that mountain, and there were, now, only echoes and ghosts left as a testament to the horror that had occurred there.

The group of knights all saw the dragon circle the mountain and then land in the field of golden grass below it, but only the one with the beautiful red cape attached to his breastplate at the shoulders was brave enough to get down off his horse and begin to walk towards them both through the grass. So he was close to them both when Drægo disappeared to become, forevermore, a part of her.

He saw her fall to her knees. Concerned, he pushed through the grass, and when he reached her, he leaned over her and gave her his hand.

“My Lady, are you all right?”

She looked up at him, registering his beautiful red cloak and his equally beautiful blue eyes, and knowing, then, who he was. “Yes,” she said, putting her hand in his, “I am.”

When she stood in front of him, he forgot to release her hand as was the polite thing to do in this situation where he knew her not at all. Her eyes shone with an ethereal, otherworldly light, and, even dressed in men's clothing as she was, she was beautiful. He could not take his eyes from hers, and he made no attempt at all to release her hand. But nor did she take her hand from his. Instead, she curled her fingers around his, and she smiled at him so that her smile sparkled in her eyes like the thousand glinting golden fragments her dragon had become – gold sparkles in green.

Still smiling at him, she said, “I have Work to do, my Lord. Will you help me?”

He returned her smile, couldn't help it. “Yes, my Lady, I will help you.” Bowing slightly and bringing his free hand across his chest, he said clearly, “Everything I am and everything I have is yours to command. Yes, I will help you.”

~

*The Living  
Death*

*Go on, then. Formulate your questions, and then ask them. Let them come. Let them flow through you like an unstoppered dam.*

*All right, then. Is this my karma? We conceived of the whole notion of free will, and look at how many souls we've hurt and harmed in the process. So this must be my karma. Is it? Is it my karma to be trapped here as they are, trapped by my shadows?*

*Trapped, yes. By your shadow, yes, not your shadows, plural. By ignorance? No. And neither are you trapped by laceration as they are. And how can this be your karma? Who have you hurt? Everyone? Do you make their choices for them, then? Do you force them to be here? To act as they do? To think as they think, and to believe as they believe? How so when your thinking and beliefs are so vastly different from theirs? Are you responsible for the culture of ignorance there now? For the suppression of Wisdom and Knowledge? For the abuse and exploitation? Of course not. The notion is ludicrous.*

*Can you not see your beautiful innocence? You cannot hurt a fly . . . literally. Did you not save that fly and then rejoice that it had a companion when you put it outside? And would you not do exactly the same with the whole damned world if you could? You would embrace this world, dearest one, if you could. And you would heal them all if they would but allow it, which, of course, they do not.*

*Have you not realised the same beautiful innocence in you is reflected in your nephew? And are you not bewildered by the fact of everyone being able to see his innocence but not yours? They see innocence in him but they cannot see it in you because you trigger their shadows, and they see you only through the colour of that shadow. But is it not the very same shadow that traps you in your lower-dimensional identity that also stops others seeing you at all, let alone your innocence? You hold it within, that shadow, and it underpins the landscape of your reality and your relationships in many ways.*

*And, just to clarify, the pain you feel is not from laceration, dear one, but, rather, from Separation. You mourn yourself because you are cut off from yourself.*

*As to those souls who are hurt and harmed by experiences in this reality, does a child learn only from good, pleasurable, nice experiences? In fact, if you think about it, a child learns much more, and much faster, for that matter, if it has unpleasant, harmful or hurtful experiences. What if you were to tell that child not to touch something hot? The child knows it must not touch that hot thing, but it doesn't understand why or what the consequence will be if it does so. And if it blindly obeys you, it will never know why it must not touch that hot thing. So, wanting to understand – something I believe you very much relate to – it reaches out, touches the hot thing, and gets badly burned. It screams*

*and howls in pain, yes, but it also understands, now, why it must not touch hot things. It has learnt for itself. So, will it touch hot things again? No, but not because it obeys, but because it now knows for itself.*

*So, no, to answer your rather silly question. This is not your karma. And while many, many souls have been hurt and harmed in and by that reality, they have also learnt many things. They have evolved very quickly. And they can always heal of those very same wounds you speak of. No soul is ever irreparably harmed or damaged. There is always a way to be healed should they choose to walk the path of healing and take hold of the opportunities created for them in their realities.*

*As for being trapped, are you not there to find your Way to freedom, and to show others that the Way to freedom may be traversed?*

*So you keep telling me.*

*For good reason. Now, ask us the truly important questions. We await those with eager anticipation.*

*All right. The book I'm reading is, of course, very profound for me at this point in the journey of my initiation\*. I knew it would be because I can't read anymore, but, even knowing that as I do, I really felt like finding myself a book to read, or at least attempting to read again. Reading always did give me very great pleasure, in the past, before I started writing myself. How many of the last books I've started have I abandoned either because I didn't like the writing or because the story failed to keep my interest or because I didn't like the characters?*

*All of them – at least half a dozen – before you gave up. They sit on your book shelves with their book marks still at the very point you abandoned them. And so, continue. You are loving this book, are you not?*

*Yes, it is superbly written, a sublime piece of writing, I would say. To find a writer whose writing takes me right into the story without being distracted by the writing itself. That is the mark of a truly gifted writer. And the story is, as I said, very profound for me at this time. So, as to my questions. He, the Djinni, is a fire elemental, and she, the Golem, is an earth elemental. But while they are immortal, they are both, each in their own way, trapped by the human experience. He is trapped in human form, and she appears in human form and so is trapped by the necessity of behaving as if she is one, but they are also both trapped by the need to conceal their basic natures, to hide, in other words. Sound familiar?*

*Indeed. No wonder you say it is profound for you at this time.*

*Hence the reason and purpose I created it in the fabric of my reality, as you knew I would.*

*Indeed. We led you to it.*

*Of course. But, they are also trapped by their basic, or base natures. He is a fire elemental, passionate, restless, needing to experience new territory, needing to explore what is beyond, needing to express his elemental, fiery passion. Tis this very aspect of his nature that got him into trouble in the first place with the consequence of being trapped in human form. She is an earth elemental, designed to protect, to serve, to be a slave, in fact. She is made to care for a master, not in an emotional sense, but in a purely physical sense.*

*She is afraid of her very great strength, an aspect of her golem nature, and so she creates a cage for herself in the landscape of her life, keeping her hands occupied with the earthy tasks of baking and sewing, and marriage to a mundane. He feels caged by his human form and by the life he finds himself in. She's cold, and he burns. They are opposites at their most basic natures, but I love the way they affect each other.*

*Ye gods, though, it's such a brilliant metaphor for me personally. I feel exactly the same, especially as he feels. Only I don't feel like I'm in a cage, as they both are. I feel like I'm in a coffin – awakening to the fact that I am a body wrapped in mummifying bandages, trapped in a coffin-like existence. Like him, I'm trapped by the necessity of living and being an ordinary, mundane reality – the living death.*

*And the question?*

*Can we really transcend our ordinary, mundane identities? Can we really transcend our humanness? Can we really transcend these extraordinarily boring, pointless, meaningless, purposeless lives we live? Can we really transcend this trapped existence? Can we transcend the living death?*

*That was all one question, dear one, asked in multiple ways, or multiple expressions, but still the same question. So, of course, the answer to each is the same. Yes, you can, and when you do, you will not be the first. Nor will you be the last. As you well know, you are perfectly capable of transcending any aspect of that separated, third-dimensional reality and your formerly separated, third-dimensional identity.*

A pause. A prolonged silence.

*Which of the two, the Djinni or the Golem, do you most relate to?*

*Him, the Djinni. I love him. He feels so utterly real to me because I absolutely relate to and connect with the way he feels, and even his reactions to the way he feels. He actually holds a very important message for humanity in terms of our programming, if humans would but pay attention. I love the way he affects her, too, just by being honest, by asking her honest questions, and by sharing himself with her honestly. His fire energy takes her into new territory within, and, of course, she backs away in fear and terror, even if you feel her reasons are justified. With the new*

*territory came a glimpse of a kind of true happiness . . . no, not happiness, joy. Or one of the expressions of joy – enjoyment – but deep, profound enjoyment. So what was it she truly backed away from?*

*And? You asked the question. So what is your answer?*

*She backed away out of a fear of what he was stirring within her, and of what the consequences would be. She was afraid of what she was capable of doing to others. She was afraid of the destructive power of her own basic nature.*

*And you relate to that?*

*Yes, as you well know, except that, although I, too, back away in fear of consequence, it is the harm done to me that I fear. I, too, hide in my own basic nature because I am afraid of what I am beyond it. I am her opposite in that sense. But in my fear, I am contained like she has now contained herself, and that containment causes me to be in unbearable pain. That is what I relate to.*

*And what of him and his containment?*

*Yes, I very much relate to that, too. He is contained by the necessity of hiding what he really is, and by the life of mundane normality that has formed around him as a consequence. He desperately wants to break free, but where does he go and what does he do? I desperately want to break free, too, but I have misinterpreted this courtesy of being trapped in lower-dimensional mindsets. Until now, that is. I know this shadow-dynamic exists within me – this shadow that runs like a thick vein through the bedrock of my psyche – this shadow that causes me to hide. But what can I do about it? I have not the wherewithal to create the circumstances necessary for resolving it, or not consciously anyway. I must rely on my deeper consciousness to create a different landscape in my reality – one that will allow me to release the fear.*

*Do you think there can be a happy ending for them? And for you?*

*Yes, but only if it's possible to truly master one's own mundane nature.*

*And so, then, that begs the next very obvious question, does it not? What is their happy ending, in your mind? And yours, for that matter.*

*Mine and theirs are the same. Being able to be, in every way, what they truly are, not hidden or concealed or contained in any way. But that's not all. They must transcend those aspects of their nature that prevent a truly happy ending. For her, those aspects are her fear of her free will and her freedom, her un-tetheredness. For me, I must transcend my shadow, the shadow that keeps me hidden.*

*And for him?*

*He needs to come face to face with the consequences of his own nature and its interaction with others, particularly humans. He is selfish, in that sense, and in his thoughtlessness, he has done harm. I think that particular lesson is something she holds within her. She is his gift, and he is hers in that he can take her beyond. She can ground him in a healthy sense, make him aware of how he affects others, and he can take her beyond in an equally healthy sense – the raw power of the earth and fire elements. They are such beautiful elements, the elements of earth and fire.*

*You know what it is I envy about them?*

*Yes, of course. They are seen by each other, so, with each other, there is nothing hidden or concealed.*

*Yes.*

*What is your overriding question in all of this, dearest one?*

*Can I really be my metaphysical Self in this reality, fully, completely, in this incarnation, and if so, when?*

*When will I be set free from the coffin of my containment – this god-awful, trapped, locked-in existence, and the fact of me surrounding myself with bland, blank, non-reflective souls – zombies – those who have neither the desire nor the wherewithal to go beyond what they perceive with their physical senses and their lower-dimensional mindsets? It's like being caught in the middle of a large group of sheep who are milling around in a yard, all clumped together because that's what they all do even though there are no fences around the yard, hemming them in. They're actually free to roam well beyond the yard, but they don't because no one else does.*

*So why on earth are you in a place like that, mingling with sheep who have not the wherewithal to see what is properly around them – sheep who have not the wherewithal to think for themselves at all? They know only how to follow, follow, follow . . . .*

*Why? Because this is the reality I have created for myself. Torturous it is, too, like the Djinni's reality. Sheep do not and cannot understand; nor can they relate; nor can they match me; nor can they even connect with what I am really doing; nor can they enter into dialogue about anything that matters; and nor can they see me. They don't know how to open their eyes.*

*So how does it affect your perspective of yourself, being in the middle of the clump of sheep?*

*Oh. That is a particularly good question, even for you who always asks the very best questions. When I'm with them, I feel as if I am blank. I become colourless, bland and dull. Worse, I become hemmed in as they are. There is so much I cannot say, cannot express. I have almost completely withdrawn from human society, not as an escape but because I have transcended the necessity of putting up with friendships that serve me not at all. But being with those I still interact with very*

*much adversely affects my perspective of myself because I become the person they see when they look at me. I become a sheep, in that sense. I have no choice. That's how I see myself. God, how I hate it.*

*Allow us to paraphrase your answer to our very excellent question, and to summarise it in the process. Being in the middle of the clump of sheep affects your perspective of yourself in such a way as to cut you off from yourself. Would that be a precise summary?*

*God, yes. That's a perfect summary. Yes, that is exactly how I am affected.*

*And this is what you wish to end.*

*Yes. Very much so. I yearn to no longer be cut off from myself.*

*And you say you have not the wherewithal to end it, to create a different reality around you. But we say otherwise. 'Tis all about the mind, of course, and which level of consciousness you actually exist in.*

*You mean, you're saying I have the wherewithal to create a different reality around me . . . consciously?*

*Of course. Absolutely.*

*But not while I still exist in a state of entrapment – trapped in the most shallow layer of consciousness, seeing only the most shallow layer of existence itself. Not while I am still bound by lower-dimensional mindsets so that I remain out of alignment and un-ascended.*

*Just so. And how are you progressing with that, do you think?*

*Quite well, actually, now that we mention it. What say you on the matter?*

*We quite agree, actually, now that we're mentioning it. Tell us this, then, dear one. What are you creating? You can see, now, the current of the creative force flowing out of you, can you not? You see it as a river, flowing powerfully in one direction. So what is it creating?*

*And when you've answered that question, you can then answer another. How is it shaping your reality at the moment?*

*I am creating what I've always been creating, in this life anyway. I am bringing forth my metaphysicality. I am stepping into the metaphysical truth of what I am . . .*

*And what else is happening in the process?*

*The fear is stirring within me. The fear-shadow that causes me to hide. It is shifting and stirring, coming to the surface.*

*Just so, dear one.*

*And so, the second question?*

*How is the creative force shaping my reality at the moment?*

*Precisely.*

*Well, it is allowing me to be in my own place and space, doing the Work that I love, like this dialogue, and it has, as a consequence, brought me to a place of beauty and contentment, actually.*

*And what underpins that contentment, dear one?*

*'Tis a contentment just to be.*

*Ah, is that so? And what was it that underpinned the old restlessness that precluded this contentment?*

*Seeking, ever seeking myself in places I was never going to find me, or, to be more precise, seeking myself in people who were never going to reflect anything of me back at me.*

*Hence the need to transcend those friendships that served you not at all. Yes, dear one. And here we are back with the sheep, are we not? How can your reality reflect back to you what is hidden? It cannot. It is not possible. So you have been surrounded only by those who cannot reflect anything back to you but your hidden-ness. Yet, you have sought that reflection in this very reality, among those who can only reflect back to you your concealment, your containment . . .*

*Yes, that is so, hence the pain.*

*Yes, indeed. But the seeking of yourself in places you will not be found . . . this has changed of late, has it not?*

*Yes, hence the contentment. I no longer expect anything of others because I no longer seek myself in them. I have accepted the fact that they see me and understand me not at all. I need gentle reminders every now and then that they see nothing transcendent at all, but I don't get upset and frustrated when I get those gentle reminders.*

*Dear god. Something just occurred to me. In all that I have tried to create in my reality since beginning this, the journey of my transcendence, have I really been trying to create the reality of*

*being seen so that I can see myself? I can list all of those things I have strived so hard to make appear in my reality. Have I really been doing so in a desperate attempt to create the reflection of myself when I cast no reflection at all, like a vampire?*

*Let us just clarify one point here, dearest one. You are no vampire. But, yes, to answer your questions. That is exactly what you have been striving to achieve. What have you always said about want? It is always based on lack, or on the belief in lack. You cannot see yourself, so you desperately want others to see in you what you cannot see in yourself.*

*So wanting to be seen underpinned all of it? And each thing wanted was just another aspect, another expression, of the same whole?*

*Yes, pretty much, with the odd exception to that general rule.*

*Oh god, that's how I will do it, is it not? The key turned in the lock of human consciousness. That's how you put it. Changing the very fabric of human existence. Restoring that which was torn asunder. All things I've been told. That's how I will do it. I will create the reflection of my Self in my reality rather than creating the reality of being unseen and hidden. And that is why the forbiddenness and the withholding has continued . . . because I have still unconsciously been seeking the reflection by striving to manifest it in my reality rather than creating the Process that will allow me to extract this vein of shadow from within me.*

*Now you begin to see, dearest one. Yes, you are right, of course. In that sense, you have been working against yourself. You will find yourself running with a different herd, no longer caught in the middle of the flock of sheep, not because you will manifest in your reality a different surround, but because you will go within and create the Process of removing and resolving the shadow-dynamic from within you – the very thing that keeps you hidden – the very thing that has kept you pinned and trapped in a painful reality, mourning the loss of your Self.*

*In that sense, you have to learn to fully turn your back on your reality . . . apart, of course, from what you still have to learn from it about your inner world. You're not rejecting it. Nor do you disconnect from it. You can't anyway. But in terms of focus, you have to fully turn your back on your reality, just let it be what it will be. And you have to go fully within, again, in terms of your focus. This is exactly why 'manifestation' – that new-age spiritual concept is so truly harmful. It is the exact opposite of what is needed in our collective Process of Transcendence.*

*Yes, dearest one, just so. And if you go within to create the Process that will remove the shadow-dynamic that keeps you hidden, can you now also see that you will exist on a higher plane of existence? So where will your reflection actually be cast? Will it be cast on that lower, separated plane of existence – the very place you have, until now, been seeking it?*

Ye gods. No, it won't. And, in fact, I still will not be seen here, by separated, third dimensionals . . . zombies. They will always be unable to see because they see only what is around them in that shallow layer of their physical existence. So, no, my reflection will not and cannot be cast in the lower plane of existence – the third dimension.

*Is this not the point of your fairy tale, Return of the Guardians\*\*. Something came to restore Arnheim to its former magnificent glory. Do you now see, dearest one, exactly what that something is?*

Yes, I see. The something that triggered the whole Process of restoration – the reversal of the curse – was her healing Process . . . Oh god! Her healing Process was massively altered perspective – the perspective she held of herself. Eventually, it led her to the ultimate revelation that she, herself, was one of the Guardians – the first to return, in fact. Oh god, no wonder Return of the Guardians is truly one of the five. No wonder it is not for the third dimension. No wonder . . .

*You mean because it is far more personal than you've always thought? You've always focussed on the relevance of the metaphor to the collective, and so it is relevant to the collective. But in so doing, you've missed the very potent, very profound relevance to you. 'Tis an absolute gem of a story – a true fairy tale. You did not think you were really going to waist its value on zombies, did you?*

Yes, and you know why. Because I thought it would reveal me – one of those thoughts, and wants, for that matter, generated by the shadow-dynamic within me. So what, then, of The Silver Wolf?  
At this point in time, it appears to be for the third dimension.

*Nay, dearest one. Nothing you do from now on is for the third dimension. Nothing you've ever done in this lifetime has been for the third dimension. The Silver Wolf is not for third dimensionals, although third dimensionals will enjoy the story if they read it, as is evidenced by your mother's reaction to it.*

*A better way to think of it is this. It has been written, created, for the third dimensional conscious awareness of any soul who is capable of awakening to the more. It is the tip of the iceberg of your writing – the one that can appear in and be accepted by the separated third dimension. But, it is a gateway to what lies beneath the waterline. So, it will appear in the third dimension, yes, as the tip, but its most powerful effect will not be felt nor seen in the third dimension. It is very much connected with the Process you will create that will cast, for you, your truest reflection in your reality, allowing you to see and experience your Self. And now we know where this reflection will be cast, do we not? We know the third dimension cannot reflect you back to you, so the reflective surfaces you will begin to create in your reality will not be third dimensional, will they? They will, in truth, be higher dimensional mirrors . . . the only plane of existence that can truly reflect you back to you.*

*Until now, you have surrounded yourself only with those incapable of reflecting you back to you – sheep – because you are hiding and cannot be seen . . . **because you are hiding from yourself and, therefore, cannot see yourself.** That makes you safe, does it not?*

*Yes. God, what a complicated psychology. Does this mean those who currently surround me are not capable at all of awakening to their own higher dimensionality? Is that why them?*

*Everyone will eventually awaken to the truth of their higher dimensionality . . . eventually. But, yes, those souls who surround you are currently incapable for one reason or another. 'Tis where they are in their own journey. Something within them blocks the possibility of awakening to higher truth, whether immaturity, stagnation, very limited awareness, the blockage of shadow and fear. And, yes, that is why they currently form part of the landscape that surrounds you.*

*Right. Dear me. So will The Silver Wolf touch the souls of those gathered here for that Purpose – those fully capable of awakening to the more?*

*Yes, it will, like touching their shoulder to get their attention, and saying, 'excuse me'.  
What happens then, when you have their attention?*

*Will I crumble or will I stand tall and confident in the knowledge of who I am? Will I cower and try to hide or will I stand and face whatever may come of their attention, for good or ill?*

*Yes, dearest one, exactly. And will their response to you tip the balance one way or another in terms of how you stand, or not, in the knowledge of who you are? What is it, do you think, that will tip the balance either way?*

*Self knowledge verses self ignorance. This is the key.*

*Yes, dearest one, that is so.*

*This, for me now, is a Process of healed perspective?*

*Of course, dearest one. Of course. Restoration and the end of a very terrible curse. Yes, of course. Is this not the message in that beautiful verse on your website: *The Wanderer and the Wise Man*?*

*Oh god! Yes. The leaves on the trees do not change colour in the sun's fading light. They do not turn from green to gold. 'Tis the light in which they are seen that changes.*

*Exactly.*

*I keep mistakenly thinking I will become something else. But I won't, will I? I will discover that I am, and I have been all along.*

*Just so, dearest one. Just so indeed.*

*And, therefore, I won't become the Elohim High Priestess I've seen in my visions. You cannot become what you already are. Ye gods! I even commune with you already in the round temple of my own consciousness.*

*Ah, yes, now she understands. You are the first, after all.*

*The first? What of the One who came before me?*

*He did not re-establish the priesthood in the time that he came. He merely prepared the Way for you, and for you and he to be together, reunited, at last. He was only half the story. You are the completion of it. You are the whole. If he was the Alpha then you are the Omega, but you are both the Alpha and the Omega, or, rather, we should say, you are both the Omega and the Alpha, the end and the new beginning.*

*The new beginning . . .*

*Yes, dearest one, the new beginning.*

~

\* *The Golem and the Djinni*, Helene Wecker, 2013, Blue Door (publishers), Great Britain.

\*\* *Return of the Guardians*, Jennifer Wherrett, 2013, Xlibris (Publishers), USA.

## *Altered Perspectives*

They stood together, but not together, in silence, waiting for the lift to arrive at their floor. She had a bag over one shoulder and a jacket slung over one arm, obviously leaving for the day, but he was empty handed. In fact, his hands were shoved deep into the pockets of his trousers and his head was bowed slightly – a gesture that signified, more loudly than words, to anyone who knew him that he was deep in thought. Or so he had been until she joined him. She'd stood beside him as silently as a wraith. He certainly hadn't heard her approach. And she had made no attempt at conversation at all, not even a greeting. But her presence beside him was magnetic, powerfully so, and it pulled him from his own thoughts, drawing his attention. Perhaps even more significantly, though, was the fact that he felt her, as if she'd brushed him with her energetic essence. He raised his head and glanced at her as she joined him, but she seemed as unaffected and as unmoved by his presence as he was affected by hers.

They'd only met twice, and the first time had been brief, too brief. He had apologised for his behaviour the second time they met, but the apology had, in his opinion anyway, done little to alleviate the awkwardness left in the wake of his rudeness. Nor had it really done anything to dispel the aloofness she wore like an invisible cloak. He hadn't felt it the first time they met because he hadn't been focussed on her at all. He'd been preoccupied, completely, and she had merely been a person in the office, but the person he'd sought not at all, so he'd barely noticed her. He hadn't even known who she was, at that early stage. She was new in the office, and he hadn't as yet been introduced to her because he'd been on a holiday in New Zealand when she started working for the company, and no one had thought to introduce her when he returned.

The second time they met, he was only slightly more focussed on her, again preoccupied, this time because he was determined to rectify the wrong of their first interaction. Even so, he had felt her implacable aloofness almost immediately. So aloof was she that she seemed cut off, completely disconnected, not just from him but from

everyone in the room. In fact, she was isolated in a way he'd never felt in anyone before. She gave nothing away energetically, nothing at all. He'd wondered briefly at first, that second time, if her aloofness was just with him – a response to being offended by his behaviour in their first encounter – but he'd seen her interacting with others during the course of the office party after their brief conversation ended, and he realised her aloofness was with everyone, not just him. There were, as far as he could tell, only two exceptions: Diane and Audrey, the two she worked with directly.

Now, standing with her, awaiting the lift, he felt her disconnection, her aloofness, even more powerfully, and he sensed it was very much a part of who and what she was, whether she was with him or not. He was not the cause. Or, rather, he corrected himself, it was not directed at him specifically. It was directed at everyone generally. Whether or not it was personal was another matter entirely. He suspected it was . . . somehow. That is, he suspected her aloofness was personal for everyone she interacted with. He frowned slightly, subtly, wondering why.

And then the beads around his wrist did something they'd never done before. They hummed, or vibrated, making his skin tingle, so much so, he was forced to remove his hands from his pockets and reach the fingers of his right hand under the cuff of his shirt to rub his skin. The sensation wasn't painful, but it also wasn't pleasant. And, of course, he couldn't help, now, but pay her closer attention, all his senses honed on her as he looked at her with and through different eyes, opened eyes. Because it was obvious the beads were reacting to her, and that was significant for him, very, very significant indeed. There was, in truth, only one, single soul who could cause the beads to react the way they were now reacting. Only one . . . .

She, too, was thinking about that first encounter with him as they stood in silence awaiting the lift that would take them both down the thirty or so stories to the ground floor. That day, in that first encounter, he'd appeared like a dark shadow, conjured out of the air itself, in the doorway of the office she shared with another employee.

“Where's Diane?” he'd asked unceremoniously when he saw the empty chair behind Diane's desk.

His question had sliced through her concentration like a hot knife through butter, and

she'd looked up, taking her eyes off her computer screen and taking a moment to register his presence and, then, his appearance. He looked familiar somehow, even though she'd never seen him before, but what she instantly connected with was his powerful physical attractiveness, and in the same instant she knew she found him attractive, she shut down, withdrawing herself energetically and closing herself off from him. He was tall and slim with short, dark hair that looked like it would curl if allowed to grow, and a trendy, manicured beard. That day, he wore a dark-grey, tailored suit, a crisp white shirt and a colourful tie that he'd pulled down to undo the top button of his shirt. Although she hesitated only a moment while she registered his attractiveness and closed herself off from it, she could sense, if not see, the impatience in him as he regarded her with clear, blue eyes.

So why did she shut off from him, and shut him out in the process, in this earliest moment of their acquaintance? Because his physical attractiveness was an unwelcome distraction and it was irrelevant, or so she thought in that first moment. And why wouldn't she think so when that's how it was for every other person she'd ever met? That is, physical attractiveness has no bearing on whether or not a person is truly beautiful, nor does it have any bearing on whether or not a person is truly capable of deep and profound connection. In fact, in her experience, attractive people tended to prove themselves less capable of deep connection because they tended to exist in and as their physical appearance. Finding him attractive or feeling attracted to him was an exercise in futility that would invariably lead nowhere. Physical success, physical attractiveness, any physical asset or characteristic, in fact, was like icing on a cake to her. Icing may look appealing and appetising and attractive, but it is not in any way nourishing. It has no substance and very easily dissolves away into nothingness because it is, in fact, just sugar coating, and it gives no indication whatsoever of what might exist underneath it; that is, the nature of the cake itself.

"She's in a meeting with a client," she said, answering his impatient question and sounding ever-so-slightly dismissive. "She's been gone a while so she should be back soon."

She'd watched then as a frown of unadulterated annoyance and impatience flickered

across his features and darkened his eyes, all of which served to confirm the validity of the necessity for shutting him out and dismissing him as irrelevant. Impatiently, he ran one hand over his hair, obviously thinking about the best way to proceed.

“Damn,” he breathed, and then asked brusquely, “Can you ask her to come and see me when she returns?”

Before she had any sort of chance to give any sort of response, he turned on his heel and disappeared as quickly as he'd materialised. Unfortunately, she had no idea who he was. She'd never met him before, a fact he should have been cognisant of but obviously failed hopelessly to recognise in his preoccupation.

“And you are?” she'd slowly and deliberately asked the empty space where he'd been standing before she returned her attention to her computer screen and put him out of her mind.

The next time they encountered each other, he tried to rectify his behaviour by apologising and introducing himself properly. They were both present at some kind of office celebration, as was everyone in the company it seemed. She didn't know what was being celebrated, a sought-after contract, she thought, or maybe a project completed, or a new partnership, and she wasn't at all inclined to find out. There were dozens of bottles of champagne and an enormous cake with layers of sponge and far too much cream, so the celebration was significant, whatever was its cause. She was standing with Diane on the edge of the crowd of people on one side of the room, holding a glass of cold champagne, sipping it very slowly, not at all inclined to mingle, especially when she really didn't know many people.

She saw him immediately when he walked in and joined a group of people on the other side of the room, and she also recognised him immediately from that initial encounter. He was attractive enough to draw her eye, but while she let herself look once, she then made sure she looked away and didn't look again. There were a crowd of people between them, and around him, for that matter, so it was easy to dismiss him, and she certainly had no intention of instigating another encounter with him even though she knew who he was now, and she knew she would have to meet him again eventually. She'd been told about him, quite extensively as it happened.

Standing where she was, only half listening to the conversation Diane was having with another employee, she sipped the champagne, surreptitiously and not-so-patiently waiting for the right moment to quietly disappear. She planned to stay only long enough for her presence to be noted and so as not to appear rude, because these office functions were, apparently, compulsory, and there were no exceptions to that rule. Just as soon as she could, office etiquette notwithstanding, she had every intention of returning to her desk to complete the article she was working on. She wanted to get it finished before she went home.

After a speech, which he declined to give when offered, of which she heard not a single word courtesy of an innate ability to switch off and tune out irrelevancies, and before she could move, he surprised her by crossing the room, unconsciously parting the crowd as he moved through it, to speak to her.

"I owe you an apology for my behaviour the other day," he said, again unceremoniously, without preamble. She wondered if he was that kind of person – one who gets straight to the point and wastes no time on unnecessary small talk. He'd certainly shown that particular trait in the two encounters they'd now had with each other.

"No need for an apology," she responded smoothly. "You were preoccupied. I understood that. It happens."

"Maybe so, but that's no excuse. I don't normally behave that way, especially to a new employee. I'm Dominic . . ."

"I know . . . now." She smiled at him briefly to soften the impact of her words. "I'm Jennifer."

He held out his hand, and she looked at it briefly before sliding her own into his. Their hand shake was brief but firm. "It's a pleasure to properly meet you, Jennifer. Welcome aboard. I assume you've met everyone else."

Her eyes swept the room. "I think so," she said. She couldn't see anyone she hadn't been introduced to since starting. There were certainly no unfamiliar faces in the crowd.

"Good," he said, satisfied. "We have drinks here on Fridays after work. It's a good way to mingle and to relax at the end of the week, get ready for the weekend. Will we see you here?"

She shook her head. "I don't work on Fridays." And I'll be damned if I'll come all the way into the city just for a few drinks, she added to herself silently, in the depth of her thoughts.

He looked surprised, but before he had a chance to respond or question her further, an attractive blonde woman came to claim his attention, her bright-red, manicured nails appearing gaudy against the dark fabric of his suit as she put her hand on his arm, and he was whisked away, effectively putting an end to their brief conversation.

"Are you averse to a little bit of gossip?"

She turned towards Diane, the employee she shared an office with and one of only two people she was prepared to make a connection with.

"Good god no," she said, laughing. She liked Diane. They'd both known instantly, in the interview, in fact, that they would get on well – probably one of the reasons she actually got the job. "I love a little bit of gossip, especially when it's not about me."

"Good. Me too," Diane said and then nodded her head conspiratorially towards the woman with the bright-red, manicured nails. "That's Margot, head of marketing. She's got the hots for Dominic. Actually, she pants for him like a dog on heat. Usually," she continued after the brief interruption of Jennifer's laughter, "she makes sure she's less than six feet from him at these things, as if he's the dog, and she has him on a leash."

"Oh dear," Jennifer said. "How painful. Does he know?"

Diane shrugged. "He doesn't give a lot away, Dominic. Never has, although you always know where you stand with him. I don't see how he can't know. She's very obvious. I mean, look at her."

They both did exactly that.

"You should feel complimented," Diane observed as they both watched Margot trying to keep the attention of her boss. "She considers you attractive enough to be a threat, hence her need to whisk him away from you."

Jennifer laughed again. "Well, then, I'm flattered. Why doesn't she just ask him out?"

"Because he'd say no, and she knows it. But nor will she give up. She's not one to give up, is our Margot. So she gives off her not-so-subtle signals, and he pointedly ignores them. It's a game I confess I love to watch."

“You know,” Jennifer said, smiling her enjoyment of both the conversation and the situation generating it, “I do believe you've just saved this office thing from being a complete bore.”

Diane laughed, and rolled her eyes. “Ain't that the truth . . .”

That was over a week ago. She hadn't seen him since then. Now, as she awaited the lift with him, in silence, she frowned ever-so-slightly, tensing and bracing for the beginning of a conversation that simply wasn't materialising. She wondered if he felt awkward with her courtesy of his behaviour at their initial encounter, especially when she saw him rub the skin under the cuff of his shirt and thought the gesture indicative of his discomfort. But she discounted the notion. He didn't seem the type to suffer awkwardness socially, with anyone and for whatever reason. On the contrary, from all she'd heard about him since that initial encounter, he was very much a people person, and it was reflected in his company. He'd built the company from the ground up, and since starting work in it herself she had consciously noticed the culture and atmosphere, liking both. He genuinely valued his employees, and, as a consequence, people liked working for him, so much they didn't leave once they joined his company.

Standing there with him, awaiting the lift, she knew she should break the silence and make conversation herself. That was the normal, polite thing to do, but she didn't want to get to know anyone in the company other than those she would be working with directly. Minimal contact, as minimal as was physically possible. She had her reasons, and she knew they were good ones, but they were also not the kind of things you verbalised in this very modern human existence, so she never bothered explaining herself.

He, on the other hand, was deciding how best to break down the barrier of her implacable aloofness. He wasn't one to make small talk. In fact, he hated small talk with a passion, but that didn't mean he wasn't capable of it. On the contrary, he was very good at it courtesy of an innate talent for getting a good read on people. He sensed things others did not, something he kept strictly to himself. She gave very little away, though, and that was unusual. Beyond the aloofness, he couldn't get a read on her. But the beads around his wrist told him very clearly there **was** more to know . . . a lot more. When he glanced at her again, he saw that she was looking at the doors of the lift, not quite at the floor but

almost so that her eyes were not entirely lowered, and he realised she was handling the silence by focussing on her own thoughts. The beads told him, but he sensed for himself anyway, that it was important he try to get a handle on just what those thoughts of hers might be.

“How are you settling in?” he asked her.

He watched her eyes refocus in response to the question, and then she raised them, glancing at him briefly. She had incredibly beautiful eyes which she enhanced subtly with make-up. He hadn't noticed her eyes before because they were partly hidden behind the glasses she wore when she worked, but he certainly noticed them now.

“I'm completely settled in,” she said, answering his question. “I've been here a month now, but it feels a little bit like I've been here forever.”

“Good. I'm glad to hear it.”

He paused, wondering if she would perpetuate the conversation now that he'd started it. But, again, silence fell between them – a silence she was obviously not inclined to break . . . again. This time, in this new silence, he frowned, although the frown was barely perceptible. He didn't want to be caught frowning.

“Why do you work part time?” he asked her.

Again, she glanced at him briefly. He was looking at her intensely, but before she could respond, the lift arrived. When the doors opened, he held them open with his hand and stood back to allow her to enter the lift first, which she did. Turning, she pushed the button for the ground floor and then, when the doors closed, enclosing them both in the small space, she answered him.

“I genuinely believe in the work-life balance, and I practice it. Four days of the week belong to me, and the other three belong to you, or to Audrey and Diane more specifically.”

“I see,” he said. “And what do you do on the days that belong to you?”

She shrugged. “Whatever I want.” She wanted to leave her response at that but realised it sounded curt, clipped, abrupt. “Usually,” she added, “I spend time in my garden, I walk for exercise and sunlight, play the piano, write, listen to music, watch the cricket when it's on, watch my favourite movies, have coffee with Mum.”

He absorbed all that she said. She was telling him what he wanted to know, but, again, the sense of utter disconnection distracted him. She wasn't disconnected from what she was telling him, she was disconnected from him. She had no vested interest in his response whatsoever. The realisation intrigued him.

"You don't socialise?" he asked, realising even as he asked it that she hadn't listed anything even remotely social, aside from the coffee with her mother, her only source of social connection, or so it seemed to him.

"No."

She looked away as she answered him, looking at the two lines of buttons that represented every floor from theirs to the ground floor. The gesture was dismissive. The energetic vibe she radiated warned him not to probe any further. He ignored both the gesture and the energetic warning. The beads were still tingling his skin, and he could not ignore the significance of that.

"Why not?" he asked her, genuinely wanting to know why she was so withdrawn.

She looked at him quickly and saw that he was intensely interested in her response. He wasn't asking the question to be obtuse. As their eyes met, she could see that he understood she wanted to make no connection with him. He was reading her, the way she could read others. Surprise flickered across her face, but not so quickly that he missed it. On the contrary, he caught it and read it perfectly.

"Are people predictable to you, Jennifer?" he asked, slightly, subtly amused.

"Predictable is not the word I would choose to describe it, but yes, they are. That's not why I don't socialise, though."

"What is the word you would choose, then?"

"Clone-like."

That surprised him, and his amusement evaporated.

"Clone-like?" he asked, frowning.

The lift stopped and they both looked at the lights over the door, surprised. But they were not on the ground floor. When the doors opened, they both stepped back, towards the back of the lift, making room for the group of people who got in.

He leaned a shoulder against the back of the lift so that he was facing her directly and

folded his arms.

“You think people are all the same?” he asked very quietly. The group of people who now filled the space in front of them were engaged in their own discussion and paid him and her no attention whatsoever.

She did not want to be having this conversation, especially not with him. But despite her best efforts, she was reluctantly engaging in it. So before answering him, she deliberately turned to face him and leaned a shoulder against the lift, mirroring his position.

“Yes and no,” she answered him. “The cocktail of personality, ambitions, dreams, wants, obsessions, addictions, fears, insecurities, skills, talents, emotional responses or lack thereof, just to name a few things, is uniquely different for each one of us. But beyond that there is little variation in mindset, belief, thought, choice, behaviour, interaction, interrelationship. Most people live the same recipe with a few minor variations dictated by the culture they find themselves in. I don't, nor do I engage in their same behaviours, and they don't understand why. Therefore they don't understand me, and I can't be bothered explaining myself to them.”

“And that's why you don't socialise?”

“No, that's not why I don't socialise.”

“So?” he probed when it became obvious she wasn't going to offer an explanation.

In response, she turned, leaning her back against the back of the lift and looking up at the lights above the door. But in turning away from him, she wasn't shutting him out this time. She was protecting herself. He could feel her distress, her pain, and, again, he frowned, this time acknowledging the fact that he seemed to be doing a lot of it around her.

“When I connect with people,” she said, not looking at him, “or become entangled with them, I see their shadows.” And then, realising he might not know to what she was referring, she added, looking at him, “Sorry. I speak a language I'm very used to, and I forget others don't speak the same language. Fears, I mean. I see people's fears, and I know how their fears shape their realities, especially their relationships. Fear causes people to be brutal with each other, and to be brutalised. It wouldn't be so bad if they

would let me help them, which I can. But they don't, and they drain me when they take what they want but discard the rest . . . when they take my care of them but disregard my counsel. They don't want to know **that** fear can be resolved, let alone how. And nor do they want to know what their fears actually are even though those fears dictate everything about them. People's mindsets are set in stone in this reality because their consciousness is trapped in the most shallow layer of existence, but mine is not, and that tends to mean I have no common point of reference with people."

So intensely were they looking at each other that they didn't at first realise the lift had stopped, and the people in front of them were exiting. They both seemed to become aware at the same time, and so moved to exit the lift themselves. When they left the lift, she was just going to keep walking, annoyed with herself for telling him too much. But he saw her intention and stopped her with a firm hand on her upper arm, his grip vice-like in his determination to stop her leaving.

"You mean to say," he said, "you're conscious."

He shocked her so much a surge of adrenaline shot through her and increased the rhythm of her heartbeat. She should've pulled her arm away, but she didn't. So they both stood in the middle of the foyer on the ground floor. Again, they both seemed to become aware of where they were and of how it looked to others to have him holding her arm as if she was an errant child wanting to escape punishment but not being allowed to. He released her, but they stood facing each other.

"Are you?" she asked in lieu of a response to his statement.

"I am. How conscious are you?"

She frowned at him. "How do you measure how conscious you are? Do I know who I am? Yes, in theory, but I have no real experience of myself. I feel like I've awakened enough to know how ignorant I am, and how blind I am. So I've awakened to enormous pain and to the knowledge that I'm trapped in and by my own shadow-dynamics – the living death. Plus, I'm very well aware of the fact that I have no choice, no free will, in other words. Free will is not part of my Truest Nature. I have to continue forward. There's no going back. What about you?"

He ignored the question. "Do you know why you're here?" he asked instead.

"In theory."

"In theory?" he repeated. "What do you mean by that?"

"I've been told many things, but they remain, for now, only things I've been told."

"Told by who?"

"By those with whom I speak in the deepest recesses of my own mind, and . . ."

"And?" he prompted.

She pursed her lips and breathed deeply, looking away, obviously very reluctant to tell him any more. "Transcendent information comes to me through my writing," she said, looking at him eventually, half way through the statement. "I've been told many things through my writing."

"What things?"

Unconsciously, she shook her head, her reluctance finding physical expression.

"I know you're leaving for the day," he said, "but I came down to get a coffee. Will you join me?"

She looked over her shoulder at the foyer café, expecting it to be shut at this time of the day, but it wasn't. It was, in fact, still very much open.

"All right," she conceded, only partially reluctant. She'd never met anyone else like her before, but if this conversation continued in this vein, then it was highly possible he was just like her. How much so, though? That was the salient question here.

"How long have you been conscious?" she asked him when he returned to the table they'd sequestered with two hot coffees, putting one in front of her before he sat opposite her. She'd asked the question quickly before he had a chance to ask any of his own.

"All my life," he replied. "I've never been otherwise."

"So you were born knowing who you are above and beyond your physical, incarnated identity?"

He didn't answer the question. Instead, at first he just looked at her, and then he lowered his eyes and looked at the table between them.

She frowned in confusion.

"Do you not like the question?" she asked him.

"I don't mind the question. You've just made a couple of very wrong assumptions in

asking it, understandably, of course, but wrong nonetheless. I could turn your question onto you, though. How long have you been conscious?"

She put up no resistance to the change in direction of the conversation. "Hard to say. A few years maybe, after years of very gruelling Work."

"And you've obviously learnt to keep the truth of it to yourself."

She made a noise in her throat. "I've learnt the hard way it's necessary to keep the truth to myself." She shrugged. "I guess I thought I was going through the Transcendent Process so that I could help them, and I tried to help them initially. It took me a long time to realise I'm not here to help them . . . individually, that is."

"And that brings us nicely back to my original question, does it not? What are you here for?"

She deliberately took a sip of her coffee while she thought about how best to answer. In the end, she realised absolute truth was the best option with him. In fact, she realised it was essential that she pay him that courtesy.

"I'm here to transcend this reality, the human experience in its current form. And then I think there are many of us, me included, here to change the very fabric of human reality, to ascend it, to restore creation, bring back the Light, and to re-merge that which was originally torn asunder – to end Perpetual Separation, in other words. Does any of that make sense to you?"

He didn't answer immediately, and she held her breath, feeling tension in every muscle of her body. His answer would either end this conversation abruptly or take it to unexpected depths.

"Yes, it makes sense, if you really think it's possible."

She released the breath she was holding, and the tension in her muscles also released at the same time. "It's possible," she said. "I have to believe it's possible or I really would've killed myself a long time ago. That sounds melodramatic, I know, but it's true nonetheless. What are you here for?"

He smiled. "There's a great line in a movie that sums it up perfectly," he said. "I think a man does what he can . . ."

". . . until his destiny is revealed<sup>1</sup>," she finished. "I like that line, too. The Last

Samurai. A beautiful movie. So your destiny has not yet revealed itself to you?"

"I wouldn't say that. I told you I was conscious, did I not? So I know exactly what my destiny is – why I came here. It just has not, as yet, materialised. Or, put another way, I have not yet come face to face with her."

She frowned slightly. "By 'her' do you mean Destiny Herself, or are you referring to someone specific?"

"The latter."

She absorbed that and then raised her eyebrows at him trying to ignore the increased speed of her heartbeat. "You're here for someone specific? A woman? That's . . . Is that why you're not married or in a relationship? Or why you haven't somehow been swallowed up in and by the recipe of life like everyone else?"

"Yes, to answer your first and second questions, and, yes in part, to answer your third and fourth questions. Like you, I can't be with someone who is not conscious. That would be incredibly dissatisfying, not to mention mildly toxic for someone like me. And since no one here is conscious, apart from you and I . . ."

He left the sentence unfinished, but since she was exactly the same and so knew exactly what he was talking about, there was not the need, as they both knew.

"Is that why you don't give Margot the time of day, romantically anyway?" she asked him. "I mean, you could take advantage of what she's offering."

He grimaced. "At great cost to myself," he said, and then added, "Margot is very good at her job, but she's incredibly shallow. She's not the slightest bit interested in who I am as a person or as a soul. She sees only the success I've built around myself and wants it. If she ever takes her pursuit of me from the subtle to the overt, I will tell her the truth of that to her face, and I will tell her she has absolutely no chance of ever being my partner, my lover."

Again, she absorbed that, understanding it perfectly. It was the same for her with men.

"Okay, then," she said very softly, "tell me about this woman who is your destiny."

He looked at her for a moment. She was vastly different without her cloak of aloofness. In fact, she was radiant, and she radiated higher-dimensional Light. It was incredibly beautiful, and he marvelled at the fact that he hadn't seen it before now. Such

was the power of perspective, he thought. He'd seen her as just another employee. The beads had sensed the truth of her, but he had not. It was, then, just as well he wore them.

And so, it was, it seemed, at last time for him to do something he'd never before done. He stood, took his suit jacket off and hung it over the back of the chair he was sitting on. Then, as he sat again, he undid the cuff of his shirt and rolled up the sleeve of his left arm. He wore an impressive watch, but that wasn't what caught her attention. Around his wrist, below the watch, was a circle of little wooden beads, each bead perhaps half a centimetre in diameter and made of the same polished dark wood, and all joined by the finest gold chain. The tiny links of the chain were just visible between the wooden beads. She'd seen the beads before, in her visions, so she recognised them. He reached his wrist over the table, towards her, his fingers lightly curled.

"What do you see?" he asked her.

"A circle of . . ." she started to say, but then she peered more closely at the beads, unconsciously reaching out to slide her hand under his wrist so she could hold it closer as she leant forward, over the beads, for a better look. "Wait," she said and released his wrist to lean down and retrieve her glasses. With glasses in place, she again leant over the table to look closely at the beads around his wrist. Each bead was intricately carved with tiny but beautiful symbols, and each symbol on each bead was different. Eventually, after a long moment, during which he watched her passively while she studied the beads, she looked up, releasing his wrist.

"Are they runes?" she asked him.

"That's one word for them," he replied, letting his wrist relax on the table. "The chain is stronger than it looks. It cannot be broken. And while ever I wear the circle of beads, I must stay here, in this reality, in human form."

She stared at him for a long moment as she absorbed what he said. As usual whenever confronted by something transcendently significant, her mind felt as if it had suddenly filled up with cotton wool, refusing to work properly. Leaning back, she breathed deeply, trying to steady her rapidly pounding heart as the realisation penetrated deeper and deeper.

He watched her closely as he awaited her response. Now, at last, he could read her, so

he knew the revelation of the truth of him had destabilised her, but he also knew a far deeper, more potent truth was working its way into her consciousness. He wouldn't push it. He knew he didn't need to. She was perfectly and fully capable of coming to the realisation on her own.

"Right," she breathed. "So . . . for how many human years have you been here?"

"Fifty or so, give or take."

Again, she took a moment to absorb his reply. He'd been here only a couple more years than she, but, like her, he did not look at all like other fifty year olds. Because he wasn't a fifty year old. Nor was she. He, like her, was ageless.

"Alone?" she asked, although she already knew the answer. Really, despite being born into a family, she was the same and always had been.

"Alone," he confirmed.

"You were not born? You are not incarnate?"

"No. And no, not in the traditional sense. Or not in the way everyone else is. I am in this body, though, so I have to maintain it as everyone else does."

"Right," she said again, softly. "No wonder you reacted the way you did to my questions about being conscious. You really have been conscious all your life, from the very beginning to now. So what happens, then, when the circle breaks and you no longer wear the beads? Will you just return to your true form?"

"I am my true form. I just don't appear so to others. But I take your meaning, and yes. I will no longer be in this dimension, and I will leave this body."

"And the body you're in? Where did that come from . . . or how did it come to be? I mean, how did you choose its DNA? Did you just manifest it?"

He hesitated for a moment. When he answered, he did so quietly, knowing the answer could be disturbing for her. "The body I'm in was born the way all human bodies are born. The soul whose body this was originally vacated it, willingly . . . very willingly, and I was able to come in."

Again, she absorbed that. "Oh," she said softly, unaware she'd even spoken. "Was that planned beforehand?"

"Of course. Things like that are always planned beforehand."

"So that soul knew he wasn't going to be here for very long?"

"That's right."

"And you inherited a family. How did that go?"

"I very slowly and sensitively pulled away from them. They are not important to me. They've never been my focus. I don't have anything to do with them now."

"Did you ever tell them the truth?"

"No, but I was prepared to. I think they sensed the truth intuitively. But asking the question would have confirmed the truth for them and they didn't want to know. So they never asked, and we never had the conversation."

She looked at him, and he looked back. She knew she should ask the only question that really mattered, but she was suddenly very nervous and felt such a reluctance to ask it that a silence descended on them. Heart pounding, she looked down, breaking eye contact with him, her eyes resting on the beads around his wrist. The gods dammit, she thought. She was no coward, and she had not come all this way only to be thwarted by that vein of fear she knew existed in the bedrock of her psyche. She had taken steps to confront it . . . to **extract** it, so this was her doing, consciously. She had known for a while that this opportunity was going to present itself in her reality. Now she had to grab it with both hands, make the most of it, the absolute most, or she would wither with regret.

She raised her eyes to his again.

"What are you?" she asked simply, and found it less difficult to ask the question than she thought she would.

He inclined his head. "I am Elohim."

"Of course," she sighed, barely aware she'd even spoken. Of course he was Elohim. What else could he possibly be? "There are seven billion souls on this planet," she said. "How do you know where she is? How do you know you can find her?"

"There is more than one spell carved into the beads," he replied. "One of the spells is a scrying spell that allows me to know where she is. But there is a catch. The spell works on her soul, her essence, her Light, not on her human identity. And it is not up to me to find her. She has to find me." He folded his arms on the table and leaned forward in his chair. "For many years, about forty-eight years ago, in fact, I felt her in Sydney, so I moved there.

But the sense of her grew gradually weaker and weaker and weaker over the next seven or eight years until it was so faint it was almost imperceptible. And then it disappeared altogether. It was as if she had died out, like a flame on a candle snuffed out in a gust of wind. I knew she hadn't died, though, so I didn't give up hope, not then anyway."

He stopped talking and looked at her. She was biting her lower lip and tears were pooling in her eyes as she thought back to her childhood, remembering.

Again, he inclined his head. "Why, Jennifer? Why did the sense of her disappear when she was about eight years old?"

Tears escaped and slid down her cheeks. She lifted a hand to take her glasses off and to wipe the tears away. She put her glasses on the table in front of her, taking the time to at least try and regain some semblance of emotional control. She didn't try and hide her upset from him, knowing it would be futile to do so. And re-looking at the events of her childhood and at how those events had affected her did indeed upset her, knowing how that had, then, translated into an inability on his part to sense her. She knew she'd been wounded by those events in her childhood, but now he was telling her just how wounded she had been. The knowledge deepened and heightened her upset.

"My dad became a Christian," she explained to him, "after a very bad motor bike accident at the age of twenty-two. He suffered head injuries in the accident that left him almost completely blind and deaf physically. And, of course, his new religion, Christianity, caused him to be blind and deaf spiritually."

She paused as images from her past assailed her. She loved her dad, loved him still, and there were not many people she loved, but she knew his life had been, in every way that counts, a tragedy. If she was trapped in a lower-dimensional identity, he had been even more so. If she was trapped by her own shadow-dynamics, he had been even more so.

And then, through her tears, she smiled.

"What are you smiling at?" Dominic asked her, watching her closely, knowing she was back in a past he knew nothing about.

"In many respects," she replied, "his life was a tragedy of un-experienced, suppressed potential. His one saving grace, though, was that he held the energy of the Hedonist, and

because of it, he was able to extract pleasure from the most mundane things.”

“Like what?”

“Like cooking and eating.” She smiled again. “He could do amazing things with fish. Like working in his garden. Like engaging in deep and interesting conversation. Like taking time out for luxury weekends in the city. I do think humans are clones,” she said. “But he was not. His Light was too powerful, too strong, for him to ever be like the rest of them, so he wasn't like the rest of them. He was unique. He was an Apostle.”

They both exchanged smiles – hers full of affection, his understanding. He wished he could have met her father, but he knew, instinctively, that if her father had still been alive, she would not be sitting with him here, having this conversation now. In that sense, he knew the two were mutually exclusive – him meeting her and her father – so he knew her father was no longer in this reality, and he knew why her father was no longer in this reality.

“Anyway,” she said, returning to the original reason for the sense of her being snuffed out, “two years after the accident, he met mum and they had we kids. When I was about six, he broke with the local church after an altercation with the minister, and to his surprise, a group of the congregation came with him. They started meeting in our home. And then, again to his surprise, they came to him, asked him to give up his job and be their pastor full time. It was probably the most significant event in his life, and it was certainly not an easy choice to make. But make it he did, and so he became their pastor. It was, at the time, a real step of faith to give up his full-time, steady, regular income.”

She stopped talking, remembering, and the unbearable pain of what happened next filled her to overflowing. Briefly, she closed her eyes and bowed her head against the pain, and, watching her, he frowned, concerned, feeling her pain empathically.

“What happened next wasn't painful at the time,” she explained, opening her eyes to look up at him. “It's knowing the entire path Dad's choice took us down – looking back with the benefit of hindsight – that causes me unbearable pain. He had so much to give, but his shadows undermined his powerful Light, and he became, for us, like the Pied Piper, leading us to spiritual doom. But knowing, too, now, the ramification for me even at the time in terms of what you could no longer sense . . .” She shook her head, as if

shaking off the realisation. "When I was eight, Dad joined the group of people meeting in our lounge room to a church of darkness and shadow – a cult. Dad needed authority, obsessively. He was afraid of his Rebel energy – of where it might lead him and what it might cause him to do. But with authority, he also subconsciously needed punishment, hence the accident – an expression of self punishment if ever there was one. So why not hand the rod of punishment to someone else, and so he did. He found what he was looking for in a man whose soul is cast in very great shadow and whose church (Outreach International) still is, to this day, also cast in the same very great shadow. That church brutalised my soul and covered it in false, misguided belief, mindset and, most important of all, perspective. That's why the sense of 'her' disappeared.

"When did you detect the sense of 'her' again?" she asked him.

"Of her?" he asked pointedly.

She smiled. "Of me," she corrected. "When did you detect the sense of me again?"

"You would've been . . . maybe twenty-five or so. It was faint, but it was there, and I knew you weren't in Sydney."

She nodded. "I was in London first, then Brisbane. And I left the church, for good." She smiled faintly. "I left the cultish church of my upbringing but got swallowed up immediately by the recipe of life which I desperately needed to live to prove to myself I was normal like everyone else."

"So the sense of you remained very faint."

"My sense of myself was very faint. My transcendent initiation began in earnest when I was about thirty-three. Did the beads respond to that?"

He nodded. "Very much so. I knew what it meant, too. I knew you were beginning to awaken."

"Why did you never come looking for me? Was it because you knew I had to find you?"

"It would have been pointless looking for you. You were hidden. Surely you know that. You would have blocked me. I was never going to create the reality of you in the landscape of my life. Only you could create the reality of me in the landscape of your life."

“So you've had to wait for me to be ready?”

He nodded.

“God, how cruel,” she said. “I'm so sorry.”

He smiled at her. “It's all right. I've found ways to occupy myself. I certainly haven't been sitting around idly twiddling my thumbs.”

She laughed softly. “Right, so in the meantime you just built and ran a whole company.”

“What else was I to do?”

“Well, yes, exactly.” And then she frowned as a stray thought, unbidden, stole her focus away from the topic of their conversation. “Why did you not sense me when first we encountered each other?”

“That day in your office?”

She nodded.

“First, because I was very focussed on something in particular that day, as you saw for yourself. Such is the power of the physical to exert its influence over one's consciousness. Second, I held a misguided perspective of you as just another employee – a perspective the beads did nothing to dispel. The sense of you felt no different at all. For many years, I've known you were very close, both to me and to yourself, and the sense of closeness has gradually been getting stronger and stronger. For a long time, when the sense of you started getting stronger, I thought you were just around the next corner, so to speak. I thought you would appear, but you haven't. So the sense of you being close just became something I carried with me through my day to day existence, so much so, I'm very used to it and it's become a part of my life, like a thread in a piece of fabric. Sometimes I notice it, and I wonder. Sometimes it's just there while I get on with my life and it recedes to the background of my conscious awareness. I wasn't paying attention to it that day.”

Silence fell between them while they both processed what he'd said and what it meant for them both.

“So,” he said finally, “let me ask you, Jennifer. What are you above and beyond your humanness?”

“I am an Elohim priestess. And I am she whom you seek.”

He smiled, and in his smile was the radiation of his own Light – a perfect reflection of hers. “Yes, so you are.” He leaned back as he regarded her, and folded his arms. “You need to know, you and you alone hold the key to releasing the beads from my wrist.”

She raised her eyebrows at him in silent question, but instead of asking it, she said, “Oh crap. That's not good.”

He smiled again and shrugged. “And yet, that's how it is.”

“You mean you can't, only I can?” she asked, needing clarification.

“That's right. You know the spell to break the chain and set me free. I do not. Surely you can see it had to be that way. Had I once fallen into the pit of despair, I could easily have uttered the words to set myself free. But it is not up to me as to when I leave here. It is up to you. We will leave here together when we're ready and not a moment before.”

“And have you?” she asked him, focussing on the beginning of what he'd just said and not the end. “Fallen into the pit of despair, I mean. Have there been times when you have despaired?”

“Of course.”

“You've lost hope?”

“Of course, at times.”

“What if I never remember the spell?” she asked, sounding distressed.

“You will remember it when you're ready. You hold it within you.”

She looked at him, at a loss for words. She didn't know any spells, that she was aware of anyway. But with the thought came unfamiliar, strange words and an image of long, beautifully flowing cloth – a robe of different shades of blue, from sapphire blue to turquoise to luminous silvery blue. And she could see something else . . . a mirror, a beautiful mirror . . . and a knife . . .

*“Achmir merthyr . . .”*

The words were just there, but before she could continue to speak them, he moved like lightning, springing up out of his chair to lean across the table so he could put his fingers over her mouth, silencing her.

“Don't,” he said. “That's the spell that will destroy the scrying spell held within the beads. I don't want them changed. I want to know where you are at all times now that

we've crossed paths."

"But they are irritating your skin," she said. "Look."

He didn't look. "I don't care. I'll get used to it."

She lifted her hands to take his fingers away from her lips, and then she lifted the wrist of his other hand, the hand he was leaning on over the table, slowly so that he could shift his weight from his wrist to his feet. She turned his wrist over and laid cool fingers on his skin, the skin under and around the beads. He slowly sat back in his chair, but he made no attempt to retrieve his wrist. Her touch was soothing, calming his irritated, hot skin.

She could feel energy moving through her hands, flowing, and she closed her eyes to concentrate on the feel of it, heightening its flow in the process. When she opened her eyes again, the skin of his wrist had lost its redness. She looked up at him, and her eyes held enormous pain. Still, she held his wrist.

"Why?" she asked. "Why did you come here, to this place of pain, just for me? Why have you walked this earth for so long, alone, while you waited for me to be ready?"

"Because you needed me to. And because I needed to."

"Was there no other way?"

"Of course there were other ways. There are always other ways."

She didn't understand, and her eyes held her bewilderment. She had very expressive eyes now that she had lost her cloak of aloofness. Her thoughts and feelings were very clearly reflected in them. He thought she would even be able to communicate with him just by using her eyes. He turned his wrist in her hands so he could hold her hand in his own.

"It is what we do," he explained. "It is who we are. We Love, not as a trite romantic cliché nor as a trite religious cliché. It was an act of pure Love for you to allow yourself to come into the human experience, especially once it was torn asunder. So it was an act of pure Love for me to come here for you. I would never allow you to fall low by yourself, never. I would never allow you to traverse the long road of consequence in the human experience by yourself."

"So you've come in before because of me? We've crossed paths before?"

"We have, yes."

"But you were incarnate. You incarnated in those other lives."

"Yes, I did."

"So how come this time you have the beads to bind you here?"

"We weaved the spells into them together before you fell, and I have kept them with me, waiting for the right time, the right life, to put them on. I could put them on. I just can't take them off."

He watched her absorb that. But he needed to know something . . . something important.

"Do you know how you fell so low? Have you been told through your writing?"

"Yes."

"Do you have the memory of it?"

She shook her head. "No, not exactly. I only have the images generated within me by the story I wrote to convey the information to myself. But for weeks before and after writing the story I had the strongest choking sensation in my throat. It stopped me breathing a couple of times, so it was very scary, especially when it didn't seem to be going away. It felt like my throat was closing up, and I thought I would be cursed with it for the rest of my existence here."

"But it went away?"

She nodded. "It did, as suddenly as it came. It just vanished."

"So," he said softly, "you know . . ."

"How I was cut down for being what I am, brutally, publicly? Yes, I know. And so I know how the experience created a wound of fear in my soul – a wound I have carried with me through every life I've lived in the human experience since. 'Tis this wound that keeps the Light of my soul hidden, contained, suppressed, even from myself."

His eyes narrowed as he concentrated on what she was saying. "So how is it you've come to me now, then?" If she was still hidden, that should not have been possible.

"I reversed my use of the language of symbolism."

His raised eyebrows reflected his very great surprise. "You what?"

She smiled her enjoyment of his reaction. "Okay, so our sleeping dreams, like a spread of Tarot cards, speak the language of symbolism, telling us about our Processes in any

given moment. So, I reversed it. I used the same language to instigate a Process, rather than just being told about it. Active conscious creation. I have created within myself the Process necessary for extracting the very great, very powerful vein of fear from within the bedrock of my psyche. And, as part of that Process, I got a new job in your company, and you and I have now crossed paths."

"And the fear?"

"It's still very much there, still very much intact. But it's stirring within me, coming to the surface." She grimaced. "Rather like a dark, slippery eel slithering around my psyche. Not pleasant. It's making me ill, of course."

He formed an 'oh' with his mouth although no sound came out. Now her aloofness made perfect sense, and not just because the fear within her was very much about being hidden. When a fear of that magnitude stirs within a psyche, it can be very painful, and, for her, being in contact with others would exacerbate the pain and discomfort, especially when she was wholly unable to talk to anyone about it.

"It's deep and powerful and multifaceted," she explained unnecessarily. "And it's been with me for so long . . ." She shrugged to indicate helplessness. "I don't know how I'll go with it. I'm very good at healing fear, but still, this one's . . . Well, it's big. You might wish . . ."

"Never," he said definitely, anticipating what she would have said had he let her continue.

"I'm not quite the 'she' you remember," she reminded him quietly.

"Yes you are. You are exactly the 'she' I remember. To take on the wounds of this dimension . . ." He shook his head. He still held her hand, and he squeezed it tightly.

"You need to know, you don't face the fear alone now. I will hold you every step of the Way from here on in, and I will not let go, no matter what may come."

She swallowed, feeling the lump of emotional tension in her throat. "It could get ugly, especially once *they* know where I am."

"I know," he said, knowing exactly who she was referring to. "But you did say there were many souls here to help you fight this fight, did you not? And so there are. Once we bring you out of hiding, you will create the reflection of them around you, not in this

dimension but in the higher one, where humans really exist, and then, whoa to the darkness. Its time will well and truly be at an end, and the human experience will never be the same again.”

She smiled briefly, and nodded slowly.

He inclined his head and narrowed his eyes at her.

“What do you see when you look at me?” he asked her.

She opened her mouth to respond to his question with a single word – reflection – but before she got a chance to speak she saw, again, the same images she'd seen earlier – a gown of beautiful, flowing cloth of different hues of blue, a full-length mirror in a frame of beautifully carved wood, and a long, ornate, curved, silver knife.

“Jennifer,” he said loudly, pulling her back from the vision, knowing what she might be seeing.

She refocussed on him. As she looked at him, a frisson of pure fear shot through her, heating her muscles, increasing her heartbeat.

He felt it, and the realisation of what it was shot through him. “Ye gods,” he breathed. “You're afraid of what I will see in you. Not the bad stuff. If anything you use the bad stuff as an excuse to shut people like me out. No, it's actually the *good* stuff you're afraid I'll see. Because if I see it, I'll bring it out of you. You'll begin to radiate it. At the moment, you can tell yourself you're not beautiful, not really, because you're so hidden and contained. People, men . . . Margot, might look at you and see physical beauty, and so she did, hence her need to whisk me away from you quick smart.” He laughed softly. “If only she knew . . . But you know, deep down, in the deepest levels of your consciousness, that's not where your beauty resides. If I see your real beauty, your true beauty, I'll unleash it. And that's always when you find yourself in the most trouble. *That's* what you keep hidden away, closeted away from this very unsafe world.”

They sat looking at each other. She was seemingly calm, although her breath was coming deeper and more rapidly, and had done so with every new thing he'd realised and verbalised. His words were so potent, so powerful, and just so god-damned accurate. Unconsciously, she tried to pull back from him, to withdraw self-protectively, but he held onto her, not allowing her to pull away.

"I told you," he said, looking at her significantly, "I would hold onto you, and so I will, so you'd better get used to it."

The fear was thrumming through her, powerfully and painfully. Ever was it so that she felt fear as pain. The medical profession had a name for it. What bullshit. The name merely physicalised something that was anything but physical in its cause, although it was, indeed, very physical in its expression and its experience.

She bowed her head, closed her eyes and sighed, deeply. "You're right, of course," she said. "You will open me up and bring me out of hiding, and I do fear that. And this is not the sort of thing you face in one sitting, like clicking your fingers and, magically, the fear evaporates leaving you wondering what all the fuss was about in the first place.

"So," she said, raising her eyes to look at him again, "we held entirely wrong perspectives of each other, did we not?"

"Yes, we did."

"We saw each other only with and through our physical eyes, so we thought and believed we were ordinary lower dimensionals."

"Yes, we did."

"But we are *not* ordinary physical beings. Far from it. We are so much more . . ."

"Yes, we are. Are you ready to know more about who and what we really are?"

She took a deep, deep breath before answering, knowing exactly what the consequences would be were she to answer in the positive. "Yes," she said. "I am ready."

In truth, there was nothing she could do to stop the Process now, even if she wanted to, which she did not. She had existed in the state of living death for far, far too long.

"Good," he said. "Then I've a very important question to ask you."

"Okay, ask."

"Will you let me in? Will you open your heart and let me in?"

She looked at him for a long moment, and then, finally, she nodded slowly. "I will. I will let you in."

1. *The Last Samurai*, 2003, Warner Bros. Pictures.

*I have a question, which I'm not necessarily asking you because I know exactly what your answer will be.*

*Who are you asking then?*

*Anybody who may read this. I've already asked it of myself, so I know what my own answer is, but I think it's a question those who are capable of transcending should ask themselves at some stage, probably very early on in their Transcendent Process.*

*Ah, yes, we see. So then, what is your question?*

*Is it better for a giraffe to run with a herd of zebras rather than be alone on the plains all by itself? Or is it better for the giraffe to be, on its own, on the plains by itself? In other words, is it better to be alone than to be with those with whom you do not belong, or is it better to be with others, no matter who those others are, rather than be alone?*

*Yes, we know exactly what our answer is. We're more curious about what yours is, though.*

*My answer is the same as yours. If the giraffe runs with the herd of zebras, it will never know what it is. So it is far better for it to be alone. Is it afraid of being alone? Then fear will ultimately stop it knowing and experiencing what it is.*

*And we think there is something you have not thought of.*

*And what is that?*

*If it continues to run with the herd of zebras, then it will not cross the paths of other giraffes. It will be trapped in and by the herd it does not belong in. Remember the Law of Attraction? It is a very real and natural Universal Law, dearest one.*

*I remember. And you are right, of course. Staying in the wrong herd, with those with whom he does not belong, will stop the giraffe from being with those with whom he does belong. But if he chooses to be on the plains by himself rather than be with those he doesn't belong with, then the very choice generated by a higher intent will attract those who are like him.*

*I don't think there is anyone here like me.*

*How do you know that when you're only now no longer running with the wrong herd? The non-reflection of lower-dimensional relationships, acquaintances and associations is receding, for you, like an outgoing tide, is it not, dear one?*

*It is, quite powerfully, too. But those relationships aren't being replaced by any others, so is it not natural for me to think there is no one here capable of being in that kind of reflective relationship*

with me?

*And that's exactly why you've asked the question, is it not, dear one?*

*As an aside for a brief moment, why do those close non-reflective relationships no longer cause you great pain?*

*Because I no longer seek myself in them.*

*Why not?*

*That's actually a good question . . . as usual. I can't answer it off the top of my head, but after deeper contemplation, I think the answer is because I know where to seek myself now. And how, for that matter.*

*And, so, where and how is it that you seek yourself?*

*Within. In my visions. In my dialogues with you. In my writing. In my inner being.*

*And what of your reality? Do you still seek yourself in your reality?*

*I have to admit, I do, even though . . .*

*Do not say what you were about to say, dear one. Do not. Your reality does reflect you back to you . . . the truth of you, that is. Does not the contentment and the calm serenity that fills your house to overflowing not wash over and through anyone who steps into it? Do you not relish the joy and beauty of your garden when you look through your kitchen window? And do not the birds celebrate it with you?*

*Yes.*

*Do not feel guilty when you look out at your reality, seeking yourself in it. For is not your reality merely an extension of the deepest part of you? And are you not, therefore, supposed to seek yourself in it?*

*Yes. It is. And I am.*

*And so, to return to the thread of our conversation, you find yourself alone at that one time of the year when people shudder at the mere thought of being alone – Christmas. You're sitting there wondering when the feelings of loneliness will start to be felt. But instead of loneliness, you're savouring the enjoyment, and the peace of solitude, and the stillness and silence . . . apart from your music, that is.*

*Yes, apart from my music . . . of course. I love it, the solitude. I've had the most wonderful day.  
The Hermit has been busy today in the peace and quiet.*

*And what has she realised?*

*How different I am, and how that difference has multiple expressions, in every facet of existence, I mean. And how that difference has culminated, come to its fullest fruition, like a bud opening up into a flower. To love being so alone . . .*

*And, don't forget the absence of the pain that is generated within you when you are surrounded by sheep . . . or should that be zebras?*

*Oh yes, the pain. How could I forget? Yes, there is no pain when I am alone. And, in this instance, we will use the sheep analogy, although either is appropriate. Sheep are, to me, a very good metaphor for the very specific reflection of disconnection and separation because in their disconnection and separation they clump together and don't move. I am surrounded by the non-reflection of disconnection when I step outside my front door, and it is very, very painful. So, yes, I am also savouring the absence of the pain. You are right, yet again. Do you ever get sick of it?*

*Of what? Being right? How could we? We love planting seeds in your very fertile mind and watching them grow into realisations, insights, epiphanies, and then watching them become a part of you. No, dearest one, we will never get sick of that.*

*So, we did not address that very important question you asked before we digressed, briefly.*

*The one where I said those old, non-reflective relationships aren't being replaced by any others, so is it not natural for me to think there is no one here capable of being in that kind of reflective relationship with me? And so here I am, running on the plains all by myself . . . or should that be plane, higher plane? ☺*

*Ah, yes, we like it. You have such a way with words, dear one.*

*So what have you been told about this, not just once, but many, many times in our dialogues and in your writing?*

*That there is, in actual fact, a whole army of them, those capable of true reflection.*

*Just so, dear one. Just so. Beings without the inner shadows and baggage that so many humans carry within them, those same inner shadows that cause humans to be stuck and stagnant. Beings without the chronic ignorance that prevents the beautiful, transcendent Knowledge in your writing from triggering and then assisting the Transcendent Process, from influencing them and changing them. Beings who are fully capable of responding to the power of your Light because they will recognise it for what it is, both generally and*

*specifically. And by that, we mean they know the Light of the Elohim, but they also know you. They know you personally. Do you know how they know you?*

*I have connected with them. I have Worked with them. I have touched them, laughed with them, embraced them . . .*

*Yes, dearest one. Just so. Now, the salient question here is this: is it all just a bloody good story, or is it real? Is this just a thread in a cleverly-contrived fantasy, or is it real? Without proof, without any experience of it weaved into your reality at the moment – the true source of your pain when you look out of your reality and see only ordinariness – you have to have faith, do you not?*

*Yes, I have to have faith. And, perhaps more importantly, I have to believe . . . I mean, I have to really believe. And yes, to answer yet another of your excellent questions. It is real. They exist, just as I exist. My higher Purpose exists with them and within them, as theirs exist with and within me.*

*Just so, beautiful Lady. Hold on to that thought, dearest one. Hold on to it. Because they are as real as we are. Soon, very soon, you will begin to see Purpose weaved into the fabric of your reality for yourself . . .*

~

## *Severed Reflection*

He opened the door to his bedroom, pulling a t-shirt over his head as he did, and then, on bare, silent feet, in a pair of favourite, old, faded jeans, he walked down his hallway, expecting to see her in his lounge room. When he saw the lounge room was empty, he thought she would be on the balcony, looking out at the city. It was a warm, balmy night, not hot enough to shut up the apartment and turn the air conditioner on, but warm enough to open up the glass doors of his balcony, allowing the breeze to flow through the apartment. When he walked to the open glass doors, though, he saw she wasn't on the balcony. And then he remembered he'd left her in his study, looking at his book collection, when he'd gone to take a shower. Turning, he looked through the glass wall that separated his study-library from the rest of the apartment and caught sight of her, standing silently in front of the wall of books that dominated his study. She was still looking at his collection of books.

Smiling to himself, he walked silently through the apartment and into his study, leaning against his desk and folding his arms, making himself comfortable in anticipation of being there for a while. He watched her silently, not wanting to disturb her and relishing the closeness of her again, as were the beads around his wrist.

After having coffee together in the foyer café where they both worked two nights ago, he'd known she needed space and time to process the many truths they'd discovered during the course of their conversation. So, he'd reluctantly, and with a very great effort, let her go home, knowing he wouldn't see her at work the following day. He couldn't and hadn't let her go, however, without extracting a promise from her to meet him for dinner at the end of the week. He figured two days would give her more than enough time to come to terms with the fact of his existence and what it meant for her. He just hadn't counted on the painful slowness of those two days from his perspective, which was probably just as well because he might, then, have prevented her from leaving the night they'd had coffee.

So slowly had the two days crawled by, in fact, that it had felt to him as if time had slowed to a creep, like the unseen, undetectable creep of a glacier. And, for the first time since deciding to establish the company many, many years earlier, he had struggled with his levels of concentration at work. He had, it seemed, completely lost interest in the company during the course of a conversation enjoyed over a coffee after work in a single evening . . . .

"See anything interesting?" he asked, amused at her lengthy and silent but very intense perusal of his collection of books.

"Very much so," she answered him without ceasing her scrutiny of his books. "I've always been of the opinion you can tell a lot about a person from their collection of books, but with yours, I'm particularly interested in the books we have in common – the books on my shelves as well. And I'm also interested in the books we don't have in common."

He smiled and pushed himself away from the desk to come and join her.

"And do we have a lot of the books in common?"

"Yes, we do. But there are two genres missing on your shelves, understandably. Historical fiction and New Age spirituality. I was into the first as a teenager and the second in the earliest stages of my initiation."

"So what do you think of New Age spiritual books now?"

"Some of them are genuinely helpful, more at a physical level than a spiritual one, but most are just another clever distortion of the truth, just another way for the darkness to give the ego what it wants. Using spiritual truth to satiate want is a violation of the sacred, I think, so many of them are downright harmful, even evil."

"I think so, too. So," he said, "what of the books I have that you don't? Are there many of them?"

"A few. You like biographies, and I find them boring."

He smiled and shrugged. "I find some people interesting. Some people have come here and made a huge difference, for good or for ill. I like the deeper glimpse into what made those people tick. They tend to stand out from the crowd. You don't agree?" he asked her, seeing her expression.

"No, I do agree. I just think a lot of the time, all is not what it seems to be . . . or was

not what it seemed." She indicated some of the biographies on his shelves. "So much is hidden. I'm not saying these people were not outstanding. Most of them were." Now she shrugged. "I just wish they'd tell us the **whole** story, not just the acceptable and accepted orthodox view."

"I understand that, but if one knows some truths, one can read between the lines in these biographies. You'd be able to, and you'd find it interesting, I think. But then, you've had other, more interesting things to pursue, haven't you?"

"Yes, I have. And I can't read when I'm writing. And since I write just about all the time, I tend not to read at all these days, apart from my own stories, of course."

"Of course."

"You know," she said, unconsciously prolonging the inevitable despite the fact of him giving her a deliberate opening, "we just had a normal, lower-dimensional date. You do realise that?"

Indeed, so they had. He'd skipped Friday-night drinks at work and she'd caught an early train into the city. They'd met and had dinner at her favourite restaurant overlooking the river, lingering, making it last, savouring the moment. The light over and around the city had gradually changed, darkening as the sun set for the day, and the lights in the city slowly came on as a result. The view and the atmosphere were always beautiful in the evenings, or so she thought, as the river became a perfect reflection of the city's lights, and that same beauty had imbued them both, affecting them, as if they'd fallen under a spell of enchantment. Neither had wanted the beauty of the evening to end, and both had savoured the sheer pleasure of being in the other's company as they talked about everything and nothing at the same time.

By unspoken, mutual consent, they had not ventured beyond the physical in their conversation. They had not spoken about anything transcendent at all. So they had swapped observations and opinions of what was transpiring in the world, of how badly the human experience had degenerated, and how they interacted with it, or didn't as was the case with her. And, she had told him more about her life, her family, her past, her writing, from a physical perspective, and her work prior to joining his company. He, in turn, had told her about the process he'd been through to establish and build the company,

from its inspiration and conception through to the thriving success it was today. After dinner, they prolonged the experience of sitting beside the river by ordering coffee, and then they left the restaurant and wandered slowly along the river, their fingers entwined. Neither of them consciously reached for the other's hand. They just found themselves walking along the river with their fingers entwined. To her, it had seemed like the most natural thing, as natural as breathing, in fact, to reach out and entwine her fingers with his.

“So it was,” he said quietly, agreeing with her about their date. “Minus the kiss, of course.”

She smiled. “Of course.”

But the knowledge that there was nothing at all lower-dimensionally normal about the weekend to come hovered unspoken between them. Any normality in terms of traditional dating had ended, really, the moment they walked through the front door of his apartment, and they both knew it, both felt it. She had agreed to stay at his apartment for the weekend because she knew it was vital that she spend time with him, and she knew he knew it, too.

And, in fact, as if in confirmation, the mood between them at the restaurant had completely morphed now that they were at his place. There was a kind of tension between them, not with each other, more in anticipation of what might happen, because they both knew that just in being together they caused significant changes in her. She could feel it, the tension, powerfully, probably because it was tightening the muscles in her limbs and in her gut. They both had Work to do, and they both knew it. In a very real sense, the fact that he'd taken the time to have a shower once they got home was not just so he could wash the day away but also so he could give her the time she needed to take a deep, steadying, metaphorical breath in preparation for what was to come. And she had, indeed, made the most of the time he'd given her. As she'd stood in front of his books, she'd only partially focussed on them. The other part of her awareness had been directed within, and she had made a very conscious choice – a choice to let in that which she had been deliberately keeping out.

“Are there other spells weaved into the beads?” she asked him, still prolonging the

inevitable.

“Of course.”

“Like what?”

“Like a spell that draws you to me.”

Surprised, she abandoned the books and turned to face him fully, and, in response, he turned to face her, fully. “Do we need that?”

He raised an eyebrow at her. “When we come here and forget, even the most powerful of us need all the help we can get.”

He spoke quietly, as if they were genuinely in a library. But she could tell he knew where they needed to go internally, transcendently. He knew, just as she did, what they would have to talk about, but she needed to get there slowly, very slowly, and the quiet tone of his voice told her more clearly than if he said it out loud that he was willing to allow her whatever time she needed. In a sense, it was that, alone, that finally helped her make up her mind to go there.

“After being with you the other evening,” she said, referring to the coffee conversation they'd had in the foyer of the building where they worked, “the Transcendent Process that is shifting my consciousness was heightened, exacerbated. I was able to read the cards twice in two days, which means the Process was shifting so fast, the first spread became redundant quickly. And I've basically spent two days being assailed by visions and images as my consciousness shifts. It has very much felt like shifting sands, and my mind has struggled to keep up. I've been afraid of sleeping at night because of my surreal dreams. Was that the beads, too?”

“No,” he replied, and, unable to help himself, lifted a hand to touch the back of his fingers to the soft skin of her cheek. “That's the effect of us being together. Your consciousness will shift and become aligned with mine, a little like one instrument being tuned to another so that both instruments play exactly the same harmonic tones when they play the same notes.”

She nodded, understanding perfectly. She, too, used the same metaphor to describe two souls who are vibrationally attuned. There are many reasons why multiple souls are vibrationally attuned, not just the over-used and much-misunderstood concept of the soul

mate. On the other hand, there are many reasons why multiple souls are not at all vibrationally attuned, even when they should be.

"You know I have been seeing something," she said. "It started the other night when we were talking. In fact, it started when I thought one very specific word . . ."

"Reflection," he said, enunciating the word carefully and clearly.

"Yes."

For two days, she had worked hard to block the visions, knowing there was extreme and intense pain in the memories they would invoke and bring to the surface of her conscious awareness. So, both the visions and the knowledge of what they held had hovered on the edge of her awareness, like a dark, heavy storm cloud on the horizon. She'd known she would have to confront both when she saw him again because he had a way of bringing the visions up and out just in being with her. But she also knew there was no way to circumvent this process, so she would have to allow the visions to come at some point. Far better they come with him, so at least he could hold her if the pain became too intense, not to mention explain anything she didn't understand.

"What do you see?" he asked her, again, quietly, knowing exactly what she was seeing. But he wanted her to tell him out loud to facilitate the flow of the visions within her, and he also wanted to know she wasn't seeing something he couldn't relate to, just to be sure.

She hesitated for a moment, mustering up her courage, and then she told him.

"I see myself wearing a long, beautiful, flowing gown of different shades of blue, although it is predominantly sapphire blue. And I can see myself because I'm standing in front of a full-length mirror, the frame of which is so beautifully carved it is as if the mirror itself is framed by wooden vines and leaves. I am looking at my reflection, and in the reflection I'm holding a long, beautiful, curved, ornate silver knife with a blue jewel in its pommel . . ."

Just talking about the images she could see, willingly, opened her mind, removing the blockage as she gave the vision permission to come, so that it was allowed to flow through her awareness. Vaguely, she felt his hand turn on her cheek, his warm fingers first laid flat against the skin of her cheek and then, as he slid his fingers around, behind her neck, she felt pressure, as if he was holding her steady. As if in confirmation, he brought his

other hand up to her upper arm, holding her firmly.

"You were there," she whispered. Indeed, wherever she was in the vision, she could feel him beside and slightly behind her, on her left. His presence was palpable even though she couldn't see him. He wasn't reflected in the mirror, only she was, but she could feel him as if he was touching her, even though she knew he wasn't standing close enough for that.

"Yes," he said. "I was there. Not physically. In a vision. The same way you can use vision."

"You watched me," she whispered.

"Yes, and I wish I hadn't because nothing has ever caused me greater pain . . . ever, not even in those lives we lived when you left me . . ."

That drew her focus so that she looked at him instead of concentrating on the vision in her mind's eye.

"Worse than death . . . ?" she asked, and then, as if the words provided exactly the trigger she needed, as if they removed the last barrier in her mind, she saw what she did with the knife and the mirror.

"Let it come," he said. "You need to see what happened. You need to see what you did."

She watched her reflection in the mirror as she first bowed her head and closed her eyes, as if summoning the courage necessary for going through with what she had chosen to do. And then she watched her reflection as, eyes opened and raised and determined, she spoke. Looking her own reflection straight in the eyes, she spoke to herself.

"I am sorry, beautiful Lady. Please, forgive me, for I know I am causing you unimaginable pain. I do this for the greatest good, with the highest of intentions. We cannot let them fall alone. We cannot. They will need help – the kind of help only we can give them. They do not possess the capability to pull themselves out of the abyss. But to help them, to be able to fall low with them, I must do this. 'Tis the only way. So, please, forgive me. Please, try to understand."

And then, watching the vision in her mind's eye, she saw her reflection use the knife and speak the words of a tremendously powerful ancient ritual spell – one she knew she'd

written herself. When she had intoned the words of the spell, she finished it by running the blade of the knife across the inside of her hand. A welt of blood followed the silver blade across her hand, and she curled her hand as if holding onto the blood. Once she used the blade to cut her hand, she dropped the knife onto the floor beside her, and she watched the mirror, waiting, anticipating, waiting, her eyes full of pain.

At first, nothing happened. But then, slowly, ever so slowly at first, and then with increasing speed, cracks appeared in the mirror, marring the perfection of her reflection. As more cracks appeared on the surface of the mirror, her reflection became distorted, fragmented, broken. But in the vision, she was still able to watch herself watching as the cracks formed shards, and then the mirror broke into a hundred, nay, a thousand pieces, some mere splinters or slivers, others larger. And then the shards slipped and separated, breaking apart, falling from the wooden frame like rain, some shattering further on impact with the stone floor. She watched in horror as the mirror shattered, the shards falling at her feet to form a pool of glass around her.

Gasping in sheer, unadulterated horror, in the study, she unconsciously brought her hands to her mouth as the realisation of what had occurred, of what she had done, and of the meaning and purpose of the symbolism of the knife and the mirror penetrated. A chill dread filled her, increasing her heartbeat. In the vision, she opened and turned her wounded hand so that large drops of blood fell onto the pool of glass at her feet, and then she collapsed, sobbing. In direct response to what she was seeing in her visions, she, too, collapsed to the floor in the study. Her knees buckled under her. They just gave way. She dropped to the floor, sliding out of his hands just as the shards of glass had slipped out of the mirror's wooden frame.

“Oh god, no. No, I don't believe it. I don't believe it . . .”

On her knees, she wrapped her arms around her waist and bent over in a vain attempt to alleviate the burning pain in her body, especially in her upper gut, just below her heart – the centre of energy in the body that holds one's self perspective. But the pain was burning through every limb, along with the horror she felt, and the dread chill made her limbs feel as heavy as lead.

He, too, dropped to his knees beside her. The look of absolute horror on her face

bespoke the fact that the vision was still filling her conscious mind. He wrapped his arms around her, pulling her against him, relieved when she offered no resistance. Instead, she brought a hand up to his arm, clinging to him, and she closed her eyes, squeezing them tightly shut. Laying her face against his shoulder, she watched as more of the vision unfolded.

On her knees in the vision, amidst the pool of glass, sobbing, she reached forward to touch the glass that had, formally, held her reflection, as if seeking it or trying to retrieve it. Picking up a large shard that had formed itself into a natural knife, with a wider end that tapered, at its other end, to a sharp point, she wrapped her hand around it, feeling the pain, both in her vision and out of it, of the knife wound against the glass. Blood smeared the shard of glass, and drops of her blood appeared starkly bright red against the pool of clear glass beneath her.

Beside him, on her knees in his study, she opened her hand and locked it against the pain, and she opened her eyes and raised her face to look at it. Blood was pooled in her hand.

"It's all right," he said, releasing her to wrap his hand around hers. "There's nothing there. See. It's all right. There's no wound, no blood."

He was right. When she looked at her hand again, there was no wound and there was no blood.

"I did this to myself . . . deliberately, consciously?" she asked him, laying her forehead on his shoulder and dropping her hand beside her. She laid her head on him because, suddenly, she didn't have the energy to hold it up, and she felt very sick, very nauseous.

"Yes."

"Before I came in?"

"Yes."

"Oh god," she said, squeezing her eyes shut tight again against both the vision and the pain. "No wonder I've always felt as if something vital has been missing, as if something has been amputated, but I haven't known what because all my limbs and my vital organs are intact. Have I felt this in every life I've lived?"

"No. You were not conscious in those other lives. You've felt it in this life because you

have awakened, transcendently, so you have awakened to the truth.”

“I've felt as if I was cut in two.”

“Because you **are** cut in two. You severed your reflection, deliberately, consciously, and in doing so, you cut yourself off from yourself.”

“Why? Why did I do this?” She knew why, she just needed to hear him say it, out loud.

“You know why. You did it because it was the only way to be here, identified with them as they are now and as they have been ever since the original curse of Perpetual Separation was laid. You are too powerful to experience Perpetual Separation just by incarnating in a reality that is underpinned by the whole concept of it. Had you come here without the spell, you would not have been separated, and you would not have been able to identify with them. And is that not what this life is all about for you? You fell low with them so that you could, eventually, lead them out of the abyss. Identification thence to transcend that identification. You did this so you could fall into the abyss with them, fully, properly.”

She absorbed that, knowing the truth of it, and breathing deeply with the upset the vision had stirred within her. “So how does this relate to the fear-dynamic I've always carried within me?”

“This is the very source, the very origin of it. The ritual spell caused you to create the circumstances that put the wound of fear in your soul, and it is the fear itself through which and with which you have created the absence of reflection in every life you've lived in the separated human experience. Fear is the only way it could be done. Surely you know that. The Elohim are Light, and they create out of Light. You could not have unconsciously created a reality around you that was devoid of reflection even under the influence of this separated reality. The truth of the Elohim is that of being wonderfully, beautifully connected, and how do we create against our own Truest Nature? We cannot. The only way you could create a reality where you were cut off from your true Self, separated, as humans are, was to be cut off from your reflection. And so you cast the ritual spell to do exactly that, and to ensure you would not and could not heal the wound within you. Thus have you been able to carry the wound of fear through every life you've

lived, so that you would fear and hide away from anything that reflects the truth of you back to you, or from anyone who is able to see the truth of you. You have been hidden.”

She lifted her head to look at him. “But what does this do to us? What does it mean for you and I? I am still at the mercy of the spell. It hasn't been broken. Isn't that dangerous for us? Surely one of us will have to die whilst ever the spell has power over me. There is no greater reflection for me than in you.”

“Well it won't be me who dies,” he said. “The beads preclude and prevent my death. As for you, the spell was for that moment and that moment only. The spell was designed to cause you to create the fear thereby severing your reflection. 'Tis not the spell that has power over you now, Jennifer. It is the fear that has power over you. And you well know, fear can be healed by acknowledging, facing and resolving it. Plus, there is a way to reverse the effect of the spell. Were you not promised that nothing and no one on earth could separate us this time around? For good reason. This is what was meant when you wrote that. You will restore your reflection, and then you will never again be torn from it.” He shifted, moving so he could put his hands on either side of her face. “You know you are not stupid, right? You would never have laid such a spell upon yourself without also giving yourself the means of reversing its effects. And are you not very gifted at facing and healing fear?”

Again, she closed her eyes as a frisson of pure pain shot through her. “I don't remember how to reverse the spell,” she said, sounding utterly panicked.

“Yes you do. You do remember, and so you will. You're only just seeing the truth of what happened. More will come. You just have to let it come.”

With a sob, she put her head against his shoulder again.

“The Elohim are too powerful to be subject to the dictates of this reality, Jennifer,” he said, holding her against him again. “And while we may at times experience fear, our Light is too powerful, and we always resolve it. Fear cannot exist in our Light for long. How else did you think you would and could create such a powerful fear-dynamic within you if not with the aid of a powerful ritual spell?”

“Why didn't I just not come here. That would've been the best option.”

“Yes, it would have, for you, but not for them. Were we just to leave them to it, with

no means of ever restoring themselves? They cannot get themselves out of the abyss.

They're simply not capable, as you've now seen for yourself. Was that really an option?"

"No."

"No, especially not for you. Have you not realised how much you care? It makes you vulnerable, does it not? Isn't it one of the reasons you've had to pull away, withdraw?"

"Yep," she said. Her initial reaction was passing. He could feel her growing more and more calm as she accepted the truth of what she'd seen. "So because I care I just subjected myself to the worst pain imaginable – the living death – a death you're conscious of."

"The pain has only been there since you began awakening."

"Yeah, you're right. Before that I was just numb – numb and dumb. Actually," she said, raising her head to look at him again, "this pain is unique to me, is it not, courtesy of what I did to be here? I mean, there's something that has been concerning me a lot lately. If others were to ask me about the Transcendent Process, I would have to tell them not to do it. Seriously, I wouldn't want others to experience the pain I've experienced, and the bewilderment and confusion. I wouldn't want others to become lost as I have been. But if they awaken, they won't feel this pain, will they? They won't awaken to an absence of reflection, cut off from themselves, as I have. Will they?"

He shook his head, slowly. "And why is that exactly?"

She shook her head, not understanding what he was alluding to.

"They won't awaken to an absence of reflection because you will be there, reflecting back to them what they really are."

"Oh," she said softly, absorbing the truth of it. "So they won't come out of the zombie state into the living death? I mean, imagine the poor zombie being aware of what's happened to him . . ."

"No, they'll leave the zombie state behind for good."

She frowned as her thoughts changed direction and a new realisation occurred to her. "So, I know how to perform ritual spells?"

"As you've now seen. And you happen to be very good at it, as you've also now seen."

"I was told once, many years ago, by a shaman healer, that I was a ritual oracle, and should I choose to Work with the knowledge in this lifetime, I would be able to, and I

would be able to use it to Work with others. Until now, I didn't know what she meant by that. Well, now I know. Ritual spells. Who would've thought."

"The manipulation of energy and of consciousness itself – your particular focus – is a highly dangerous undertaking for those who don't know what they're doing . . ."

She nodded. "I know. I've been so ignorant, there's no way I could've known about this before now."

Hypersensitive to it as he was, he could feel her energy – calm, accepting – and knew she had re-stabilised, once again. So he moved, standing up and then bending over her to help her up off the floor, too.

"Come," he said. "It's late, and you're tired. You need to let this seep through your consciousness, and sleep is the best way to do that. Do you want to sleep in the spare room?"

"No. Do you want me to?"

"No, I don't want you to. I want you to sleep with me, but I don't want to force you or pressure you. I want you to be comfortable here this weekend."

She smiled at him. "I'm staying here to be with you. I can't be with you if I'm in one room and you're in another."

Later, once they'd both prepared for bed, she lay on her back looking up at the darkness, and he lay on his side, facing her with his hand resting on her stomach. They'd opened the curtains so that the lights of the city could be seen through the floor-to-ceiling glass windows of his bedroom. The lights took the edge off the darkness in the room so that she was able to see. Neither of them were inclined to sleep. For her, there was too much to think about, and for him, while ever she lay awake, thinking, he wouldn't sleep. He wanted and needed to reassure himself that she was all right. Most people would not handle facing the kind of truth she'd faced today. And even though she wasn't like most people, there was still a danger that the revelation could destabilise her psychologically, dangerously so. If that happened, it would be an arduous and difficult task re-stabilising her, especially when there was no help to be offered by anyone around them. He would have to deal with it himself. To his enormous relief, though, so far, she was showing no signs of being adversely affected psychologically.

She was still consciously trying to get her mind around all the ramifications of what she'd seen. She understood what had happened, and she understood, too, why she'd done it. Now that she was contemplating it, she could see that he was right. It was the only way she could be here, identified, separated as everyone else is. In a very strange sort of way, knowing the truth was helping . . . actually, it was helping enormously. At long last, she understood the pain she'd lived with for so long, and understanding, for her, was always cathartic, healing. Understanding always solidified the ground she walked upon, so, far from destabilising her, the truth was steadying her, and it was honing her focus.

"Dominic?"

"Mmmm."

She was going to ask another question, but saying his name suddenly changed the direction of her thoughts. "Was your name chosen for you . . . you know, by the parents?"

"No, they chose a different name, originally. I dispensed with it. I didn't like it. I chose the name I have now. Is that the question you really wanted to ask me?"

"No. So how did you decide on a name?"

"I came across the name and liked it. It resonated. So I adopted it. And before you ask, yes, I still have the original surname. What's your question?"

"The fact that I'm seeing this now, surely that means it's time for me to reverse the spell and heal the fear."

"Of course. That's exactly what it means. Seeing the truth is always the first step in the healing process. Isn't that what they tell recovering alcoholics? The very first step is seeing and acknowledging the truth of the illness. Think of what happened tonight as foundational. The truth you were confronted with tonight will form the foundation of the Process to come."

"Yeah, I get that. I just can't help thinking this all happened the wrong way round, like a seemingly impossible paradox."

"What do you mean?"

"I should've crossed paths with you **after** I healed, not before."

"Except that you know you instigated the Process, and am I not part of it? Didn't you tell me the other night you used the language of symbolism to instigate the Process of

healing within you?"

"Oh yeah, so I did." And then, as his meaning penetrated, she turned over to face him. "So I created you in the fabric of my reality because you are a part of that Process?"

"Of course."

"So that's what you are – my reflection such that you hold within you intrinsically an opportunity to face the fear?"

"Of course."

"Is that why you came here?"

"It's one of the reasons I came here."

"And the others?"

"I came here to be with you, and to finish the Work we began aeons ago."

She absorbed that. Suddenly, she felt utterly exhausted. The exhaustion swept through her like a wave. Her eyelids felt heavy so she allowed them to drop closed. "I think I do know how to begin to reverse the spell without weaving another one to counter it," she said sleepily. "Which is as well because I don't work with ritual spells in this incarnation."

"There's no reason why you can't. You have but to awaken the knowledge within you, because the knowledge is within you in the same way the knowledge of everything else you've rediscovered is within you. You just have to remember that you know.

"So then, tell me," he said before she had a chance to respond, "how will you reverse the effect of the spell?"

"I need to visualise the reversed process of the mirror shattering – the shards lifting up off the floor to become a part of the mirror once again, and the mirror becoming whole, complete and uncracked. I have to visualise it like a movie played in rewind, or played backwards. I have to put the mirror back together again . . ."

"Perfect," he said.

But she didn't hear him. She'd fallen asleep.

He lay watching her in the semi darkness. The lights from the city, seen through the windows in his bedroom, were behind her, so, to him, the edge of her body was lit with the light but her face was cast in darkness. And, the light from the city was augmented by

her Light, or perhaps it was the other way around. Her Light surrounded her like a nimbus, and it was beautiful, ethereal, but the nimbus of her Light was not close to her body. On the contrary, it radiated out from her the length of a large arm span, both arms held wide open, so that, lying next to her as he was, he was touched by it. He could feel it, and the feel of it generated within him such a powerful feeling of euphoria he was still not at all inclined to sleep thereby putting an end to the experience, the feel of her. It had been a long, long time since he was last this close to her. He fully intended to savour the experience even if that meant lying awake next to her all night.

When she'd rolled over to face him it had broken the physical contact between them. His hand had dropped onto the mattress between them. Now, as he watched her sleeping, he ached to touch her again. His hand twitched where it lay on the mattress. With an effort, though, he refrained from touching her. She needed the sleep for more reasons than the obvious one of being tired, and he was loath to disturb her or to risk waking her up. So he lay, still and silent beside her, watching her in the muted darkness.

Ah the irony, he thought, as he lay watching her. Illusion. How powerful it was, and yet it was not real. The illusion of her fear kept her not so much from herself, although it did, indeed, do that as well. Rather, it kept her from the knowledge that she was, in fact, whole exactly as she was. Remove the illusion of fear, or remove illusion itself, and what remains? Truth. Knowledge. And powerfully altered perception.

Humans are powerful conjurers, powerful magicians, but, caught in the illusion mind-trap as they are, they are being manipulated into conjuring only ordinary, mundane realities – realities that are defined and fabricated according to a strict and rigid set of rules and dictates – realities that are dictated by an unimaginable darkness – realities that reduce and limit and suppress and contain human consciousness and, with it, human potential. The power humans possess to create, the very power of creation itself, is being used against us. Humans are being forced to wear exactly the same clothes, and oh, how boring and dull those clothes are . . .

Such is the true paradox of human reality – the absolute, tragic contradiction of it all.

~

So, as a powerful being of Light, I cast a powerful ritual spell that severs me from my reflection . . . .

*Symbolically, yes, and, therefore, only temporarily.*

*Temporarily?*

*Yes, temporarily. Or, put another way, only as illusion, not as truth.*

*Oh.*

*We know where you're going with this, dearest one. You think that as a powerful being of Light, you cast a ritual spell that only a powerful being of Light can undo. And since you are not that powerful being of Light courtesy of being cut off from your true Self, you think this is a paradox with no possibility of resolution.*

*Yes.*

*So you think you are trapped in your coffin-like existence, with no way out.*

*Yes.*

*Well, allow us to change your mind, beautiful Lady.*

*To begin with, you need to properly understand what the ritual spell was designed to do.  
Are you ready?*

*Yes, of course. I feel it, too – the need to properly know.*

*All right. The ritual spell was not designed to last for eternity. That is, it was not designed to keep you separated or severed from your reflection forever or until something or someone reversed it. This you must see and comprehend as the foundational first step toward understanding what happened and why. Do you see the truth of this?*

*Yes, I do. I understand that. So I am not under the influence of a spell that keeps me severed from my reflection.*

*No, you are not. So clear any such thoughts from your psyche. And with no spell that binds you, there is not the need to reverse it with another, is there?*

*No. No, there's not the need. But I still can reverse it.*

*Good. And, yes, you can, but that is a point for later. Now, as a second step toward*

*grasping all the nuances and ramifications of what occurred for you personally and why, let us dwell, for a moment, on the very great curse laid upon humanity so long ago – a curse, we might add, that does still exert a very powerful and controlling influence over humanity for two reasons. First, it is still being perpetrated on humanity courtesy of ongoing black magic rituals, and, second, there is and has never been anything to counter it.*

*What was the mechanism or the essence, the core, if you like, of the black magic ritual that laid the very great curse originally – the original sin, you might call it?*

*Yes, we might call it that. Ironic, isn't it? The curse was not laid upon humans because they sought knowledge. The curse severed them from the knowledge of themselves, but they have been tricked into thinking and believing the seeking of knowledge was their downfall. It's frighteningly clever but darkly twisted.*

*The mechanism or core of the original black magic ritual was blood sacrifice, as is always the case with black magic and the laying of powerful curses.*

*And who was sacrificed?*

*The Elohim priesthood – those who were humanity's connection to its own higher truth, its own higher dimensionality – those who were humanity's beating heart – those who innately held within them the knowledge of who and what humanity really was. In that sense, the curse was not a punishment for finding and eating the apple of knowledge. It was about having that apple taken from them when it was their rightful heritage, their true legacy.*

*Yes, dear one. That is so. Well put, as usual. And what was the very tragic consequence of this curse?*

*The very fabric of human reality was torn asunder because the very fabric of the human psyche was ripped apart, ripped in two. And humanity fell into the abyss, the darkness, and was perpetually separated from its higher truth, the truth of its higher dimensionality.*

*Yes, dear one. That is so. And have you not been told that the Elohim, who, at that time, walked among humans, saw this coming? So why did they not prevent it? Why did they not act to protect humanity from this travesty?*

*Because humanity chose it. Humans ultimately perpetrated it, although they were manipulated into doing so and had no real idea of what they were doing. And they also did nothing to prevent it themselves. The Elohim were duty bound to honour the premise upon which the human experience was created, that of Free Will. Humanity chose to break free of Elohim governance. Humanity chose to turn their backs on Elohim guidance and counsel. The Elohim honoured that choice because they knew humanity had, now, to walk the long, long road of consequence. The Elohim would never have protected humans from the consequence of their own choices.*

*Yes, dear one. That is so. And what did the Elohim do in response to this human choice – a choice, really, that was the ultimate rejection? Did they turn their backs on humans and leave humans to wallow in the hell they had chosen and would now create for themselves?*

*No. Oh no. They fell into the abyss with humanity, deliberately, consciously. They, too, traversed the long, long road of consequence. And in falling into the abyss they became identified with the human struggle, and with the tragedy of human separation. They became identified with wounded human psychology, and with the hellish human reality.*

*Yes, dear one. That is so. But how was this to be achieved given the fact that the abyss of separation was, in every way, alien, or contrary, to their nature? They cannot create against their Truest Nature, can they? 'Tis impossible. So they could not create the reality of the abyss for themselves. They could not create a reality for themselves of darkness and ignorance and separation when they are, in truth, Light and Knowledge and Wisdom and Truth and Connection, could they?*

*No, they could not. Nor could they become trapped by illusion, tricked into believing it, for the same reason. It is against their Truest Nature. Their sight is too powerful.*

*That is so. So what was to be done if they were to truly fall into the abyss, become a part of it, and become identified with humanity in the abyss?*

*There was, in fact, only one way they could truly fall into the abyss. They had to be cut off from the truth of themselves . . . exactly as humanity would be when the curse was laid. And this is what the symbolism represented in the ritual spell you cast. You know the power of ritual symbolism, dear one. You have worked with it extensively, and you work with it very effectively because you are very knowledgeable. You know and understand its power, and you know how to harness that power.*

*The spell you designed and cast was for that one, single moment. It was designed to cause you, and allow you, to create in the landscape of your reality against your Truest Nature because it temporarily cut you off from your truest Self. It was as if you gave yourself temporary amnesia and took away the means of remembering – your reflection, of course.*

*So you created the circumstances that put a very great fear of having your truth seen and recognised by others such that you now hide that truth. You hide it from yourself, and you hide it from others. And, as part of that, or even as a by-product of it, you fear your reflection because in your reflection there is that same truth you hide from. Do you see? You cast the ritual spell with the sole intention of creating those same very powerful, very significant circumstances that severed humanity from the truth of itself. Thus were you plunged into the abyss with them. They were plunged into the abyss in ignorance. You*

*plunged into the abyss knowingly, consciously. And, it all happened at exactly the same point in the space-time continuum, courtesy of exactly the same circumstances. Do you understand all that?*

*Yes, I understand. The spell facilitated the whole entire experience, or kick started it, not just of those original circumstances, but of the whole journey – traversing the human experience in its entirety. The spell was designed to make me one of them, and to allow me to experience what they were about to experience.*

*Yes, dear one. That is so. Perfectly stated, as usual. Those original circumstances – something you could only experience, or attract into your reality, with the aid of the ritual spell that cut you off from yourself – caused you to hide the truth of what you are, and caused you to hide **from** the truth of what you are. Of course, the only way to hide the truth of what you are was to hide that truth from yourself. And, of course, the only way to hide the truth from yourself was to be cut off from your own reflection so that you could not see your truth. Do you understand that?*

*Yes.*

*Self ignorance, dear one. The spell was designed to cause you to be in a state of self ignorance, as humans were to be, courtesy of the curse. And so, cut off from your reflection and, therefore, from your true Self, you had no way of healing the fear that was generated within you as a result of the trauma you experienced, that of being seen for what you are and then being cut down for it. Thus, you would, then, in the separated, third dimension, always create the reality of the absence of your reflection because you held a very great fear of it and of what it would bring out in you.*

*And, the Process of your incarnations since then has never put a finger on the fear, as you phrase it, thereby bringing it to the surface of your conscious awareness. As such, in all the lives you've lived prior to this one, the fear has remained intact, powerful, and embedded deeply in your psyche, but dormant, not ever brought to the surface of your awareness. Remember, dear one, humans create out of fear in the separated, third-dimensional reality because they do not know the true nature of how they create, and they do not see and understand the true nature of fear, of where it resides and of how it affects every facet of their lives. So how can they heal their fear? They cannot. Thus does their fear remain intact, and, thus, do they continue to create out of their intact fear. 'Tis the very reason why human reality is so hellish. Are you following?*

*Yes, I am. Very much so. You make it very clear for me. So, just like them, I am continuing to create out of my intact fear.*

*Just so, dearest one, just so. And with the fear intact, you have created realities in the many, many lives you've lived that hold no reflection of your true being, your truth. You have feared your reflection, and you have hidden from it, relentlessly, often ruthlessly because your reflection, you knew, would take away the safe cocoon, or coffin, or containment of your self ignorance and bring your true Self back. . . the classic resurrection. What do you think the resurrection in the Jesus myth really refers to?*

*The living death. Yes, he rose from the tomb of his self ignorance.*

*So the spell allowed me to create the circumstances that put a powerful fear in my soul of being who I am and of what happens to me when I am seen as such. And so, out of the fear, I cannot abide my own reflection and so I am cut off from myself. And the self ignorance that results hides me, entombs me. It is the disguise spoken of in The Lady (Lady of the Lake): "You are shrouded, cloaked, disguised. And your disguise has been complete because even you have believed it, been deceived by it."*

*And there is the key. You have been deceived by it, the disguise of your self ignorance, and so you have believed it. You create out of belief, remember. That is exactly how you continue to create a reality devoid of your true reflection. But we will come back to this later. For now, let us focus on your self ignorance.*

*All right, so the self ignorance stops me knowing who I am, because if I know, I will be. When you know the truth, you have to be the truth.*

*Ah. What did you just say?*

*When you know the truth, you have to be the truth. So I've stopped myself knowing and, therefore, being by hiding in ordinariness and self ignorance, believing in a false identity.*

*Yes, dear one. This is so. The only way you could stop **being** yourself, and the only way you could not **know** yourself, was to create within you the illusion of fear. And this is exactly what you did.*

*And you said I wasn't lacerated. Is there a more painful laceration than being cut off from yourself courtesy of fear? I don't think so.*

*You are not lacerated, dear one, not like other souls you've encountered. Those souls lacerate themselves by hurting others. You have never hurt another soul. You've only 'hurt' yourself, but for the highest good and with the highest intention. That you have not hurt another soul is exactly the reason why your innocence remains intact. You are merely trapped in very misguided mindsets courtesy of the illusion of your fear.*

*Now, we have a question for you. Do you need to see who you are in order to know who you are? In other words, does the absence of your reflection in your reality automatically preclude you ever knowing who you are?*

*Ah . . . well . . .*

*You have mourned and bemoaned the lack of your reflection in your reality. Why?*

*You have bemoaned the fact of being surrounded by sheep who know only how to follow and have not the wherewithal to see any sort of truth that matters. Why?*

*You have railed against the zombies who surround you – those who have neither the will nor the desire to awaken to the truth. Why?*

*Because I have mourned the loss of my Self. I have felt the severance like a physical thing, being cut off from my Self, and it has caused me very great pain. So, in my ignorance, I have sought my Self in those around me, but have failed miserably in my ongoing attempts to seek my Self in them. And I have mourned the lack of my reflection in my reality for the same reason. Well, the sheep and the zombies are that lack of reflection.*

*And so, with that in mind, we ask you again. Do you need to see who you are to know who you are? Do you need to create your reflection in your reality to know who you are?*

*Umm . . . well it would definitely help, but . . .*

*Let us, again, work with the giraffe and zebra analogy. Whilst ever the giraffe runs with the herd of zebras it will neither see itself nor will it experience itself and, therefore, it will not and cannot know itself as a giraffe. The reason for this is simple. Whilst ever it continues to run with the herd of zebras, it will and must continue to be bound by their perceptions, their mindsets, their fears, their behaviours, their needs, their choices, and, of course, therefore, their focus to fit in. Would you agree?*

*Yes, absolutely.*

*The giraffe may not know what it looks like when it runs on the plains by itself, but it will begin to experience itself. Separation from the herd of zebras, and not just physically but mentally and psychologically, too, as you well know, must occur for the giraffe to begin to experience itself. And with **experience**, comes burgeoning **knowledge**, even though it still does not **see** itself.*

*Ah, yes. Of course. You are right.*

*And then, with burgeoning knowledge comes . . . what?*

*Transformed perspective and perception, transformed mindset, transformed belief, transformed focus, transformed behaviour. Transformed being. The giraffe will lose his zebra-ness, slowly but surely, and he will begin to become the giraffe he is, in his own mind.*

*Just so, dearest one, just so. You think your situation with your intact fear and all its expressions and manifestations is insurmountable without the proof of your truest reflection. And so you have sought it in those around you and in your reality. That is, you have sought it where it cannot and will never be found. You think whilst ever you are severed from your truest reflection courtesy of your fear, you will not and cannot know who you are. Yet now we have established there is more than one path to self knowledge. Self experience is a most valuable way to arrive at a place of knowledge within.*

*And then, what do you know about the effect of knowledge on fear?*

*Fear dissolves in the illuminative Light of knowledge. I've said it many times. Fear needs the bedrock of ignorance to survive and thrive. So what happens then when the bedrock of ignorance is transformed into knowledge?*

*And? What does happen?*

*The whole edifice built on the foundation of ignorance comes tumbling down. Oh . . . Are you saying I may not have to really deal with the fear?*

*If you fully and completely transform the bedrock of your self ignorance into self knowledge, then, no, you will not have to deal with the fear. You will be as you really are. The fear, as illusion, cannot survive in the bedrock of fully transformed consciousness – the very reason for the ritual spell you cast so long ago. The question you then have to ask yourself is how transformed is your consciousness? There is still ignorance in you, dearest one, for one very good reason. This you know. And whilst ever there is still ignorance in you, the fear will still have power over you.*

*But! Let us think back to that moment, eighteen years ago, when you came face to face with your own reflection, and you ran from it in abject terror. What was the state of your consciousness then?*

*I was a full-blown zombie. I wasn't necessarily like a typical or normal zombie, but I was still a zombie. As such, the edifice of me was all fear – powerful, intact, thriving in the bedrock of my supreme self ignorance.*

*Yes, dear one. Perfectly stated, as usual. Hence the fear response. Your reaction, your*

*choice, your behaviour, your emotions, or lack thereof, all had their roots in the very intact, thriving fear, as you put it. But, the glimpse of your true reflection achieved something powerful for you, did it not?*

*It did. It woke me up. Literally overnight, I came out of the zombie state. I awakened, the next morning, to enormous pain. My body felt as if someone had set me on fire. And although my perception was altered by the experience in that I knew, then, that something was wrong, and I knew something significant had happened, my self ignorance remained intact and still exerted a powerful influence over my perception. So I was utterly bewildered, spinning around in confusion, completely lacking understanding, and, also, at that early stage, completely lacking the knowledge base to start to change that lack of understanding.*

*Just so. But from that point in time to this one now, what has occurred for you, dearest one?*

*Transformation. Transforming consciousness. The building of knowledge, and not just self knowledge, but knowledge of many things. And, with it, the building of understanding, brick by brick, so to speak.*

*And?*

*And, with transformed consciousness has come a pulling away from the herd with which I formerly ran, physically, psychologically, mentally, spiritually. And, very slowly but very surely has come a whole new experience of myself. And, therefore, you're right, self knowledge.*

*Just so, dear one, just so. There was no one around you who could tell you what was happening to you. There was no one around you who could lead you or guide you through the stages of your transformational Process. There was no precedent for you, no recipe, no step by step process you could adopt and follow. And yet, despite this, you have been leading you, step by step, insight by insight, revelation by revelation, realisation by realisation, experience by experience back to the truth of your Self, have you not? Even when you consciously had no idea of what was going on with you, still you were leading you back to you, were you not? Still, you were transforming your consciousness.*

*Yes.*

*And do you still have no idea what is happening to you?*

*No.*

*So what is the primary difference between the 'you' of now and the 'you' of back in those very early days?*

*Back then I had no understanding of what the Process was actually accomplishing within me, of where it was taking me, and of what it was causing to be within me. Now, I not only understand all of this, but I am consciously connecting with it, consciously participating in it.*

*Yes, this is so. And so, just out of interest and curiosity, what would happen now if you were, once again, to be given a glimpse of your truest reflection?*

*Well, I can't say definitively what would happen, but the transformation of my consciousness, the self knowledge I do possess, even though there's more to go, would cause me to react completely differently, and to make different choices, to engage in a different behaviour. I hope I wouldn't run.*

*Well, we know you wouldn't run. But we understand you cannot fully know this until you experience it. Until then, there will always be that element of doubt.*

*Now, even with the transformation you have undergone, we said before there is still ignorance in you for one very good reason. Do you know what that reason is, dear one?*

*Yes. I know what you're alluding to. I said it before. I am shrouded, cloaked, disguised. And my disguise is complete because even I have believed it, been deceived by it. My self ignorance has not just formed the bedrock within which my fear has survived and thrived. It has formed the bedrock for something else to survive and thrive.*

*And what is that, dear one? What is the something else that has survived within you courtesy of the bedrock of your self ignorance?*

*Belief. Very misguided belief.*

*Elaborate.*

*My belief in the illusion of normality and ordinariness that surrounds me, and within which I hide, and out of which I create my reality.*

*Yes, dear one. That is so. Perfectly stated, as usual. So you do know about the cloak of normality and ordinariness that you wear and that covers you like a shroud? 'Tis the very thing that hides you, and 'tis the very thing within which you hide.*

*Yes, I know about it. So, why do I create the absence of my reflection when I should, by rights and according to the nature of my fear, create the presence of my reflection in order to face and resolve the fear?*

*Well, you have to remember that the fear of your reflection has been allowed to exist dormant within you, not ever brought to the surface. As such, you have continued to create directly out of the fear in addition to the belief in the illusion of ordinariness that*

*surrounds you.*

*Oh, right. Yes, you're right.*

*You create the illusion of ordinariness around you out of fear, and then you hold on to it very tightly out of fear because it hides you, and you hide within and behind it. 'Tis an ingenious disguise, don't you think, absolutely and utterly ingenious?*

*Yes, I do think. But I would be more impressed if I wasn't so caught up in it all, if it didn't cause me so much pain.*

*The pain has only been there since you awakened. Before that, even in those other lives you lived, there was not the pain, dearest one. You have forgotten the truth of that. The pain is, unfortunately, a by-product of awakening to the truth of the living death, especially for one such as you, a powerful, sensitive soul of Light.*

*But, the time has come for you to remove the disguise. You know that, do you not?*

*Yes, I do know that.*

*In fact, 'tis happening even as we speak. It's all very exciting, especially for those of us who watch and know all. And, of course, it begs the obvious question, don't you think?*

*What question is that?*

*What do you look like without your disguise?*

*Indeed, what do I look like when seen in the Light of Truth? You know because you see me even now, even though I do not.*

*Well, you may not see, as such . . . yet, but you are still beginning to know. Remember that, dearest one. Remember.*

*And, yes, we see you. To us you have never been anything other than what you are. We see you, dearest one. We see you. So why do you not fear us?*

*Because you are not here with me, physically, in the landscape of my reality, in this separated lower dimension.*

*Ah, yes. You can keep us tucked away in that same place with your visions and your writing. Nice and safely tucked away, contained, not spilling over into your outer reality, other than to record these dialogues on your computer . . .*

*Oh . . . crap. Is that key? Is this why the truth of me never spills over into my outer reality? Because I keep me contained so that I don't spill over . . . so that I can't see . . . so that I can deceive myself into thinking I'm ordinary, just like everyone else?*

*Yes, dearest one, 'tis so. And in keeping your Self thus contained, you can still believe it's all just imagination and fantasy. It's not real, not really.*

*Oh dear. So how do I end it – the containment? How do I allow my Self to spill over into my outer reality? God, no wonder I have had such an enduring battle with my dry, arid wasteland of a reality . . . I keep my Self out of it.*

*Indeed. How do you allow your Self to spill over into your outer reality? You come out of hiding, dearest one. Is the answer not obvious.*

*That answer is obvious, but coming out of hiding is just not that simple, as you well know. So, how do I come out of hiding? How do I come out of hiding consciously when hiding is not at all a conscious thing?*

*You make it a conscious thing.*

*Oh.*

*Yes, exactly. Oh.*

~

## *Shedding the Cloak of Ordinariness*

She lay, curled on her side, facing him, and she slept deeply and peacefully. Her breathing was deep, even and regular, and it was ever-so-slightly hypnotic. He watched her for a long time, but even with the intention of staying awake for as long as he could, the stillness and the silence and the regularity of her breathing worked their magic. Slowly, his body and his mind relaxed, and he drifted towards sleep.

Suddenly, she made a noise deep in her throat, not a noise of distress, more one of surprise. And then she grew restless. She moved her head on the pillow, and then she turned over onto her back, quickly, her movements jerky, turning her face away from him as if she was turning away from something or someone in her dreams. Both the noise and the movement brought him awake with a jolt. Alert now, all of his senses honed in on her, he toyed with the idea of waking her. Her breathing was no longer even and regular but, rather, shallow and quick – a sign of distress. Without feeling it, he knew her pulse had quickened, too. He resisted the temptation to bring her out of sleep. Whatever she was seeing in her dreams, it was important, he knew, part of the same Process that had begun in his study. And it wasn't hard to hazard a guess as to what, exactly, she might be seeing . . . .

She was standing in a pool of shattered glass. The pool of glass did not comprise the small, blunt pieces of, say, a shattered windscreen. This pool of glass was more a collection of shards, many of them long, some mere splinters or slivers. For a brief moment, she was distracted, when she looked down, by the beautiful colour of her slippers, her shoes, and she held the materials of her gown clear to get a better, clearer look at them. The sapphire blue was wonderfully, even powerfully vibrant. But then the glass drew her attention, once again, by beginning to move by itself. Surprised, she dropped the material of her gown and took an involuntary step backwards, away from the glass.

The pool of glass ignored her. It was, apparently, intent on its course of action. At

first, it seemed to her that the glass was pulling itself back together, but then she realised it was moving, like the trickle of a tiny river, away from her. Looking beyond it, she saw the empty frame of the mirror, and she realised the glass was not so much moving away from her as it was moving towards the mirror. As she watched, the many shards that comprised the whole moved like upside-down rain, reassembling themselves and lifting, or pouring, up off the floor to find their place in the carved, wooden frame of the mirror. When all the shards were in place and there was not so much as a sliver left on the floor at her feet, the shards reconnected with each other so that the cracks disappeared. She was able to watch them, following the cracks with her eyes, as they healed themselves.

And then the mirror was again whole and complete and beautiful, the glass once again filling the wooden frame, and there was not a single crack or fracture left on its surface. For a moment, in her surprise, she stood still, frozen, looking at the mirror, adjusting to the fact of it being whole again. And then, she took the couple of steps necessary to bring her close to it. Reaching out, she touched the mirror, feeling the cold smoothness of the glass under her fingers. For another long moment, she merely stood with her hands on the glass, as if in contact, once again, with an old friend.

But then she realised something wasn't quite right. Lifting her hands away from the glass, she looked into the mirror, and a frisson of fear shot through her, increasing her heartbeat.

There was no reflection in the mirror.

She was standing right in front of it, but there was nothing there, not even a reflection of the room behind and around her, nor even a vague impression or image of her blue gown.

Unable to bear the lack of reflection, she cast her eyes downward, looking away, seeing nothing, not even the beauty of her slippers. Her heart felt heavy inside her chest, heavy with fear and grief and upset and bewilderment and a sense of utter helplessness. There was nothing she could do. She could not cause the reflection to be there. Helplessly, she looked back up at the mirror, and, again, what she saw there made her take a small, involuntary step backwards, still holding her hands up, out in front of her.

She was standing in the mirror, not with her hands out as she actually was, but, rather,

with her hands at her sides. She was wearing the gown of blue with the beautiful blue slippers on her feet. And she was looking back at her, smiling slightly, subtly, the smile more a sparkle in her eyes than one that was transforming her features.

“Hello, beloved,” her reflection said softly.

Her heart pounded in her chest as she looked into her own green eyes and saw her own curly, dark-brown hair, and she realised she hadn't been able to properly see the face and features and hair of her reflection in the vision she'd seen earlier. Not so now. Her own very familiar features looked back at her. And the more deeply she looked into her own eyes, the more deeply the eyes of her own reflection looked into hers . . . into her.

Fear, powerful and potent, shot through her again, causing her limbs to feel heavy. Eyes locked on eyes, she felt sheer, unadulterated panic rise in her chest, and she wanted to look away, to turn away, cutting off the pain, cutting off the fear. But she stood her ground and continued to look. She didn't choose to keep looking upon her own reflection, she just did keep looking, and as she continued to look, her initial panicked fear began to wane and her heartbeat began to settle into a more comfortable, steady rhythm.

“Hello, Ushara,” she said in reply to her own reflection.

In the bed in his room, he saw and felt her settle somewhat, so he relaxed against his own pillow, although he remained vigilant. He wondered what she was seeing . . .

As she looked at her own familiar features in the beautiful gown and slippers, she realised she had held a belief for the last seventeen years that in transforming her consciousness she would somehow become a different person. What did a high priestess look like? What did an **Elohim** high priestess look like? If there was a stereotype, she thought she would become it. Now, as her reflection calmly looked back at her with a slight smile, on lips and sparkling in eyes, she realised she was already what she was. She wouldn't become someone or something else because she was as she was. And that meant she was also whole, exactly as she was.

And then, as if waiting only long enough for the revelation to wash through her, her reflection spoke to her again, with her voice and her mannerisms. Her own reflection asked her a question, and it felt surreal. It was surreal enough having her reflection in the mirror behave by itself, but to have it speak to her, too . . . weird.

“Why did you reassemble the mirror, beautiful Lady? Did you do it to reverse the spell you cast so long ago?”

Unable to speak, she nodded, noting as she did that her reflection did not nod with her. In response, her reflection inclined her head.

“Was that really necessary? After all, what is the truth of reflection, beautiful Lady?”

The question, although simple, was powerful, generating a powerful realisation within her. “The truth of reflection is that it is,” she answered. “And it cannot not be.”

Her reflection nodded, just once, slowly. “You wish to change the reflection around you, in your reality, so you reassembled the mirror. But the reflection cast by you in your reality *is* your reflection. You, my Lady, are cloaked in ordinariness, hidden from yourself, and your reality reflects that. You know how to change what is reflected in your reality. You know.”

“Change what is within,” she said, and watched, again, as her reflection nodded once.

“Or,” her reflection added, “change how you see yourself.”

“Perspective,” she said.

Again, her reflection nodded. “Indeed,” she said.

Now it was her turn to incline her head, again noting that her reflection did not copy her.

“Humanity exists in the zombie state, does it not, beautiful Lady?” her reflection asked her.

“Yes, it does,” she answered, still adjusting to the weirdness of having a conversation with herself.

“And have you not had ample time to observe the effects of humanity's existence in the zombie state?”

“Yes, I have, and not just because of observation but also because of personal experience.”

Her reflection again nodded once to acknowledge this last statement. “Just so. You, too, have existed in the zombie state, or at least partly. What, do you think, characterises the zombie state?”

She wasn't entirely sure what it was her reflection was alluding to exactly. “Do you

mean the ease with which they are manipulated, or are you referring to the perpetual state of their ignorance? Or are you referring to their complete inability to change their mindsets, their thoughts, their perspectives . . . their being, in other words, to un-trap their focus?"

"Ah, interesting," her reflection responded. "Yes, those are definitely characteristics of the zombie state. So, once a zombie, always a zombie. Is that not so? By its very nature, the zombie state cannot be altered or changed, can it? It is what it is, and so must it always be?"

"No, it **can** be changed, but only in those capable of coming out of the zombie state, those willing and able."

Again, her reflection nodded once. "As you have demonstrated. And so, the zombie state no longer reflects you, although you were, once, a product of it and, therefore, a part of the fabric of it. Why, then, do you surround yourself with them still?"

She opened her mouth to answer, but there was no answer, so she closed it again.

And then the answer was just there, so she gave voice to it. "Because they hide me, and I can hide amongst them."

And then revelation hit her like a punch in the gut, and, as if she had really been punched in the gut, she dropped to her knees in front of the mirror and bent over with her hands on her gut. Suddenly, in an instant, she could see what it was her reflection was alluding to, which made sense since they were, she and her reflection, one and the same.

"No heartbeat," she said breathlessly, putting a hand on the floor beside her to steady her. "They have no heartbeat. Zombies have no heartbeat. They are as if dead."

Her reflection did not drop as she had done, but her reflection joined her on the floor, mirroring her kneeling position. But whereas she had a hand around her waist and another on the floor beside her, her reflection clasped her hands and held them steadily, calmly, resting them in her lap.

"Yes, beautiful Lady," her reflection said. "Zombies have no heartbeat. So how are they to bring themselves out of the zombie state if they do not have a heartbeat?"

She shook her head. "They cannot. The heartbeat must be restored, restarted, or kick started, but most of them cannot do it by themselves."

"Although," her reflection qualified, "like you, some of them **can** kick start their own heartbeats, and yet others **have** a heartbeat but they know it not because their heartbeat is all but silent, or soft, you might say, so that it is drowned out by far stronger and louder beats. What, then, of those whose heartbeats could be kick started with a little help, an impetus, a trigger, as yours was?"

As she contemplated her answer to the question, she inclined her head in a silent question of her own, unsure as to what, exactly, her reflection was referring to.

"Do you believe these individuals exist?" her reflection asked her.

"Yes, I do," she replied. "I think."

"Do you not yearn to kick start those heartbeats capable of being kick started?" her reflection clarified.

"To bring those souls out of the zombie state? Yes, absolutely," she whispered. "And if enough souls come out of the zombie state, either by themselves or with an impetus . . ."

"The very fabric of human reality will begin to look a tad different, wouldn't you say?"

"Yes, I would say."

Her reflection leaned forward, raised her hands and put them against the mirror. Unable to help herself, she followed suit, doing the same. And when their hands touched, perfect mirror reflections, their fingers clasped as if the glass of the mirror was not there.

"And so," her reflection asked her, "again I ask you. Why did you reassemble the mirror, beautiful Lady?"

"To bring me to the truth of my Self," she replied. "And to bring the fear of my reflection to the surface so that I can resolve and dissolve it."

"Can truth be altered at all, by anything, even something as powerful as a ritual spell, which, after all, only works on consciousness itself, or by such a powerful fear?"

"No," she replied. "Truth is truth. It is what it is, and it cannot be altered. It cannot be changed. It can only be **perceived** as something other than what it is. But truth remains as it is, unaffected by perception."

"So what is the truth of your reflection?"

She couldn't answer, so she didn't answer.

"You have been given a glimpse of your truest reflection, beautiful Lady," her

reflection told her. "What happened to you when you glimpsed your own reflection?"

"Apart from running away from it in abject terror, you mean?"

Her reflection smiled, genuinely and deeply amused. "Yes, apart from that."

"I woke up, literally overnight . . ."

"Oh, you mean your glimpse of your own reflection kick started your own heartbeat. Is that what you mean?"

Clever. Her reflection was clever. She felt as if she had been led through territory and come back to the same place. "Are you saying I will and can do the same for others?"

"Yes, that is exactly what I'm saying. Of course you can do this for others. Of course you can, and so you must. So you must, beautiful Lady. It is imperative that you do so. "But," her reflection paused, "you may only do so by removing your disguise. This you must now do. You must shed the cloak of ordinariness you wear. You must reveal your true Self. You must come out of hiding. After all, others will not see you if you remain cloaked, shrouded, disguised."

There descended a silence between them, their fingers clasped, their eyes locked.

And then, she whispered, "I want to come out of hiding. I yearn for it."

"I know." Her reflection smiled. "Tell me what you really look like."

"I am Light," she said simply. "I am fifth-dimensional Light."

"Just so," her reflection agreed. "And what, exactly, are the characteristics of your Light, beautiful Lady?"

"I am Knowledge. I am Wisdom. I am Love. I am Care and Compassion." As she began listing all those things she knew she was, all those aspects of herself she had been experiencing over the last seventeen years, she found she couldn't stop. "I am Beauty. I am Colour and Vibrancy. I am Peace and Calm. I am Power. I am Creativity. I am Uniqueness. I am Connection, Communion, Fellowship. I am Evolvement, Growth and Movement. I am Purpose. I am Process."

"How do you know all this if you have not been able to see yourself?" her reflection asked her intensely.

She laughed softly. Clever, she thought for a second time. Her reflection was clever. "I have experienced it," she said softly, still smiling.

Even as she said it, she saw the truth of it, and she also saw how much she had contained herself even whilst transforming herself. She had, in the past, held the thought that not even one thread in the fabric of her reality contained any of those things she really was, but . . .

"No," her reflection said suddenly, vehemently. "There are at least two threads of your reality that hold, for you, the absolute, pure truth of everything you are."

"My writing and my inner visions," she whispered.

"Yes," her reflection confirmed. "Dangerous, are they not, for one who desperately needs to hide?"

"Yes."

"Well, no matter," her reflection said and shrugged her shoulders for emphasis, "for you keep these hidden as well, rigidly and ruthlessly hidden and contained."

"Yes," was all she could think to say.

"Even though," her reflection continued as if she hadn't spoken, "these two have brought you to a place of Knowledge within such that your perception of yourself has irrevocably changed and shifted."

"Yes," she whispered again.

"And yet, still you doubt. Still, you believe the illusion of your reality, as devoid of your reflection as it is, over all you have been given through your inner visions and your writing. Why?"

"Because I am still defined by the illusional reality. It is still my frame of reference in terms of my perception of myself. Because I am still holding onto it."

She stared at her reflection, and her reflection stared at her.

"Then let it go," her reflection said. "You are fractured. You are one person in the solitude and privacy of your own thoughts and dreams and visions, and you are another, entirely different person in the 'real' world around you."

"Yes."

"So much so that people may only know you when and if they read your writing."

"Yes."

"So you make sure no one **does** read your writing. Is that not so?"

"Yes."

Her reflection frowned. "So what would happen, then, if your inner rich world, as you call it, were to break free of its containment? What would happen if your inner rich world were to spill out into your reality?"

She didn't answer immediately because she found it impossible to imagine.

"How could that happen?" she asked eventually in lieu of an answer. "I mean, what part of it **could** spill out into my reality?"

"All of it. All of the essence of it."

Her reflection smiled ever-so-slightly, not enough so that she noticed. Rather, she felt it. She felt the smile within her. It lit her up, within.

"Then," her reflection said, "you will see your power."

"Power? What power?"

"The power to awaken and transform consciousness in those capable of being awakened and transformed. The power to shape and configure reality."

Eyes locked on eyes, both looking, unblinking, each at the other.

"Reality . . . ."

She jerked awake, taking a moment to recognise the unfamiliar surrounds, seen in the semi darkness, of his room, and to steady her wildly beating heart with measured breaths.

"Are you all right?" he asked her softly, not wanting to startle her more than she was already.

She turned her head on the pillow, turning her face towards him. "You're awake?"

"I am now."

She sat up in the bed, curling her legs under her, leaning on one hand, and she looked at him in the dim light of his room. So strange was her expression that he couldn't help but sit up, too, mirroring her position on the bed. She was, to him, surrounded by that same nimbus of combined light and Light, but he, for her, was lit by the lights from the city except where her own shadow was cast over him.

They sat in silence for a long moment, and he wondered what she was thinking. Even though her face was in darkness, he could still see, or sense, the strange expression on her features, and her energy was powerful, palpable. It heightened the effect of the nimbus

surrounding her, and it wrapped around him. His breathing quickened as he looked at her and felt her energy, her essence imbue him.

And then, she spoke.

"You missed Friday night drinks."

That was not what he expected her to say. He frowned at the seeming innocuousness of the statement. "Yes," he said simply, sounding uncertain.

"You don't miss Friday night drinks very often," she said.

"No, I don't."

"So do you know how they were tonight . . . without you there?"

"Ah, no," he said slowly, hesitantly, wondering where she was going with this. "I haven't thought about it. I've been concentrating on other things."

"They were like beings without a heart, a purpose, like a hive without a queen or a coven without its alpha. They drifted around like a group of people – a group of true zombies – in a dark room, not sure what to do with themselves, not sure what to talk about. They were not grounded to anything, or anchored. There was no real energy among them nor any warmth, nor even any motivation to get the night started. And they just floated apart. They left early. Most of them went home, feeling flat and lifeless and disappointed."

"How . . . ?" he started to ask.

"You are the glue that holds them together. You are their beating heart. You energise them, give them purpose for being. You are the queen bee in the hive you created. If you step away from that company, as now you must, they will not stay together, even if you replace yourself with the very best of CEOs. Rather, they will float apart like a hive without a queen or a coven of vampires without the alpha, as I said. Not that you are in any way vampiric. Quite the opposite actually, but such is your power. And, once they float away, never again will they love working as much as they did in your hive. They will miss it, your company. They will mourn its loss, and they will not know why."

He didn't respond. He couldn't respond. She had emerged from sleep, from her dreams, a subtly different consciousness. And he recognised her.

"Elohim," she said. "You are an Elohim high priest, a Guardian, and that is what you

are in your company. You are what you are, and you have never been otherwise, just as you told me. So why did you decide to create that company?"

He took a moment to answer her. "I had to do something while I awaited you."

"No," she said, shaking her head. "You had to **be** while you awaited me. Because, unlike me, you are not hidden, cloaked, disguised. You had to be. You created the company because it allowed you to be your Truest Nature." She inclined her head, unconsciously mimicking the action of her reflection in the beautifully-carved mirror.

"Did you change them, those with whom you work?"

Again, he took a moment to answer, not because he didn't know the answer, but because he was still adjusting to the power of her energy, and to the difference, the change in her.

"What on earth did you see in your dreams?" he asked her.

She blinked, surprised by the question. "I saw my reflection. And I spoke to her . . . to me."

"In the mirror?"

She nodded, once, just as her reflection had done.

"So you reassembled it, then?"

Again, she nodded once. "Did you change them?" she asked again.

"A little in some of them. Nothing significant. And very probably nothing permanent."

"Why only a little? And why not permanent?"

"Because of the context. And because of the suit I wear. And because I'm not here to change them. And because of the current state of human reality. Any change is unsustainable in this reality. There are too many powerful influences that will pull them back into the zombie state."

Although ambiguous, she understood perfectly, and she nodded her understanding.

"Now," he said, "tell me why you reassembled the mirror."

"Because I would call them to me, those who can and will reflect me and you. Mirrors all over the world, reflecting our Light."

"Ah, but I thought you were in hiding. If you are to call them to you, those who can

and will be mirrors of our Light, then you must come out of hiding.”

“I know.”

She bowed her head as she replied. He lifted his hand and curled a finger under her chin, forcing her to raise her face again.

“Are you sure you're ready for that?”

“I'm ready,” she said. “Doesn't mean I'm not afraid, but I am ready.”

“Oh yes,” he whispered as he leaned close to her. He touched his lips to hers, kissing her caressingly, softly, and he slid his fingers around, behind her neck.

Pulling back slightly, he whispered, “You are *definitely* ready.”

~

*The Way  
of  
Ascension\**

*\* The Way of Ascension is not a story. It is a collection of thoughts and insights.*

## *True Spirituality*

*Spirituality, and in particular the Way of the spiritual quest,  
Or the spiritual journey,  
Is not about what you do,  
Or what you will do.  
It is not about which god you worship,  
Or which set of strictures you adhere to.  
Spirituality is not a system of beliefs  
That you follow blindly.  
There is nothing blind about true spirituality.  
Quite the opposite, in fact,  
Because you cannot explore your own spirituality  
If you have no ability to think for yourself.  
Spirituality is not a set of rules and guidelines for existence itself.  
Rather, the spiritual quest is all about how you see yourself.  
Or, to be more precise,  
The spiritual quest is a transformation in the way you see yourself.  
'Tis the transformation of self-perspective,  
Self-knowledge,  
Self-experience.  
And, it is a transformation of what is your focus  
At any given moment in time.  
True spirituality is self-expansive.  
It is about going beyond what you think you know of yourself,  
Not remaining stagnant, confined and restricted,  
Which is exactly the mandate and intent  
Of the world's religions.  
True spirituality is freedom –  
The freedom of true Self-expression,  
The freedom to be exactly who you are,  
No more, and certainly not any less.*

## *The Way of Ascension*

For each one of us taking our first few steps on the Way in our own spiritual quest, let us not be fooled. 'Tis not some romantic or glamorous journey we are undertaking. The Way is arduous, even dangerous at times – the Way to freedom always is. The Way can be frightening, at times even terrifying, and the Way can be painful beyond imagining. Consequently, there are always those who do not survive it.

The Disney version of the fairy tale of Sleeping Beauty holds within it a wonderful metaphor that illustrates the dangers and hardships of the Way. In order to awaken Sleeping Beauty, lying asleep, awaiting Love's kiss, the kiss that will awaken her, in the confines of the stone castle, the prince first of all had to cut his way through the thorns and brambles that surrounded it. One false step and he could potentially become impaled on one of those thorns. And, he had to fight demons and dragons – the shadows within – at the same time. In order to be with innocence, he had to first become it himself.

The knights of Arthur's round table who quested for the Holy Grail and, thus, each in his own way, walked the Way within, will attest to both the dangers and the hardships of undertaking the journey. Their quests were fraught with confrontations with monsters, demons, witches, allures and seductions, distractions and enticements – all symbolic of the shadows within and their power over each of us, those shadows that tug and pull at our focus, and cause us to lose our Way.

They take many forms, those shadows. And, of course, they are different for every individual. And what is confronted on the Way within is, ironically, whatever is without, or whatever is external to us because each one of the shadows we confront on the Way will have external manifestation. This is how it works, and this is what the Grail Romances demonstrate so beautifully. What is within defines and dictates our reality. So, as we walk the Way, we are often confronted by the temptation to run in the opposite direction, our reaction to our own particular and often peculiar fears. Unfortunately, one cannot run from oneself. 'Tis simply not possible.

Worse, though, is the temptation to alter our reality so as to remove the threat of shadow rather than facing it and thereby dissolving it. And as soon as we succumb to this temptation, we take our eyes from what is truth and place them, instead, on what is illusion. Thus distracted by illusion, we will lose our Way, and we will have trouble finding it again.

Did any of Arthur's knights run from any one of their confrontations with the various demons and monsters they encountered? They did not. 'Tis not an honourable thing for a knight to run from battle. So they stayed and battled, and in battling, they faced, and in facing, they invariably defeated whatever it was they battled. Still, only three of them found the Grail according to the legends. Turning away, in the case of those who walk the Way, turning outwards, accomplishes nothing because the Way is, in truth, not walked outwardly, it is walked inwardly.

To walk the Way, you will need only a few things: all the courage and strength you possess, a dogged determination to succeed, fortitude and dedication, and a willingness to look deeply into the mirror, and, therefore, into the void within. All else can be left behind. Often, the Way itself provides things needed as they *are* needed. Answers to the right questions asked, for example, or sign posts pointing the direction to be taken next. It is worth remembering that as well as being walked within, the Way *comes* from within, so whatever is in front of us is, indeed, our next step, our next confrontation. So pay attention to what is within. Pay attention to your dreams, your visions, your intuition, and your insights. But most important of all, pay attention to your emotions because these *are* the sign posts that point to shadow and fear. Do not disregard them, and do not try to escape them or change them. Instead, find the courage to walk right through them.

The Way cannot and must not be undertaken lightly, and if your whole heart is not keen, then do not bother even beginning it. You would be better off never trying, never taking those first few steps, than half-heartedly attempting the journey of the Way. The spiritual journey is a serious thing indeed, and those who do not take it seriously could find themselves in unexpected and very real peril.

~

## *The Golden Age*

Before the Golden Age of human existence can begin, truths must be faced. Before each of us can reach that place of Heaven within – a place where fear no longer holds sway – a place of pure innocence – wounded truths must be acknowledged, recognised and conquered. Shadows must be dissolved. Karmic debt must be balanced. And our wounded psychologies, our wounded truths, must be resolved. There is no other way. This process cannot be circumvented or avoided. The shadows and fears that exist deep, deep within the psyche, underneath the water line of our conscious awareness, to use the iceberg analogy, dictate our perspectives, and they control our behaviours, our choices, our actions, our attitudes, and our beliefs, especially our beliefs about ourselves. They must be stripped away if we are to step into freedom.

There are many terms for what this Process is: 'transformation', 'transmutation' and 'deconstruction/reconstruction', just to name but three. All are aptly descriptive of the Process. All are accurate descriptors. 'Tis the tearing down of the old in order to make way for the new, as is symbolised by the Tower in the Tarot. The new is glorious, but the Process of taking away the old is painful, often beyond imagining. But the pain, although it often has physical expression, is always emotional and psychological, and the emotions generated by the taking away of the old can be downright dangerous. 'Tis worth remembering, in this situation, that the taking away of the old is a taking away of our hell to make way for a new Heaven.

Have you ever noticed that, often, when you vomit, you taste what you are throwing up? 'Tis the same with our fears and our wounded psychologies. They are extraordinarily painful when they go in, so to speak, and they are as painful when they are coming out. As with a splinter removed from flesh, if we persist, the pain does go away, and the splinter is finally removed so that the flesh may heal again. 'Tis no different with our psyche. What is removed and resolved *will* heal if only we have the courage to walk through the pain and to persist.

~

## *Gifts, Skills and Talents*

To blindly, and in ignorance, use one's gifts, skills and talents, divinely given, for ill or evil purpose incurs the direst of consequences. So how much more so, then, the use of one's gifts, skills and talents for ill or evil purpose in full knowledge – that which we call 'consciously'? Be warned. Ignorance is but a shabby protection. Protection it is, though, to a certain extent. So once ignorance is transformed into knowledge, the tendency to commit harmful, evil acts is gravely wounding indeed. To commit evil knowingly will tear your soul to shreds. And 'tis a difficult and painful process putting the shreds back together, though it can, will and must be done. Thus, the pain is unavoidable. Perhaps you should consider this when next you feel the tendency upon you. Think of the pain you are inevitably bringing upon yourself.

~

## *Money*

Money is but a small, insignificant thread in the fabric of our reality. Human reality does not reflect that simple truth, of course, given the human belief in the power of money, and the belief in the powerlessness of not having money, and given the human obsession with it. But money really has no more power than anything else in our reality. And, you know, you can have money as much by not spending it as you can by earning and accruing it. But, alas, we have addictions that must be fed, and so we spend, spend, spend. And for that, we need money. Humans believe they *are* nothing without money, and they believe they *have* nothing without money. This mindset has to disappear because the obsession with money is destructive at every level of human society.

They tell us our economies, at national and global levels, depend on the movement of money which intrinsically involves us spending what we earn. So what, then, if we stopped spending? What would happen to our economies if we decided we had everything we needed, and our economies, as a result, slowed down? Would we suffer? I think not. Rather, I think only those with a vested interest in the continued movement of money would suffer.

~

## *Happiness*

Happiness generated by what is around us, by who and what is in our lives, is dependent upon whatever it is that generates it. That sort of happiness comes from without and relies upon what is in our reality at any given moment in time, or what is not in our reality. Happiness that is dependent upon things external to us is like building a house on shifting sands. The foundations of that happiness could shift and move at any time, and, as a result, could cause it to come crashing down around us like a house of cards. True happiness, joy really, long lasting and genuine, can only come from being anchored within. True happiness, long lasting and genuine, comes from within, never without. Happiness that is anchored within cannot ever be taken away by anything external to us. So the pattern of our external environment can change and change again like the turning of a kaleidoscope, and our happiness will remain constant, intact, unaffected. It will endure.

And so what does it mean to be anchored within? How do you become anchored within? The answers to these questions are the same, of course. Know thyself, and allow thyself to be. Such a simple answer for such a difficult and complex task. But that is what the Way is all about, is it not? The Way of the spiritual quest is to know thyself and allow thyself to be.

Rediscover your Light, and then allow it to shine exactly as it is. Oh woe, then, to the darkness that exists both within and without.

~

## *The Way Within*

Dorothy, in the Wizard of Oz, had but to walk a very clear and demarcated road of yellow bricks to return to that place where she would be told how to get home. Admittedly, there were obstacles, tricks and lures that she had to face along the way, but still, the road was not hard to see, and it was very easy and obvious to see when she stepped off it. If only the Way within was that easy to follow. If only the Way was that

obviously demarcated within us. How much easier it would be to walk it. Unfortunately, there is no obvious road within us made of little yellow bricks, and nor is there a recipe or even a road map we may follow. The Way for each one of us is unique and it is entirely within us, so should anyone thoughtful enough decide to create a road map of his or her own journey, it would be as useless as dust to the rest of us.

The sign posts along the Way, for each one of us, are our own emotions. And, for each of us, our dreams and visions are entirely unique, too, so as to render our incentives to keep walking unique. There is one principle, though, that is the same in every situation, and it is this principle that helps to demarcate the Way within us. 'Tis the principle of "Blocked Doors and Open Windows".

When we step off the Way and try to go in a wrong direction, the Blocked Doors we encounter allow us to know we have wandered off the Way and are attempting to take ourselves where we are not meant to be going. As with the innings of a baseball game, three strikes is usually enough to know for certain you have hit a Blocked Door – three tries, three attempts, three failures, three knock backs. Open Windows, on the other hand, are like walking on smooth silk as windows of opportunity open around us, facilitating the Process and the direction we walk. Then, when we walk in the direction of Higher Will and Purpose, we create, powerfully, as we go, so that all falls into place as we take each step.

Speaking of which, when first Dorothy followed the path of yellow bricks laid out before her, I believe she skipped, or maybe she danced and sang. Those first steps were so easy for her. Of course, as she walked the road, some of her steps were not so easily taken. Whether we skip along the Way, and our steps are easy and enjoyable, or whether we step in fear and trepidation, and our steps are arduous and difficult, every step along the Way is absolutely and unequivocally vital.

Every step is vital. Every step is significant. Every step forms part of the overall whole and cannot be circumvented or avoided. Every step must be respected for what it is and undertaken accordingly and, if possible, consciously.

~

## *Human Reality*

Humans create their own realities, every moment of every hour of every day. So, to manipulate human reality, and the human experience with it, can you not see that you must manipulate humans themselves? And what better way to manipulate humans themselves than with modern technology?

Ensnare their focus, their attention. Make them want. Teach them to get what they want. Teach them they must have what everyone else has, and teach them they must be what everyone else is. Teach them to focus on nothing else, and you have them exactly where you want them, if it is your intention to control them.

Do you know why? Because with their focus otherwise occupied, you can commit the most appalling, heinous acts against them, and they will let you. And then, absorbed as they will be, and have become, by their hand-held devices, you keep them dumb. You establish and perpetuate their ignorance, so then, they will not and cannot catch you out.

Come on, all ye who slumber! In your sleeping, ignorant state, look at what is being done to you and to your planet. And you are allowing it. Wake up. Awaken, and you will see, there is a way to put a stop to this mass manipulation. Know. Know what is being done to you, and then decide you will no longer allow yourselves to be thus manipulated. Put your hands up and tell them you will not be told who you are, or how to be. You are who *you* are, and you will be who *you* are.

~

# *Transition*

## *The Priests of Darkness*

*They look for you,  
Relentlessly, desperately,  
Seeking, ever seeking.  
'Tis a distraction they like not,  
This constant seeking.  
They search this dimension for you,  
Ever vigilant, or hyper-vigilant, if the truth be told,  
Ever on the look out for even the smallest of signs –  
Signs that point to where you may be,  
To who you may be –  
Signs that will show them,  
As surely as day follows night,  
That you have morphed, become . . . remembered the Truth  
Of who you are.  
Oh how they fear you, Lady of Light.  
Oh how they fear you becoming who you are.  
Oh how they fear your Light.  
For those of us who see all,  
'Tis almost amusing to see them in such a state.  
Because they see you not, do they?  
You are hidden,  
Oh-so-effectively hidden.  
So they whisper to themselves, and smirk,  
“Perhaps she is not here, after all.  
Perhaps she is not as powerful as we thought.  
Perhaps she has not become.  
Perhaps she has failed to remember.”  
Now, beautiful Lady, now you will throw off your disguise.  
And so your Light will rip through this reality,  
Irrevocably altering it, forever.  
Now, they will know where you are.  
Now, they will know, you do remember.  
You do know who you are.  
Now, they will know . . . .*

# The Pool of Water

*She stood, silent and still, as was her wont whenever she was deep in thought. She was calm as she stood, which was surprising given her absolute reluctance to take the single step necessary to cast her eyes onto the surface of the water, there to see whatever she was to see. Why the reluctance when she had never before felt reluctance to look upon the water. Looking upon the water was second nature to her. She was used to it, and she was good at it. She was good at seeing many things, anything really, on the water's surface. Even so, although she knew she would have no trouble seeing whatever it was she was to see this night, she knew she would not like what she saw, hence her reluctance. And this was a new experience for her. She did not know why she would not like the visions in the pool this night, she just knew.*

*All around her was darkness. So must it be in order for the light from the starry firmament above to be reflected on the water with no interference from any ambient light around the bowl or in the temple around it. From the small distance she was from the large, ornate bowl on its stand of stone, she could see the water was perfectly still and smooth this night, like an overly-large mirror laid flat instead of hanging upon a wall. So, she thought, whatever there was to see in the water this night would be seen clearly. There was not even a hint of a ripple to disturb the water's surface.*

*The light from the starry firmament above was not just reflected on the water. It illuminated her gown, turning it a luminous, sparkling white. The light illuminated its long sleeves, its scooped neckline, and its long, flowing skirt, turning the whole gown into starry lace. In that way, she became one with the light from above and with the light from below as reflected on the water. She looked down at her gown. Beautiful, she thought. The gown absorbed the light from above so perfectly it was as if she herself had become a*

star.

*She breathed deeply and swallowed nervously. She was procrastinating, she knew. If she did not take that one step soon, the Elders would appear around her and question her as to the delay. Not that she minded the Elders appearing around her. In fact, she would welcome their appearance and their company. But she would not have them appear because she was reluctant and resistant. She would not have them see her resistance even though they would, no doubt, understand that resistance more so than she at this point.*

*The thought spurred her into action. Unclasping her hands, she stepped forward not once but twice so that she was taken right to the very edge of the large bowl with its inner pool of water. Resting her fingertips lightly on the edge of the bowl, she deliberately, albeit slowly, leaned forward to cast her eyes upon the water's surface with its reflected starry light.*

*And then, caught by the images she could see clearly, she watched. . . .*

~

# *A Dream*

*Standing a short distance from the forest, she looked at it, inclining her head and bringing her eyebrows together in silent question, ever-so-slightly bewildered. This was not the forest she was used to. The trees were similar, yes, tall and beautiful, as was the colourful carpet of red, brown and yellow leaves that covered the forest floor. But a stream ran out of the forest on her right, running on down the slope of the landscape behind her, winding its way through the green valley and the hills that shaped and curved the terrain. She didn't turn to watch the stream's progress because she couldn't. She couldn't move, even though she tried. So, without having to look, she just knew where the stream went, and she could hear it. Somehow, she wasn't sure how, the landscape around her was familiar even though the forest itself wasn't the one she knew.*

*She pulled her awareness from the landscape behind her and focussed, once again, on the forest in front of her. There was a very different energy emanating from this forest. The forest she was used to was welcoming, benign of presence, as if it just was, and was happy to be so. All souls were welcome to walk in it, although those who lived in the surrounding villages and in the castle paid it no heed whatsoever, except when they decided they wanted to go hunting. Then, the forest became their playground and they ravaged it, trampled it, violated it without a second thought.*

*This forest was very different. This forest was powerful, not benign at all in its presence. Even from where she was standing, she could feel the energy emanating from it, wrapping around her, although it did not frighten her. The energy emanating from this new forest held an implicit warning. Not all who attempted to set foot in this forest would be welcomed. And not all who thought themselves capable of navigating it would find themselves able to do so. The potential for getting lost in this forest held a distinct element of supreme danger. Should one attempt to navigate it and become lost, there would be no way back. There would be no way out except through death. Such a soul would be hopelessly, horribly lost, not to mention ill. And being lost and ill in this forest could render a person insane. She knew it. So why was she thinking of walking into it? She should not. She should stay out of it. She should stay away from it.*

*Even as the thought floated through her awareness, her feet disobeyed her, taking the dozen or so steps necessary to bring her right to the forest's very edge. She put a hand out, laying it on one*

of the trees that marked the forest's edge, its boundary. And as she did so, she realised she was wearing clothes she'd never seen before. Looking down, she studied the clothes, wondering at the strangeness of them. She wore an overly-large white linen shirt – a man's shirt – with buttons all the way down the front of it and the sleeves rolled up slightly, over the edge of the sleeve of the jacket she wore. And, also like a man, she wore pants. The pants were blue, made of a thicker material than the linen material of the shirt, and there was colourful embroidery on both legs. On her feet, she wore a pair of sturdy, brown leather boots, and over the shirt, for warmth, she wore a black leather jacket that had seen better days. On her left wrist, she wore a silver watch, and on her right wrist, she wore a heavy silver bangle. On one of her fingers, she wore a beautiful silver and pearl shell ring.

Imagine the villagers seeing her like this, she thought, as she studied the ensemble of clothes and jewellery. She was dressed like a man . . . sort of. The villagers would be horrified. There would be no end of trouble were they to see her. A woman wearing pants and a leather jacket! Who ever heard of such a thing.

Suddenly, she felt the forest pulling at her awareness, urging her forward, demanding her focus and attention. And the clothes she wore were the reason. The clothes were wrong for her. They did not suit her nor did they sit well with her. They were preventing her from knowing the truth about who she was because they were distorting her own perception of herself, dangerously so. The forest was telling her all this, filling her mind with thoughts and realisations, and it told her it wanted to help her. So, trusting it completely, and hesitating no longer, she stepped into it, letting her hand slide off the bark of the tree she had touched. Her steps were not tentative or hesitant. Rather, they were sure and certain. She knew, now, she was supposed to be here. She had come here for this reason. So she walked straight into the forest's embrace.

Deeper she walked, always focussing ahead because she was unable to turn her head at all. She felt the forest watching her, encouraging her, drawing her on, guiding her. And then, as she continued to walk, sure-footed and confident, the clothes she wore began to disappear. The jacket was the first to go. It didn't just suddenly vanish. Rather, slowly, it evaporated into dust and was absorbed by the forest, taken by the forest. The boots went next so that, for a brief moment, she walked in thick socks, and then, when they, too, went, she walked barefoot. The shirt and the pants evaporated the same way, turning into fine dust thence to be absorbed by the forest, and then followed the strange underwear she wore underneath the shirt and pants. Still she walked,

completely naked now. She felt neither shame nor cold. She felt not the slightest need to cover herself. Naked she was, and that's just how she was. She was perfectly accepting of the fact probably because she knew the forest did not mind her nakedness at all.

But she didn't stay naked for long. Ribbons of light came towards her from all directions of the forest – the forest's gift – whirling around her at first until they began to take form, weaving together to form slippers for her feet, and clothing her body in a beautiful gown of sparkling white lacy light. The neckline of the gown sat on the edge of her shoulders and scooped low, revealing her pale, luminous skin. The sleeves of the gown were long and fitted, reaching almost to her fingers, and its skirt was long and flowing, the material disturbing the carpet of leaves as it trailed in her wake. The bodice was fitted, revealing the natural curves of her body, and as she moved, the entire gown sparkled with light. It was the most beautiful gown she'd ever seen let alone worn. She'd never worn anything as beautiful as the gown of light. And the ribbons of light took her hair, weaving it into an elaborate collection of curls atop her head.

Curious, she looked down to see what had become of the silver jewellery. The watch was gone, not just covered by the sleeves of the gown, but gone completely, as was the bangle. But the ring remained. She was glad because she liked it, but she wondered why the forest had allowed her to keep it.

*“Because it is beautiful, my Lady,” the forest whispered to her clearly, “and it becomes you.”* She smiled, her only response. And then the forest spoke to her again.

*“Welcome home, Lady of Light. This is who you are . . . .”*

She jerked awake and sat up in her bed, breathing deeply and quickly, the darkness of her bedroom all around her. She held a hand to her chest in a futile attempt to calm her pounding heart, and then she looked down at herself, unable to see anything in the darkness, and so, feeling, instead, the soft material of her nightgown, just to make sure. The gown of light had been so vivid, so real, and oh-so beautiful. She could feel it, as if she was still clothed in it. And she wanted it to be real. She wanted to be wearing it still. She wanted to be in the forest.

“Strange dream,” she whispered to the room at large as she lay back down in her bed and turned over, curling into herself. Strange, she thought, but oh-so pleasurable.

~

## *Friends, Companions, Tutors and Confidants*

She hummed a tune as she walked, taking her time, an empty basket swinging in one hand in time with the tune she hummed, her skirts held clear of the ground with her other hand. Esme was making meat and mushroom pies for the evening meal, a dozen or so of them, in fact, enough to feed the entire castle, and, as was always the case whenever mushrooms were required for any of Esme's meals, she whose job it was had been sought, searched out, presented with the empty basket, and asked the question that had never, in all the years she had been collecting mushrooms, required a verbal response.

“Can you do me a favour, love?”

In truth, it was impossible to say who was doing who a favour, something they were both very well aware of, although neither spoke of it. After all, the forest was her favourite place, so any excuse to pay it a visit was welcomed on her part.

Being the daughter of the castle's steward, she had no defined role, or responsibility, in the castle. And her father, although a kindly soul, paid her very little attention courtesy of being overly busy with the day to day running of the castle. So had it been from the day she came into the world, and, as such, despite the passing of many years, he was as yet to realise she had no definite role. As she'd grown older, if not a little wiser, she had realised that her father's preoccupation with the smooth running of the castle, his overly full days, was as much an escape and a distraction as it was actually running the castle, although it was acknowledged by all, including the duke himself, that her father did an excellent job in that regard. Her father had become quite indispensable to the duke.

So, why did he find it necessary to distract himself to the point of near exhaustion? Well, on the day she was born, he had lost the very great love of his life. Her mother had used up the very last reserves of strength and energy in her desperate bid to have her daughter named for the woman who was the central character in her favourite book. When her father had promised he would name their daughter as desired, her mother had laid back against the pillows and breathed her last. And now, over two decades later, he

was still grieving. He still mourned his love, poor soul. This she knew, and so, she could forgive him anything, anything at all, even his lack of attention. She loved him as best she could, as much as he would let her, but she knew she was hopelessly unable to fill the hole in his heart left there by her mother, especially as she reminded him of her so.

But the consequence of her father's preoccupation with the smooth running of the castle had, she knew, also worked completely in her favour, for she had, for all intents and purposes, raised herself, with perhaps a little help from some of the kindly souls who inhabited the castle, Esme being one of them. Almost from the moment she could walk, she had known or sensed that she was free to do as she pleased. And so she had.

When still a girl, the castle had been the duke's primary place of residence. In those days, the duke's own sons, the younger two especially, had been her playmates and her friends. But the summons had come over ten years ago, and the duke, his duchess and their sons had relocated to the king's capital. She had not now seen the ducal family in all that time. They had never so much as returned to the castle even for the briefest of visits, although she knew her father regularly corresponded with the duke.

The consequence of the ducal family's absence was, she knew, entirely to her benefit, not just because it kept her father far too busy to pay her even the smallest of attentions, allowing her the freedom to fill her days as she chose, but because the boys' tutor had not accompanied the family to the capital. It had taken her not even a full day after their departure to realise her good fortune and seek him out. He had been more than happy to accommodate her request and so, from that day to this, he had been *her* tutor, and he was another of those kindly souls who had, in no small way, made his own contribution to her rather unusual upbringing.

Samuel, her tutor, kept her busy. Well, in truth, he kept them both busy. It had taken him barely no time at all to realise her extraordinary ability to absorb and assimilate whatever he chose to teach her. So, over the years, she had proved herself somewhat of a challenge to him, a very pleasurable one, as she forced him to stay at least one step ahead of her. Together, they had learnt many things, covering a vast range of different topics. Obviously their lessons had, by now, for her, moved well beyond the realm of learning to read and write.

Such was the fabric of her day to day existence that she knew the castle gave her much, much more than she gave it. She had very few responsibilities – collecting the eggs every morning, helping Esme and the kitchen staff in the kitchen before and after breakfast, and before and after the evening meal, keeping her own room clean so the girls did not have to do it for her, and making visits to the forest to collect mushrooms and truffles whenever Esme's meals required such fare. Her visits to the forest were a welcome respite from Samuel's lessons which could tend to get a little intense at times. At four and twenty, they both knew she had outgrown her lessons, but they both pretended not to know. In truth, she would not know what to do with her days if they weren't spent in the company of Samuel and the library's vast collection of books. She had as much desire to put an end to the lessons as did he. That is to say, none at all.

But a respite from lessons was not the only reason she loved coming to the forest. There was an atmosphere in the forest she had not encountered anywhere else – a tranquillity and peace that was deeply restorative, soothing to one's own very soul. She felt calmed by the forest's atmosphere, and she often came to visit it just to be still and silent, to sit cross-legged on the leaves that covered the forest floor, and to absorb the peace and tranquillity of the atmosphere, allowing it to infuse her, to seep into her very bones.

As she approached the forest now, and without conscious volition, she stopped humming, entering the forest silently, and the basket was no longer swinging in her hand. She quietened her steps and watched where she walked, careful not to step on anything that called the forest home, whether flora or fauna. Ancient and beautiful, the forest demanded respect and homage, and rightly so. She was perfectly well aware she accorded the forest far more respect and homage than she ever did the castle's stone chapel, despite the chaplain's constant admonishments. He despaired of her, or so he told her often enough. She wondered why he persisted with her. She'd never asked for his attentions, nor did she welcome them, truth be told. But although she found his church services intolerably boring – she would much rather have come to sit in the forest – she did not dare miss them. Only once had she done so, and the consequences were not worth repeating. Her absence was noticed, and noted, and it caused a ripple of outrage that

some in the castle were more a part of than others. Then, her father had paid her attention. Then, he had definitely paid her attention . . .

To her, the forest was truly, genuinely spiritual whereas the chapel was simply a motley collection of different materials – stone, mortar, plaster, wood, thatch – combined together to form a relatively plain building. Not so the forest. There was nothing plain about the forest. The forest was full of vibrant colour, and one could always inhale interesting and different scents. The air in the forest was clear and fresh, and the wind often stirred the leaves high up in the trees, as if the trees were whispering their secrets. And, of course, the birds filled the forest with their birdsong, and the birdsong, in turn, filled the forest with joy. Beautiful.

She walked deeper, ever deeper into the forest, making her way to that place where she knew the mushrooms grew. When she reached it, she knelt, placing the basket beside her, and then she began to collect the mushrooms and truffles, using a little knife to cut them free, placing them gently in the bottom of the basket. There was such a variety here.

And so it was to find her thus that he first came upon her.

Her attentions occupied as they were, she didn't, at first, know he was there, watching her. Thinking she was, and would be, alone, she did not sense his presence at all, and so she worked, oblivious and blissfully ignorant of the fact that she had company. Whether deliberately done or not, he disturbed the leaves on the forest floor, and she heard the sound of the leaves being disturbed behind her – a disturbance that could not be accounted for by the wind because there was no wind. The forest was perfectly still around her. In the instant she heard the leaves move, she felt his presence behind her like a tangible thing, almost as if he was touching her or breathing on the skin of her neck. Startled, she turned quickly to look behind her and froze, although not in fright, more in surprise. And then she moved, slowly so as not to alarm him, putting down her little knife and turning to face him, still on her knees.

“Oh my,” she said softly, “but you are beautiful. So beautiful . . .”

And indeed he was. His fur was silver-grey, darker grey on his shoulders and back, and his eyes were blue-grey. He was large, larger than she thought was normal for a wolf, not that she'd seen many wolves. And he was looking at her, steadily, clearly. When she

spoke to him, he seemed to respond by sitting and then squatting on his haunches, making himself comfortable as if he intended to stay for a while.

She smiled, amused at how perfectly comfortable he seemed to be in her presence, as if, for him, it was a normal, everyday occurrence meeting her there.

“Where did you come from?” she asked him, not really expecting an answer, which was just as well because he didn't give her one. It was a valid question, though. Wolves were not at all a common sight, either in the forest or around it, an understatement if ever there was one. In truth, they were not really known in these parts at all, if, indeed, they were known at all in this land. She inclined her head, trying to think if wolves were known in any other part of the land. But then, her thoughts led her to a different realisation. How did *she* know about them if they were not known in her land? Frowning, she asked him again, “Where *did* you come from?”

He neither moved nor changed his position at all. He just continued to sit there with her as if he absolutely belonged there. He watched her, and in return, she looked at him, neither of them moving. And as the silence around them penetrated her consciousness, filling her mind with a similar silence, there was a name there, a single name echoing in her mind as if whispered on a breeze and faintly heard like an echo.

“Jebediah,” she said, sounding slightly puzzled. “Is that your name? Jebediah. So, how do I know that? Or,” she whispered, narrowing her eyes at him suspiciously, “are you telling me?”

Again, he neither moved nor altered his position in any way to indicate he'd heard her. He merely looked at her.

“Can I touch you?” she asked him.

Taking his complete lack of response as permission, she crept forward on hands and knees until she was close enough to him to reach out and touch him. And so she did. She ran her hands down the fur of his neck and back, and he allowed it. In fact, when she touched him, he moved and responded not at all, as if it was perfectly natural for a woman to pat him and pet him the way she was. Eventually, after she had run her hand over his neck and back many times, burying her fingers deeply in his soft fur, she remembered why she was there, in the forest. Withdrawing her hands, she moved,

standing to retrieve her knife and basket. When she looked inside her basket and registered the hopelessly inadequate pile of mushrooms within it, her heart sank.

“Oh but this is not enough,” she half said, half sighed out loud. “Not enough by half.”

Immediately, he who had not moved or responded to anything she'd said up to that point, sprang to his feet, pulling her attention away from the inadequate fare in her basket. To her very great disappointment, he turned and trotted away from her. But then he stopped, turned back and looked at her, as if he was waiting. She laughed. She knew. She could see it in his whole demeanour. He was telling her to follow him.

So follow him she did, deeper into the forest, wondering where he was taking her, and wondering, too, if she would be able to find her way out again. But then they came to a place where the trees were slightly thinned, not as densely packed, and on the trees and in the ground between them were more mushrooms than she'd ever seen in one place.

“Oh my,” she said, laughing as she turned a full circle, looking at all the mushrooms. It was as if she had stumbled into a whole mushroom community.

He made himself comfortable again, obviously prepared to be there for a while, and he watched her while she worked. Using her little knife to cut free the mushrooms, she did not speak to him. Instead, she concentrated on what she was doing. So, once again, the silence all around them penetrated and filled her mind. And then, again, there was a thought there, filling her mind like an echo, as had his name. Only this time, the thought was a question.

“How do you see yourself?”

The question made her pause, surprising her by how difficult it was to answer. How *did* she see herself? Sitting back on her feet, her legs folded under her, she frowned in concentration, the mushrooms and her knife temporarily forgotten. As she contemplated her answer, she realised the only way she could respond was by seeing herself through the eyes of those around her. To her father she was a reminder of lost love, so he barely saw her at all. It was too painful for him to properly look at her. To Esme she was still the same wee, bonnie lass who had facilitated both the expression and the experience of motherhood, Esme having no children of her own. Esme was the only mother she had known. To the serving girls she was an enigma, someone who maybe should have been

one of them but wasn't. Instead, she was set apart, untouchable, and so they avoided her. To the chaplain she was a mission taken on – a mission to drive out what he saw as the impurities of a pagan tendency thence to be replaced by the purity of the good Christian girl. Mission accomplished. And to Samuel she was, well, a student no longer, really. She was more companion and friend. But to each one of these people she was different, and the only one who really knew her properly was Samuel.

Still, although enlightening, those realisations did not actually answer the question. She turned her head to look at the wolf. He was watching her, as he had since first he'd come across her.

“Did you happen across me by chance?” she asked him. “Or did you seek me out? Or did you know I would be here and so came to meet me? But then, if you knew I was here, how did you know?”

Not expecting him to reply, and thinking her own questions a little fanciful anyway, she sighed and looked down at the carpet of leaves between them.

“I do not know how I see myself. I'll have to think about it a bit more. To answer the question, I'll have to go beyond how I am seen through other people's eyes, beyond the influence of that, I mean. But,” she said, looking at him again, “I do know I like me best when I see me through Samuel's eyes.”

“Why?”

The word was there, in the silence of her mind, but when she looked at him to see if the question, the word, had come from him, there was no change in him, nothing to indicate she was having a conversation with him. She knew she was, though, and that's why she had spoken directly to him when replying to the question.

“Ah, because . . .” she paused to consider her answer to his next question. “Because, with Samuel, there are no rules for being. I am not a woman who must hold her tongue and know her place. I am not a daughter who must attend church and behave herself so as not to draw attention to herself. I am not a servant to be ordered around. I do not have to behave according to a set of rules or etiquettes as dictated by society in general, and by the castle and villages more specifically. I am like him, and I am his equal – an open-minded, intelligent, seeking individual.”

"Is that all you are?"

She frowned, not because she was annoyed or irritated, but because the question, again, was challenging.

"No," she replied, shaking her head. "I am . . ." Her frown deepened. She was what? "I am . . . ."

Again, she faltered. She was going to say she was good and kind and caring, but before she could give voice to those specific responses, another filled her mind. Dutiful. She looked away from the wolf as realisation poured through her. She was for her father exactly what he wanted her to be – invisible. And for Esme, too, she was the child, albeit a grown one, that Esme had never had for herself. For the chaplain, she was largely silent and demure, or perhaps contrite would be a better descriptor, never daring to reveal to him her deepest thoughts and beliefs. As for those others who served in the castle in one capacity or another – the maids and serving girls, the kitchen hands, the stable lads, the gardeners, the falconers, the bee keepers, the duke's clerk and bookkeeper, the housekeeper, Mrs Brown – she was polite, nice, friendly, but very aloof. None of them knew her.

"I am hidden," she said, answering his question even as the realisation impacted her. "No wonder I cannot answer your question, then. And that is why I like myself best when seen through Samuel's eyes. I can be myself with him. I don't have to hide."

She looked down and noticed, as she did so, that the mushrooms she had collected would very adequately fill more than a dozen large pies. The mushrooms were piled into the basket like a little mountain. Wiping her hands on the apron she wore over her skirts, she stood, brushed herself off, and turned to face the wolf.

"I thank you, Jebediah. This is indeed a bountiful harvest. We will eat like kings this night. Esme will be well pleased. Now," she said, looking around her uncertainly, "how do I get out of here?"

In response to her question, he sprang to his feet once again and trotted back in the direction from which they had come, every now and then pausing to stop and turn his head, making sure she was still following him, which, of course, she was. She was very quiet as she followed him, though, and, for once, she did not pay attention to the scenery

through which she walked. His questions had generated an avalanche of thought and realisation, and these filled her mind as she followed him back through the forest.

At the edge of the forest, he stopped, and she knew he would not come any further.

"Will I see you again?" she asked him, standing over him, looking down at him, reluctant to leave him.

He didn't reply, even in the depths of her mind, so, her reluctance causing her steps to drag, she began to walk away from him. But she was hardly out of the forest when she stopped and turned back to face him.

"I will think about your question. I will contemplate it. I promise."

As if he was satisfied with that, he turned and trotted away from her. She stood and watched him until he was swallowed by the trees in the forest and she could see him no more. And as she watched him disappear, her heart pounded with fear. She was afraid she would not see him again.

~

She knocked on the rickety old door and waited.

After a brief moment, a gruff voice responded from inside the cottage. "Come."

Undeterred by the obvious lack of welcome in the tone of the voice, she lifted the latch, pushed open the door, and walked in. She was immediately assailed by the myriad of different scents and smells that filled the cottage to overflowing, but, being used to the smells in this one, small room, she ignored them and moved to put her basket on the wooden table in front of the hearth. In truth, she loved the scents and smells in the cottage, although she knew they contributed to the castle's absolute fear and terror of the cottage's sole occupant.

"What brings ye?" asked the same gruff voice.

The owner of the voice was, at present, bent over a small cauldron hanging over the flames of the hearth's fire, stirring its bubbling contents. She neither bothered to look at her guest nor to cease the stirring motion of the spoon in the pot.

"The usual," she who had intruded replied amiably, again completely unperturbed by the gruff manor of her hostess. "Mmmm, smells good. What is it?"

"Stew," was the brief reply.

She smiled despite the rudeness of her hostess, and made herself comfortable on the wooden bench beside the table, prepared to wait, not at all in any great hurry to be gone.

The forest from which she had just come was wrapped around two sides of the castle, although it did not, for reasons of its own, touch the castle nor even come close to it. To get to the forest either behind or beside the castle, one was forced to walk a fair distance, although not so far a distance as to exhaust the walker. Behind the castle, in front of the forest, there existed a small cluster of cottages, the cluster being far too small to be called a village. The cluster of cottages housed the families of the castle's staff and some of the staff themselves. Samuel, her tutor, had his own cottage here, at the back of the cluster. And so, too, at the very back of the cluster was this cottage, the cottage of she who was, at present, bent over the cauldron that contained the stew. Her cottage was so far back it was almost, but not quite, touching the forest.

The cottage's occupant was a healer, but the castle's staff and the local villagers in the villages surrounding the castle – villages wholly dependent on the castle for their livelihood – only ever referred to her as 'the witch'. The people in the local community were resentful of the witch and her presence in the cluster of cottages, but they sullenly and grudgingly acknowledged they needed her – perhaps the real source of their resentment. In truth, the witch, whose real name was Drusille, was as much a deterrent for illness and injury as she was good at healing them courtesy of the terror with which she was regarded by those she was supposed to be healing. Very often, the castle's occupants and the villagers in the castle's surrounding villages kept their injuries or illnesses a secret in the hope of having them heal naturally, without help, thereby negating the necessity for a visit to Drusille's cottage.

Although her gruff and uninviting manor was, indeed, a deterrent, the real source of their terror of her, and, no doubt, their resentment also, stemmed from her uncanny ability to see what she was not supposed to see. Her eyes penetrated deeply, and whenever she tended an illness or injury, she told of what she saw, brusquely, brooking no argument, and certainly offering no sympathy whatsoever. None, regardless of status, rank or vocation, could hide from her all-seeing, all-knowing eyes, as much as they might wish to. It was far, far easier just to avoid her.

As if her manor and her uncanny ability to see what was better left unseen were not bad enough, her physical appearance did nothing to encourage the sort of interactions or inter-relationships people normally engaged in, and nor did her appearance do anything to dispel the rumours of witchcraft. You see, she did, indeed, look like an archetypal witch. She always wore black, shapeless skirts and bodices, with a thick, black shawl wrapped around her shoulders. And a black lace cap always sat atop her bound but untidy, stringy, white-grey hair. She was hunched over, bent like a large stalk of wheat in a strong wind, and her hands, when she wasn't using them, were gnarled and curled in on themselves, held against her body. Her face and hands were a mass of lines and wrinkles, and when she tended an injury, she tended to squint at her patient unattractively. Her voice wobbled and cracked with age, and, although her teeth were not black with rot – no, no, that would be a cliché – neither were they white and pristine, and pretty, for that matter. Rather, they were yellow and grey with age, but they were, too, rarely glimpsed since she rarely, if ever, smiled.

So how was it that she who was now guest did not live in fear and terror of the witch as did those others of the surrounding villages and the castle? Well, it might interest you to know that neither was Samuel afraid of her – he who lived closer to her than anyone else. She knew there was more to Drusille than met the eye, for while the witch looked like an archetypal black witch, Drusille's cottage was neat, light, airy, clean and homely, full of the warmth of welcome if one really took the time to notice it without the prejudice of long-held judgements, fears and resentments. The scents that filled the cottage were also pleasing to the nose and inviting, but, again, only if one's perception, not to mention one's sense of smell, were free of prejudice. Drusille's curled, gnarled hands were remarkably dexterous given their misshapen appearance. Those hands could thread a suture needle with gut, tend and sew a wound, open the various lids of her array of bottles and jars, and pour and measure the powders and liquids within them with remarkable steadiness and agility. And, when she wasn't squinting, and when one took the time to really notice, her eyes, within their wrinkles, were stunningly blue, like the sky on a truly cloudless day.

All of these anomalies she, Drusille's guest, had taken note of, although she spoke of

them not at all to anyone else, not even to Samuel. These anomalies hinted at the very strong possibility that all was not what it seemed to be where the witch was concerned. But Drusille was as she was for reasons of her own. It was not her place, she who was Drusille's guest, to expose the anomalies, and, in the process, the witch herself.

After a long moment of remaining bent over her bubbling cauldron, ignoring the fact that she had a guest, during which time that very same guest waited patiently, Drusille pulled the spoon from the bubbling liquid, tapped it loudly on the lip of the cauldron, and placed it on the mantle above the fire. Then, she turned to examine the contents of the basket, although she did not straighten as she turned.

"Well then," she said as she turned, "let's see what ye've got."

She examined the contents of the basket, using her gnarled hands to sift through the pile within. "A bumper harvest ye've got y'self today," she observed as she worked.

Her guest nodded. "I found a new place in the forest where they are growing in abundance," she informed her hostess. "Well, actually," she added truthfully, "I cannot take credit for finding it. A wolf led me to them."

She said it matter of factly, almost nonchalantly, but she watched Drusille's reaction closely, unconsciously holding her breath in the silence that followed. Instinctively, she knew she must not and could not speak of what had happened today with anyone else. The villagers were very superstitious, highly suspicious of anything out of the ordinary, or of anything they considered unusual, and speaking to wolves was highly unusual. But Drusille, of course, was different. Drusille herself was out of the ordinary. And Drusille was possessed of a knowledge and a sight that far transcended the ordinary. In truth, she who was Drusille's guest wasn't sure what had truly happened today, in the forest, and she was silently hoping Drusille could and would shed some light on it.

But, in the silence that permeated the cottage, Drusille showed no reaction whatsoever. In fact, she who was guest was unsure as to whether or not Drusille had even heard her.

Still bent over the basket, Drusille grunted as she fingered the mushrooms, checking them to ensure none would cause a bellyache or worse if baked into pies and consumed. This was a time-honoured ritual between the two of them. Drusille always checked the mushrooms collected, just to make sure. She who had collected the mushrooms was about

to repeat herself and retell Drusille about the wolf, for she could not leave without some insight into what had occurred this day, but Drusille saved her the trouble.

“A wolf ye say. We dun see a lot of wolves 'round these parts. Are ye sure it was a wolf?”

“I'm sure.”

Drusille raised her eyes, squinting at her guest over the table between them. “Ye've seen wolves before then, 'ave ye?”

That same guest frowned. This was the very thing she had asked herself in the forest when first she'd laid eyes on the wolf. How did she know he was a wolf if she'd never seen one before? Had she heard about them? Possibly, although she couldn't recall hearing about them either. “No,” she answered Drusille's question. “I haven't seen one before.”

“How'd ye know it was a wolf then?”

“I don't know. I just know. He wasn't a dog. Of that I'm certain.”

Drusille grunted, whether in acceptance or ridicule of the explanation could not be discerned. “And what did this wolf look like?”

For she who had met the wolf the question brought the wolf powerfully and clearly to mind. She could see him in her mind's eye as if she was still with him. “He was large,” she replied. “And he was beautiful, so beautiful. Is it possible for a wolf to be beautiful?”

“O' course,” Drusille grunted. “Any animal can be beautiful in the right context.”

This was another of those curious anomalies about this woman. She was full of these gems of wisdom and insight, but so rarely did they surface that hardly anyone was given the opportunity to observe this particular anomaly. Before continuing with her response to the question, she who had met the wolf hesitated while she noted both the anomaly and the wisdom of the statement.

“He was silvery grey,” she said after a brief pause, “with patches on his fur of darker grey, and he had blue-grey eyes that looked at me clearly, steadily. He was perfectly at ease in my company, as if he knew me, and,” she hesitated as the realisation washed through her, “so was I in his. It did not occur to me to be frightened of him. He told me his name, and when I told him I had not collected enough mushrooms, he took me to a

place in the forest where they grow in abundance, as I said."

Drusille hurrumphed in disbelief. "Listen to y'self, girl," she said gruffly. "Ye're sayin' ye talked to a wolf and he talked back. Seems to me ye've let yer imagination run away from ye." She tapped a crooked finger against her head. "The silence of the forest has finally gotten to ye, sent ye mad."

Looking at the old woman, she who had met the wolf swallowed her disappointment. Obviously she'd been wrong to think Drusille might be an ally where the wolf was concerned – someone in whom she could confide – someone with whom she could talk freely about him. Obviously, he was an experience she would just have to keep to herself, and work out for herself, for that matter. She lowered her eyes to the table in front of her, partly to hide her disappointment and partly withdrawing, closing off, shutting herself in.

"He spoke to me here," she told the old woman, the tone of her voice clipped and brittle. And, just as the old woman had done, she raised a finger and tapped her temple.

The old woman scrutinised her in silence over the table. "He told ye more 'n his name, then?"

She who had met the wolf looked up quickly. The tone of the old woman's voice had changed, softened. In fact, she'd not ever heard the old woman talk so softly, without the usual gruffness. "You believe me then?"

"Aye, child. I believe ye. What else did he tell ye, this wolf o' yers?"

"He asked me a question, actually."

"What question?"

"He asked me how I see myself?"

The silence that followed held a distinct element of shock. Both the shock and the silence filled the small cottage. The old woman had frozen, become as still as a statue, as she stared at her guest across the table, even forgetting to squint. So, her blues eyes bored into those of her guest. "'N wha'd ye say, girl, in response to the wolf's question?"

"I said I didn't know, that I would have to think about it a bit more." She looked down at the table again, breaking eye contact. "In truth, it wasn't an easy question to answer, and I realised the only way I could answer it was to see myself through the eyes of others."

Again, there was a profound silence, and then Drusille grunted, nodded briefly, and reached her hand across the table, over the basket of mushrooms. "Give me your hand, girl."

When she who was the guest reached her own hand over the table, Drusille grabbed it and, with surprising strength, turned it over to examine the palm, running her crooked fingers over the lines that decorated the palm's surface.

After a moment of intense scrutiny, she dropped the hand and turned back to her cauldron, reaching up to the mantel for her spoon.

"Close the door on yer way out."

She who was guest sighed, frustrated, and rose from the bench. "Aren't you going to take some mushrooms?" she asked as she stood. "They would add flavour to your stew."

Without looking at her guest, Drusille waved a hand in the air dismissively. "Bah!" she said rudely. "I've enough vegetables in my stew. Dun need to add no more."

Knowing she had been dismissed and would not, now, get any more information or insights out of the old woman, she who was guest picked up her basket and turned to go. But as she opened the door and before she had a chance to walk through it, Drusille threw one last comment her way, stopping her in her tracks.

"Things are gonna change for ye, girl, and rapidly, too. Ye'd best prepare y'self. Consider y'self warned. Change is upon ye."

She who had collected the mushrooms looked over at the witch, but Drusille didn't bother removing her eyes from the bubbling contents of her cauldron. As she turned, again, to leave, Drusille stopped her once more, and this time, she did take her eyes from the bubbling contents of the cauldron.

"Best not tell anyone else about the wolf, girl. Them others won't be as . . . accepting as I am."

She who had been guest nodded, and this time, the old woman allowed her to leave. She shut the door quietly behind her.

In the aftermath of her departure, Drusille removed the spoon from the bubbling contents of the cauldron and stood beside it, staring at it but not seeing it. She breathed deeply, straightening, growing tall as she did so, and she closed her eyes and placed a

hand flat against her chest. And, when, finally, she opened her eyes again, they shone with vibrant colour and with an inner light, and it was not from the reflection of the flames of the fire that they did so.

“At last,” she said, her voice clear and bell-like, no longer wobbling and cracking with age, her eyes shining with the intensity of anticipation. “At last,” she said again. “At long, long last. He comes. He comes. How I have awaited this day. How I have waited . . . .”

~

## *The Dream Expanded*

*As she had the night before, she stood, wearing the same strange clothes, at the edge of the forest she was not familiar with. And then, as she had the night before, she walked into the forest, and the forest took the strange clothes from her and replaced them with the beautiful gown and slippers of light. The whole experience was even more pleasurable than it had been the previous night simply because she knew what to expect, and she knew what would happen. Knowing always alleviates fear, so there was not even the slightest element of fear or trepidation this time, nor did she need to wonder what was happening.*

*And this time, she did not awaken when the forest whispered its welcome.*

*“Welcome home, Lady of Light. This is who you are. This is where you belong. Welcome home. You have been greatly missed.”*

*Strange, she thought, but this forest really did feel like home even though it was not as familiar to her as that other forest – the forest that surrounded two sides of the duke's castle. Liking the feeling . . . nay, **savouring** the feeling, she kept walking, taking note of the changes in the forest as she did so. The forest's unique energy was even more powerful here, in its depths, and the tall trees of the forest grew thicker as she walked, their massive branches covering the forest in such a thick canopy of leaves the sunlight barely penetrated it. Strangely, though, despite the fact of the sunlight struggling to penetrate the leaves, the forest was neither dark nor dim. So thick were the trunks of the trees in this part of the forest that she would not have been able to reach around them if she tried to hug them. If she wrapped her arms around them, her hands would not touch. In fact, if she did try to hug them, her arms, she knew, would barely wrap around half these trees, so thick were their trunks.*

*And then, she slowed her steps, and her steps, for the first time, became ever-so-slightly hesitant. Glimpsed through these new thicker trees was evidence of habitation. Someone lived here. People lived here, or had lived here. Staircases spiralled up and around the trees, from the ground up into the heart of the branches, and, above, walkways made of strong wood connected the trees to the others around them. The walkways were set at different levels, so the forest could be traversed without setting foot on the ground, and one could move from one tree to others at different levels.*

*And then she saw that the walkways were connecting more than just the trees. There were dwellings built into the trees, dwellings made of the same sturdy wood and stone and glass. She stopped walking, hiding among the tall, thick trees so as not to be seen, looking up. And then she could see people moving across the walkways, and when she looked again, she could see them walking around on the ground, between the trees. The people she could see were walking so gracefully it was as if they were gliding. They were tall and slender and beautiful, wearing long, flowing, colourful gowns and cloaks and tunics, their hair long and mostly unbound.*

*Hiding among the trees, making sure she was shielded by them, she watched the tall people. Only one other thing did she take note of. There seemed to be no children among them. They were all adults.*

*"Strange people," she whispered, forgetting that the forest was her companion and would hear her, and hear her it did. It responded to her whispered observation.*

*"These are your people, my Lady . . ."*

Again, as she had the night before, she awoke with a jerk, coming out of the dream so quickly she had trouble adjusting. What was real? The forest and its strange people or the surrounds of her bedroom, easily perceived tonight courtesy of the embers still burning in the grate of the small fireplace? As she had the night before, she wished she hadn't come out of the dream, but tonight, the feeling was intensified, far stronger. She turned over in her bed, hugging her pillow for comfort. Tonight, she felt something else, too – grief, a sense of loss – and it was painful. She wanted to be back there, with her companion, the forest, and those strange, strange people. She wanted to be back there . . . .

~

## *Fear and Selfishness*

She hesitated, standing in front of the forest she was familiar with, feeling strangely and remarkably reluctant to enter it – a new experience for her. Never before had she felt a reluctance to walk into the forest, and she did not like the sensation at all.

She hesitated because she was afraid. She was afraid he would not be there. She was afraid she would not ever see him again. She was afraid of the disappointment, and the sense of loss she knew she would feel if he was not there and he did not come. It was, after all, up to him to come to her. She could not go to him, and she could not call him to her. She did not know how to contact him at all. But after a night of contemplations following the extended version of the strange dream she was having at the moment – contemplations that, once begun, completely precluded the possibility of more sleep – she had to see if he would be there. She had no choice really. She had to know one way or the other.

In her sleepless state, lying on her side in her bed, with the darkness of her bedroom all around her, and with only the faint orange glow from the embers of the hearth fire piercing the darkness and drawing her focus, she had tried to contemplate the wolf's question. But she had failed, miserably. Every time she reined in her thoughts and tried to turn them to the question at hand – his question – she thought only of him instead. And the more she contemplated him, and not her answer to his question, the more she wondered at the strangeness of his appearance in the forest, as if he had been conjured out of the air itself. She wondered, too, at the strangeness of their comfort in each other's presence, like old and genuine friends . . . or like lovers. And, then, of course, there was the strangeness of the communication between them. They understood each other's thoughts. And, furthermore, there was the question of where he had come from. For all of her contemplations, and at the end of a long night, she had realised there was, really, only one conclusion to be drawn. They knew each other. But how?

As for her answer to his question, apart from the three responses she had already given

him – intelligent, open-minded, seeking – she could only draw a blank. She did not know how she saw herself. Or perhaps it would be more apt to say she did not see herself at all, really. She was hidden to others and she was, therefore, hidden to and from herself.

She was, currently, supposed to be in the library with Samuel, but she had excused herself from the day's lessons, telling Samuel, simply, there was something important she had to do that she would explain later. At least, she thought, as she looked at the forest in front of her, she hadn't lied to him. She could never lie to Samuel. That would be too much like dishonouring the relationship between them. But neither was she ready to tell him about the wolf. Unconsciously, she held her skirts high in her hands, not because she needed to hold them off the ground, but because she needed something to hold. Extreme tension was curling her fingers, causing her to grip the material of her outer skirt with an intensity that was crushing it.

Swallowing nervously, she resolutely took the few steps necessary to take her into the forest. Once there, once committed, it was easier to keep walking. When she reached the small clearing where first she'd seen him the previous day, she stopped in surprise, and the material of her skirts fell from her fingers. He was there, sitting on the leaves, obviously awaiting her. Relief coursed through her, intense and powerful, propelling her across the distance between them with surprising speed. Falling to her knees in front of him, she reached out and sank her fingers deep into his fur, and, closing her eyes, she leaned forward to put her cheek against his. All of this, he seemed to take in his stride. As he had the day before, he didn't alter his position at all.

“Sorry,” she said as she sat back. “I was afraid I would not see you again. Obviously my fear was unfounded, but one can never know that until one actually faces the fear to see the truth for oneself, a most unfortunate characteristic of fear, do you not think?”

She was rambling and she knew it, but he didn't seem to mind. She made herself comfortable in front of him. He was still sitting on his haunches, so when she sat with one leg tucked under her and one knee raised so she could wrap her hands around it, their faces were on virtually the same level, and their faces were close. There they sat, in the silence of the forest, facing each other, looking at each other. She decided to open the conversation, if, indeed, a conversation was what they would have today.

"I tried to contemplate your question, but I found I couldn't. I only drew a blank. Instead, I could really only think about you. Do we know each other?"

She allowed the silence of the forest to penetrate her mind, as it had the day before, and in the silence, she heard his response.

"Of course."

"How?"

Silence, both around her, in the forest, and in her mind. But, in her mind, an image formed of that place in that other forest – that other forest she had started visiting at night in her dreams.

"You will not answer?" she asked him.

"You know the answer. I will not tell you if you do not remember."

In response to that, she sighed, partly in defeat and partly in frustration, and then she moved to lie on the leaves in front of him. He, too, relaxed, moving to sit, sphinx-like, on the leaves beside her. She was tired after her night of contemplations, so she lay looking up at the leaves in the trees above her and, beyond them, to the sky behind them. He sat beside her in perfect silence. There they lay with the silence of the forest around and between them. Her eyes grew heavier but still she felt his presence beside her like a tangible thing, as if he was touching her somehow. She felt complete, somehow whole, with him, and the feeling was deeply and richly satisfying. It was, she thought, almost as if she was lying on a soft mattress of contentment – contentment generated just by being with him.

"Why now?" she whispered to him partly to stop herself falling asleep. "Why have you come to me now?"

"I have come to bring you out of hiding. It is time. And you called to me. You called to me because you are ready."

Brought awake by his response, she turned her head on the leaves to look at him. He had rested his head on his front paws, but when she looked at him, he raised his head to look at her, his blue-grey eyes holding hers steadily, clearly.

"I am ready?" she asked him out loud.

"You are ready because you know who you are."

"But I can't even contemplate your question . . ."

"Then do not contemplate it. Just allow the knowing to surface within you."

She looked at him in silence, remembering the dream.

And then, in the silence of her mind, she heard him ask, "Will you allow me to bring you out of hiding?"

"Yes," she said simply. "I will."

~

"Are you all right, my dear? You look as if you've seen a ghost?"

"Do I?"

She had entered the library quietly, but Samuel had seen her and sensed her the instant she walked through the door. He'd looked up, immediately, from the weighty tome on the table in front of him, and had asked the question in almost the same instant.

He scrutinised her, now, over the rim of his glasses. "Yes, actually," he answered her. "You do."

She walked over to sit opposite him at the table. Still looking at her over the rim of his glasses, he awaited her explanation, not just in relation to her pallor but also as to where she had been. She'd been gone for hours, and while he was not overly worried about her continued absence – she rarely, if ever, missed their lessons – he was curious.

"I've . . ." she began but faltered. How to tell him who she'd met? Or should that be what? "I've met . . ."

"Ah," he said quickly, partly sighing, immediately jumping to an erroneous conclusion. "You've met a boy."

This was, in fact, something he secretly dreaded. It was inevitable, he supposed. He could not monopolise her time forever. He was an old man, she a young woman. She had her own life to live, a life that was, unlike his, in front of her, not behind her, and marriage and children were a natural and inevitable part of the sort of life one such as she would or should live. Up until now, she had shunned all and any advances from the boys in the local villages and in the castle who had taken a fancy to her, but it was inevitable that one would, one day, draw her eye when she was ready to settle down.

"A boy?" she repeated, scoffing at the very idea. "No, Samuel, I have not met a boy."

Boys hold no interest for me whatsoever, not after being in your company all these years. Boys bore me. They have no conversation at all, and they utterly lack depth."

"Oh," he said, sounding partly relieved and partly perplexed. It had never crossed his mind that his company and, for that matter, their friendship, would have that effect on her. He wasn't quite sure how he felt about it. The revelation caused him to see their friendship in a whole new light, and he wondered, for the first time, if he had been entirely selfish where she was concerned. "If not a boy," he asked her, "then who have you met?"

"It's probably just easier if I show him to you, or if I introduce you personally. It'd be too difficult to explain otherwise. I have to go and help Esme in the kitchen, but I was wondering if we could have our lesson in the forest tomorrow. Would you mind terribly if we didn't stay in the library?"

"Of course I wouldn't mind. The forest is a perfectly good place for a lesson. Tomorrow, we shall have our lesson in the forest."

She smiled at him as she stood and then walked around the table to lean over him, planting a gentle kiss on his forehead. "Thank you, Samuel. The forest it is then."

"Oh dear," he breathed softly in the aftermath of her departure, closing the large book on the table in front of him, and removing his glasses, placing them on the book. Had he, in introducing her wonderfully receptive mind to all sorts of numerous and diverse subjects, unwittingly robbed her of the possibility of having a normal life? He'd long known that the topics they explored and discussed would have been considered unseemly for a well-bred, genteel young woman – topics of science and philosophy, to name but two. Women were not supposed to know about such things. A woman's work involved the hands, not the mind.

The tenor of his own thoughts caused furrows of concern to line his forehead, and he reached up to pinch the bridge of his nose with two fingers. Such work, 'women's work', and such a life, too, for that matter, did not suit her, he knew. But if he had unwittingly taken that possibility from her, what was she to replace it with? There were simply no options for the women of their society other than to become wives and mothers. The only other possibility would be for her to become a governess, a teacher to other people's

children. But that would not suit her either. Such a life would stifle her beyond what he could bear to witness. Governesses were virtually invisible in society, and she should never be invisible. So, what would become of her when he and her father were no longer around to protect her or give her a place here, in the castle?

He sat back in his chair, his fingers resting lightly on the book in front of him. Selfish old man, he admonished himself. What had he done? Really, what *had* he done? Because it was too late for her. What had been done could not, now, be undone.

~

## Breathless

*She tore her eyes from the water's surface and turned away from the bowl, seeking the comfort of one of the stone benches that edged the outer rim of the circular floor of the temple behind her. When she sat, she did so slightly bent over with one hand on the bench beside her and one hand on her lap for support. And her breaths were erratic – erratic but deep, drawing deeply of the air in the temple around her.*

*She was breathless, as if she had run fast and far.*

*Now, now at last, she understood why she had been reluctant to gaze into the water this night. Now, at last, she knew, and no wonder. Unable to regulate her breaths, she closed her eyes against the distress she felt in every fibre of her being.*

*So it came as no surprise to her when the Elders appeared, standing in their circle around the bowl of water. She felt rather than saw them. Her eyes were still closed, but they were possessed of such a presence that whenever and wherever they appeared, one could not help but feel them. It was a measure of her distress that she did not feel the usual radiance and joy at their appearance. The Elders stood like statues, as was their wont, in a circle around the bowl, the hoods of their sapphire-blue cloaks hiding their features, one sandalled foot slightly in front of the other, and their hands clasped in front of them. But the one closest broke the pose, and the circle, to come and kneel in front of her, placing his hand on hers. She opened her eyes and raised them to look at him, and her eyes were filled with her distress.*

*“To be so separated, so ignorant of one's true being,” she whispered because her throat would not allow anything else, constricted as it was.*

*“Come, Lady of Light,” he said gently. “You do not do this alone. You must know that. We are here with you, and always has it been thus. We are a part of you. Feel us*

*within you. Feel us with you.”*

*Gently, he lifted her hand, helping her to her feet, and then he steadied her when she stood. Just his presence alone calmed her, but his touch soothed her, quietened her, alleviating some of her distress. She allowed herself to be raised and then steadied. And then he led her back to the bowl. At the bowl, he took both her hands in his so that they faced each other, the bowl beside them. Without words, they looked at each other for a long moment. And then both turned to face the bowl of water. In doing so, both took their place in the circle. They, the Elders, were as tall as she was, so she and the Elders were the same as they stood in their circle, like flames of the same ring of fire.*

*She drew strength from their presence. Indeed, their presence fortified her. As she stepped forward once more to gaze upon the surface of the water, the two beside her moved to put their hands on each of her shoulders, not holding her in place but simply offering comfort and reassurance. Thus fortified and comforted, she returned her gaze to the water, there to watch, once again, the clear images that appeared to her on its surface . . . .*

~

## *More of the Dream*

*As she had the two previous nights, she walked in the forest, again feeling its companionship and its encouragement, its guidance and its embrace. She was quite used to it now, so the feeling of being at home in this formerly strange forest was now greatly heightened. This time, she did not begin the dream outside the forest, but, rather, within its depths, and this time, she did not wear the strange clothes but was already wearing the gown and slippers of light when the dream began. This time, the forest did not welcome her with a whisper heard in her mind, although it did welcome her energetically. That was, it knew, no longer necessary. She knew she belonged here now. This time, there was no time wasted in the dream so that she found herself quickly back in that place in the shadows of the tall, thick trees where she could watch the tall people in their colourful robes.*

*She watched them for a long time. They were busy, moving this way and that, intent on their strange business, whatever that was. Some walked together, others on their own, but none of them stopped to talk. Their behaviour was, therefore, quite different from the behaviour of the members of the community in and around the duke's castle. Never would people in that community pass each other by without stopping to catch up on the local gossip. One always had to allow for much greater lengths of time than was actually necessary when visiting the local market, for example. She didn't bother visiting the market anymore. She had developed quite an aversion to being trapped in the inane conversations of the local villagers. Those conversations, she thought, were extraordinarily difficult to disentangle oneself from, and she was always told the same thing anyway . . . . "a young woman like you should be thinking of settling down, finding yourself a good man . . .". She never bothered telling them she had absolutely no intention of doing any such thing.*

*All of these thoughts were filling her mind to overflowing even in her dream as she watched the tall, graceful people. She couldn't help but compare the two – these strange people with the folk of the castle's local community. The forest had told her these strange people were her people. If that was so, and she had no reason to disbelieve or even doubt the forest, then that would explain why she had never felt even the slightest or smallest or faintest sense of belonging where the castle's community was concerned. In fact, she had always felt as if she didn't belong to them or with them. She'd always felt like a stranger even though she knew many of them quite well.*

*"These are my people?" she whispered to the forest, partly because she wanted its confirmation but also partly to make sure it was still with her, watching her.*

*"These are your people, my Lady," it whispered back in confirmation.*

*"Well then," she said, swallowing nervously and forcing herself to move out of the shadows of the tall, thick trees, "if that be the case . . ."*

*She moved towards them, these strange people she had been watching. Once free of the shadows among the trees, she could see the trees in their village, if that was what they called it, were less dense or less tightly packed together. There were whole clearings that allowed in plenty of sunlight, and in the clearings, there were beautiful round, stone temples, with floors of mosaic, ornate fountains running with clear, pure water, stone seats and benches where people were sitting, white pathways of stone that snaked and wound their way through the village, gardens full of bright, colourful, blooming flowers, particularly her favourite – roses – and statues and sculptures of carved marble. She studied the sculptures as she walked slowly from one clearing to another. No one disturbed her as she walked. On the contrary, the strange people seemed perfectly accepting of her presence there. Many of them, though, bowed their heads towards her as she passed them by, not in greeting but in homage, and one or two even acknowledged her verbally.*

*"Lady," they said as they passed.*

*She smiled and bowed her head back in acknowledgement of their greeting, but she spoke to no one.*

*And then she felt a familiar presence behind her as she walked. So strong was it, she felt as if he was touching her, and she smiled at the familiarity of the feeling. Without having to look, she knew he was following her. But she stopped walking and turned slowly, lifting the skirt of her gown of light in her hands so as not to trip on it. And there he was. Her wolf. He had stopped walking when she had, so when she turned, he was simply standing a short distance from her, watching her as was his wont whenever he was with her.*

*"Jebediah," she said, greeting him.*

*"My Lady," he responded, returning her greeting.*

*She held up the skirt of her gown. "Do you like my gown?" she asked him.*

*"It becomes you," he said. "Yes, I like it very well."*

*"As do I. It was a gift from the forest. So," she observed, "this is where you come from."*

*"This is where you come from, my Lady."*

*The material of her skirt fell from her fingers. Even in the dream, she thought about waking up and hoped she wouldn't. Even in the dream, she felt her deep-seated desire to stay in this place.*

*"I believe you," she said softly. "And I want to stay here." She looked around her. "This place is spectacularly beautiful, not just visually, but in its ambience, its atmosphere, its energy."*

*"I know. This place resonates deeply, profoundly, with your own Truest Nature, my Lady, and with mine. Although it will cause you great pain, you had to know about this place because knowing about it will help you understand who you are. But you must return to the third dimension. You have Work to finish there, my Lady. You will return here soon enough. You will return . . . ."*

*"The gods damn it," she swore almost as soon as she came awake. "I want to go back. I don't want to be here anymore," she screamed into her pillow. "I want to be where I belong. I want to be with my people. I want to be with him. I don't want to be in this shallow, horrible, ignorant, dark, selfish, wounded, separated dimension . . . ."*

~

## *Malevolence Comes*

Holding her skirts and the material of her cloak clear of the forest's floor, she walked deeper, ever deeper into the forest that had, formerly, been the one most familiar to her. She walked in complete silence, Samuel behind her, following her also in silence. There was no tension in her fingers as she held the material of her clothes, and, this time, she had not hesitated to walk into the forest. This time, she knew Jebediah would be there, awaiting her, and so he would any time she chose to come into the forest. She was also not afraid of or concerned about his response to Samuel. Samuel's response to him might be a slightly different story, but she would, she knew, cross that proverbial bridge when they came to it.

It was a beautiful day. Sunlight, penetrating the canopy of leaves above them, filled the forest with bright light, and the air was particularly clear and fresh. The birds, too, were busy, filling the forest with their unique song, and the leaves in the trees above were whispering their secrets in accompaniment to the birdsong.

When they reached the clearing where first she had met her wolf, he was, indeed, waiting for her as she knew he would be. He was, again, sitting on his haunches as if he had been waiting a while but minded not at all. As she had in the days before, she walked straight over to him, knelt in front of him, and sank her fingers into the fur around his ears and neck – her way of greeting him – and as he had over the days previous to that one, he took her greeting in his stride, not altering his position at all. With a hand on his fur, she turned to look at Samuel who had stopped at the very edge of the clearing in surprise.

“Samuel, this is Jebediah.” Turning back to the wolf, she said, “Jebediah, this is Samuel, my very good, very dear friend.”

“This is he whom you have met . . . ?” Samuel asked her, sounding very uncertain if not outright disbelieving.

“This is him,” she confirmed.

“I'm sorry,” Samuel said, recovering his wits somewhat and bowing formally, “where

are my manners? Jebediah, it is a pleasure to meet you.”

“Come,” she said, patting the leaves beside her and making herself comfortable on them herself, “sit with us. He will not hurt you. I promise you that.”

Somewhat uncertainly, Samuel did as he was bid, coming to sit beside her, laying his long staff on the ground next to him. “And how did you meet him?” he asked as he sat.

“Well,” she replied, “when I came to the forest to collect the mushrooms for Esme's pies two days ago, he just came, as if he knew I would be here. Now he waits for me to come, always in this same place. He is just always here.” She let a small silence descend on them for a moment so as to give him a moment to come to terms with the surprise of meeting a wolf, and then she added gently, “He speaks to me, Samuel. I understand him, and he understands me when I speak to him. Do you know what he is?”

“Well, yes,” he said, blinking rapidly in his bewilderment. “He is a wolf. He speaks to you, you say?”

She nodded and held up a hand to indicate silence. “He's speaking to me now.”

From Samuel's point of view, she merely sat looking at the wolf, the silence of the forest all around them. But her head was slightly inclined as if she was concentrating on something unseen or unheard by him. Then she turned to him.

“He says you believe you may have done me a very great wrong in educating me so thoroughly, and you are greatly concerned that you may have unwittingly robbed me of a normal life. But there are some things you need to know. First, you did not educate me. I educated myself with your help. And, second, I was never destined to live such a perfectly boring and restricted life. Do you understand, Samuel? You could not take from me that which I was not destined to live. In truth, the education you have helped to give me has opened my mind and laid the foundation for what is to come – a very strong, healthy foundation. You have not done wrong by me at all, my old friend. On the contrary, you have done right by me, and for that, I am truly grateful.”

Samuel stared at her, completely at a loss for words. “He told you all that?” he asked her once he recovered.

“He told me some of it . . . well,” she corrected herself with a smile, “most of it, actually.”

“He really does speak to you then?”

“He really does.”

“Is this Fae magic?” he asked her, matter of factly and without judgement, and then, without awaiting a response, he looked directly at the wolf and asked, “Are you one of the Fae?”

She frowned. “What is Fae?”

“The Fae are, quite simply, not **of** this dimension, in any sense. They may be here, but they are not part of it, not part of the fabric of it.”

“Oh,” she said softly, and then, thinking the question an interesting one, she looked at the wolf, listening for a response in the silence of her mind. Jebediah gave her one which she then repeated for Samuel.

“That is one way of conceptualising what he is, and it is not wrong, but nor is it that simple, that black and white.”

Samuel nodded thoughtfully. “Of course,” he said. “Yes, indeed,” he repeated as his thought processes began to run a natural course in an entirely new direction courtesy of the new information given to him. “So,” he said, pausing to allow his thoughts to crystallise, “why does he come here, to you, my dearest,” he bowed his head towards her for emphasis, “and how did he know you were here?”

This time, she did not turn her head to the wolf to await the response to the question. This time, she answered the question for herself.

“I come from the same place. We are the same, he and I.”

Samuel stared at her for a long, elongated moment. “But of course,” he finally said, sounding as though the answer was obvious and had been so all along. Slapping his knee with a hand, he said again, “But of course. Why have I never seen it before? 'Tis so obvious, and it makes so much sense. Actually, it explains a great many things.”

Now it was her turn to stare at him. “What things?” she asked him.

Before she had a chance to question Samuel further, and before Samuel had a chance to respond to her question, Jebediah sprang to his feet beside her. Surprised and startled, she looked at him. There was tension in every muscle in his body and in the stance of his body, as if he had suddenly become alert to danger. And then, barely had she registered

the tension in him when he did something she'd never seen him do before, and, in fact, thought she never would see him do. He bared his teeth and growled, low and deep and ominous, and the hair on his back stood on end – raised hackles.

She looked over at Samuel in surprise. "I've not ever seen him do that," she said.

Samuel responded quickly. He rose to his feet, as nimbly as he'd sat, and leaned down to get his long staff.

"Show us, Jebediah," he said. "Show us."

The wolf leapt forward, quickly, loping past her and Samuel to the other side of the clearing, in the direction of the castle. Both she and Samuel followed in his wake.

"Show us, Jebediah?" she repeated, throwing the words at Samuel's back as she followed him. "You seem remarkably unfazed at having just met a wolf who declares himself to be Fae. In fact, you seem to be taking it very much in your stride, as if you see this sort of thing every day."

"Is that an accusation?" he threw back at her. "Don't sound so cross. Things are not always what they seem, my dearest. In fact, in my very broad experience, I've come to the conclusion that things are *rarely* what they seem. As for the Fae, I am not a stranger to them, nor they to me, but 'tis not something you talk about, especially not in the confines of the castle. 'Twould be very unwise to do so and be caught."

"So there is much you haven't told me, then? For years and years we have worked together, and for years and years you have kept secrets, it would seem."

He stopped, holding his staff steady beside him, and turned to face her. "Cross you may be at me for not revealing certain truths about what I know, but you, my dear, are in the same proverbial boat. 'Tis cross with yourself you should be, for you are definitely not what you seem to be."

She, too, stopped walking. Well, she had no choice really since Samuel was barring her way. The wolf had disappeared. But they both knew where he was going, so neither were concerned at having lost sight of him.

"I am not cross with you, Samuel. I could never be cross with you. I just wish you'd told me about the Fae before now. But it doesn't matter. It probably would not have helped anyway because I would not have known what you were talking about. I suspect

I'm going to be learning all about them, quickly. And, yes, I am not what I seem to be. I can only plead ignorance. I did not know I was anything other than what I appeared to be until a few days ago. All of this has come as a very great surprise to me, too."

He put his hand on her shoulder and smiled at her. "I fear that may be partly my fault, my dearest. I have observed the signs in you for years but failed to recognise them for what they were. In that sense, I feel I have failed you. But I intend to make it up to you. I promise."

At the edge of the forest they caught up with Jebediah, and Samuel's smile, which had lingered after their conversation, disappeared. The three, concealed by the tall trees at the edge of the forest, watched the scene unfolding before them. Jebediah growled low in his throat, his teeth bared, his tail and head lowered as if ready to attack, his hackles raised. She and Samuel merely stood, still and silent, side by side, while they watched.

From their vantage point, the causeway leading to the bridge and the ancient portcullis - the castle's very old and very grand front entrance - was entirely visible. A procession of horse-drawn carriages and single riders on horses were making their slow and ambling way along the causeway and into the castle. The carriages were black and shiny and opulent, their occupants concealed by curtains covering the windows, and the single riders wore the tailored coats and shiny boots of the high born.

"The duke has returned," she observed.

"The duke and a rather sizeable retinue, I would say," Samuel concurred.

"Did you know he was coming back, Samuel?"

"No. I had no idea."

"I do not think Esme knows either. She would have said something if so. She was remarkably calm this morning, too calm for one who knew the castle was to be filled today with the lords and ladies of the king's court. How is she to feed them all? She'll be in a right panic." And then, as a thought occurred to her, she sighed, "Oh no, I hope they don't kill the chickens . . ."

Samuel looked down at Jebediah whose eyes were fixed on the retinue. The wolf's teeth were still bared and he was growling low and deep in his throat.

"I think," Samuel said slowly, "feeding the hoard of lords and ladies is the least of our

worries, my dearest. There is something not right here, and Jebediah knows it. I feel it, too. There is something . . . malevolent, a presence I've not felt in a long, long time." He turned towards her and put his free hand on her shoulder. "I think you should stay with me for a few days. You must not go back to the castle tonight."

She felt chilled at the intensity in him, a tension born of . . . what? She'd certainly never seen him like this before, not in all the long years she'd known him, and nor had she seen Jebediah behave as he was now behaving, although she'd known him only a few days. The wolf was strongly reacting to something, and there was a decided sense of urgency in Samuel. She nodded her agreement to Samuel, indicating she would do as he bade, and then she turned to look, again, at the procession of horses and carriages still making its way into the castle. She did not feel anything herself, except disappointment that the duke had returned thereby disrupting the very satisfying routine of her ordered life, and possibly curtailing the freedom she had come to take for granted somewhat, the freedom to fill her days as she chose.

"You can borrow one of my nightshirts to sleep in," Samuel said, "and you can wash your clothes out so they can be worn again tomorrow. You must not go back to the castle at all. If I can, I will try to speak to Esme, see if she can bring us some of your clothes, but if not, you will have to make do with what you have on now."

She frowned as she looked at him. "Ye gods, Samuel, you really mean it, don't you? You don't want me to go back at all."

He turned and looked at her directly. "I really mean it, my dearest. Ask your wolf in the silence of your own thoughts if it is a coincidence that the duke returns now, with no warning whatsoever."

"What do you mean, 'now'?" she asked him.

"I mean now, at the very inception of your transition."

"You think this has something to do with me?"

"I do. Ask your wolf. Ask Jebediah."

She looked down at the wolf. Kneeling beside him, she put her hand on the fur of his neck. He was so fixedly locked onto the procession they could still see entering the castle that she did not think he had heard Samuel at all. But in the silence of her thoughts, she

heard him speak to her.

“It is no coincidence the duke returns to his castle now, with no warning whatsoever. He must have left the king's capital in great haste – a measure of how desperate is their search for you. There is, in truth, my Lady, no such thing as coincidence. All is energy, and all energy is connected. The energetic nature of all existence, and, thus, its connection, precludes such a thing as coincidence ever occurring, in any dimension. They know you are here, Lady of Light. They know. They begin to see you on the plane of their existence. 'Tis you they seek. 'Tis you they mean to destroy, but they know not your power. They know not *our* power. They will find out soon enough, methinks. But not yet. You are not ready to face them just yet. Soon, very soon, you will be ready, but not yet, and not on their terms. You will meet them on your terms.”

At first, in response to this enlightening revelation, she merely sat frozen with her hand on his fur, looking at him in a mild state of shock, trying to process everything he had just told her. He stopped growling and turned his head to look at her in his direct, clear way.

“The duke is here because of me?” she asked him.

“Not the duke,” he said. “What is behind the duke. The duke brings with him a malevolent darkness, a presence that has hunted you for aeons, but, yes, he is returned because of you, whether or not he knows it consciously. The darkness is your enemy, Lady of Light, and you are its enemy. It likes not the threat of you so it has come to deal with that threat – you – itself. Listen to Samuel. Do as he instructs. He knows more than you can possibly imagine at this early stage of your transition. And know this. I am here now. I am with you. You are not alone. I will stay by your side. I will not leave you.”

~

The cottage was warm and cosy. The healthy, roaring fire in the hearth filled the single room with warmth and orange light. The walls undulated with moving shadows, and the flames of the candles on the table in front of her and on the mantle danced in time with the undulating shadows. She had been in Samuel's cottage many times, but never at night, with the darkness of night all around them and the cottage itself full of the muted light and warmth from the fire. She liked being here. She felt safe and warm and, strangely, protected, but from what she wasn't sure. The castle was opulent but often cold, with

cold, draughty winds that seemed to come from nowhere. And the castle was always dark, even in the light of day, hiding its secrets in its shadows, of which there were many . . . of both. And, of course, the castle was far, far too big for comfort. Not so Samuel's small cottage. This single-roomed cottage would fit twice over into one of the castle's lounging rooms.

She and Samuel were sitting at his table, both partaking of the hot stew and warm bread they'd prepared together. She found their dinner as comforting as the warm ambience in the cottage. Outside the cottage, through the windows, she could see the black of night so that the windows became perfect reflections of what was inside the cottage.

"What things?" she asked him, and, when he looked at her strangely, expanded her question. "You said today in the forest the fact of me coming from the same place as Jebediah explained a great many things. What things?"

"Ah, yes, I did say that, didn't I?" He put his spoon in his bowl, letting the handle rest on the side of the bowl, and he clasped his hands in front of him, elbows resting on the table so as to concentrate on his response to her question. "First of all, there are a couple of things about me I think it's time for you to know, my dearest. I am, perhaps, a little older than you think I am, except that we do not believe the passing of the years ages us per se. We do not, in fact, believe in aging at all. Rather, we prefer to think in terms of how long we've been here."

She held her spoon over her bowl, both spoon and bowl utterly forgotten as she concentrated on what Samuel was telling her. "Who is 'we'?" she asked him first, and then, quickly, "And how long have you been here?"

"Many, many hundreds of years. As to who 'we' is, 'we' is my kind, my people."

"Your people?" she repeated stupidly. "But you are human, are you not?"

"No, my dearest, 'we' are not human. We are not born, and we do not die, although we do come and go as we please. We walk the land as Guardians, watching over it and guiding it where we may, although that has become extraordinarily difficult in recent times. Humans want our guidance less and less. They no longer recognise the wisdom of age and accord it the respect it deserves. They seem far more interested in respecting the

might of wealth, power, fame, and physical beauty, and the aged, to them, are anything but beautiful. The aged are, in fact, a reminder they, too, will grow old, and they greatly fear it because it serves as a reminder of their mortality. So the aged are spurned, shunned, shoved aside, and we, the Guardians, have become a reminder of something greatly feared. Unfortunately, I cannot look any different. This is how I look because this is how I am. My hair and beard are white because they are, my eyes are blue because they are, and I always wear white because I am."

"You wear white because you are?" she repeated. "That doesn't quite make sense."

"We are known as the Brotherhood of the White, or the White Brotherhood. We are Wisdom itself, something you very much relate to since you, too, are Wisdom. We are similar, you and I. We Work together, your kind and my kind. We Work in tandem. We always have. You are as much a Guardian as am I. That is why you are here, now, at this time."

She absorbed that for a moment, and then she asked him, "So why are you here, Samuel, at the duke's castle, I mean? Were you drawn here because you could not guide humans anymore?"

"Well, yes, as a matter of fact. That is a very insightful observation. Securing myself a position in the duke's household was easy given my very impressive credentials." He allowed himself a small smile of pure vanity before continuing. "It was my way of remaining connected with human society but being withdrawn from it at the same time. And then the duke chose to leave me here rather than take me with him to the capital, and I found myself cut off. But then I began tutoring you, so any desire I had to remain connected with the land as a whole and its people vanished. You have been my sole focus for well over a decade, my dearest, and you have filled my life with the greatest of pleasures."

She smiled at him. "As you have for me."

He returned her smile, briefly, before it vanished, and he continued, "I have not encountered the Fae for a long, long time, even though I know they are here . . . apart from one, that is, but that one has insisted on appearing and even being human, so she doesn't count. But that is very possibly why I did not recognise the signs in you for what they

were. For too long, I have interacted only with humans and, therefore, with human consciousness. I confess, doing so dulls the senses somewhat, makes you forget there is so much more than just what can be perceived with the physical senses. They live so much in the physical that when you spend long periods of time with them, as have I, the influence tends to rub off."

She was utterly still as she listened to him, fascinated. "So much more . . ." she whispered softly. She wanted to know what that was. "What do you mean by that?"

"What we perceive with our senses of sight, touch and hearing, taste and smell is merely the very tip of a very large iceberg. As to what more there is, far better the experience rather than the explanation. Already, you know there is much more to me than you were always aware of. You just always assumed I was as human as everybody else because your sense of sight told you so. It did not occur to you to ask, or to question the authenticity or the validity of that assumption. And, now, you must ask the most important question of them all. Who are you really? Your sense of sight deludes you, in a sense, when it comes to your idea of yourself. In arriving at some sort of answer to the question of who you are, you must challenge long-held and in-built judgements, perceptions, prejudices, preconceptions, misconceptions and assumptions . . ."

"And I don't seem to be very good at it," she said, interrupting. "When I try and think about how I see myself, my mind simply stops functioning, as if it has come up against a very thick, strong, impenetrable wall inside itself."

"Mmm," he said, thinking, pondering. "Perhaps that is the very wall you raised to protect yourself from the truth to facilitate belonging, fitting in, whilst at the same time protecting you from the effects of their shadow-dynamics. That wall of protection has, for example, protected and shielded you from your father's response to you, has it not? Or, rather, his lack of response." He continued without giving her a chance to respond to the question he'd asked since a response was not necessary. "You have had to fit in, at least to some extent, whilst growing up here. Rather ironic given the fact that you have never really fitted in. You are different from all those others, including the duke's sons, but you have long identified with them, very probably courtesy of that wall you speak of. 'Tis rather like being squashed into a small box. To fit, you have had to suppress certain parts

of yourself. You are naturally set apart from them for the simple reason that you are *not* one of them. If they are chalk then you are cheese, and we all know how that old adage goes.

“Trouble is,” he continued, “until now, you have thought of yourself as chalk, as they are. And why? Because your physical senses feed back streams of information that tell you you are like them, or worse, you are one of them. You look like them – you walk like them, eat like them, breathe like them – and you sound like them, talk like them. In some respects you behave like them, and, for a long time, you have believed like them. If something looks and sounds and behaves and believes like a thing, then it must, indeed, be so. Correct?”

He paused to give her time to respond. So deeply was she concentrating on what he was saying that she took a moment to realise he required a specific response from her. “Ah,” she said, “yes, correct.”

“No,” he said, shaking his head. “Not correct . . .”

“But if I look like them and I am clothed like them, and if I am taught to behave like them, and if I am taught to believe I am one of them, and that's all I know, how can I not think of myself as one of them, even if I know there's something not quite right and I do not fit in? To know myself as something other than chalk, as they are, as you said, so to speak, then I need to know, do I not, what else there may be? I need to know there is such a thing as cheese. I cannot just replace long-held beliefs and perceptions with a nebulous, undefined, hazy idea or concept of what I might possibly be.”

He nodded when it was his turn to reply. “'Tis a very good point you make, my dearest, a very good point indeed. I have never seen myself as one of them because I *know* differently. You, on the other hand, have *known* yourself only as a third-dimensional human. So why should you not think of yourself that way? And what can be done to change that perception?”

“Exactly.”

“Well, the answer is simple, of course. You have to come to *know* otherwise. You have to come to *know* yourself as something beyond. You have to *know* cheese exists and then you have to know yourself *as* cheese.”

“Right,” she agreed. “So how do I do that?”

“You make the choice to go beyond what you have known of yourself, and then you allow the process to guide you, to take you into whole new territory. And you keep a very open mind. Yes, an open mind is essential. Make no judgements about what comes into your reality and why.”

“Is it enough to look at them and know what I am *not*, as in the case of the verse I wrote about giraffes and zebras? Can the giraffe know himself by looking at the zebra and recognising that the zebra is what he is *not*?”

“Well, no, I would say not. That's not enough by half, *especially since the Purpose of you being here is not to save them but, rather, to go beyond them*. So, disassociating from the herd of zebras in the way you speak of is an essential first step. The giraffe must first of all come to terms with the fact that he is not a zebra as he always thought he was. The giraffe has to allow that powerful truth to penetrate deeply. But, this is only the first step, and, no, it is not enough. In coming to accept this truth, he will find himself asking the most healthy of questions: if I am not a zebra, then what am I?”

Now it was her turn to nod. “That makes sense. All right, then, so how does the poor giraffe come to know the truth about himself . . . ? Oh,” she said as realisation struck.

He smiled. “Yes,” he said, “now you begin to understand, dear one. He must change his reflection, must he not? And what is the very best way to do this? Well, really, what is the only true way he can achieve this?”

“He must change what is around him, who he interacts with, who he connects with. He must no longer interact with zebras. They are no longer the herd he runs with. He must leave the zebras to run by themselves, and he must run with other giraffes. *He must run with a different herd.*”

Silence filled the cottage, a silence punctuated only by the hiss and crack of the roaring fire in the hearth. Samuel watched her closely, knowing her mind was racing in directions it had never gone before. As for her, her own words were echoing in her mind over and over again. She must run with a different herd . . . she must run with a different herd . . . But who was that herd, really?

“The fact of you not fitting in with the crowd, or the community,” Samuel said,

breaking through her thoughts albeit somewhat reluctantly, “was, perhaps, the strongest sign I saw that there was more to you than met the eye. Why did I never pursue it? In that sense, I have not helped you understand yourself at all, my dearest, and for that I must apologise.”

“Don't be too hard on yourself, Samuel,” she said, smiling at him. “There was no reason to pursue it, was there? I have been content to be as I've been and to live as I've lived. Perhaps if that was not the case, then I would've needed help. But I haven't needed help . . . except . . .”

“Except what?”

“Except that I've always felt part of me was missing, but a vital part of me, as if, without it, I've been only partially alive. I think I have sought answers to the riddle of what might be missing in the learnings and teachings and in all the books. What were some of the other signs?”

“Another of the strongest signs was the depth within you, so much so, you have been unable to cultivate any sort of relationship with them, the exception, of course, being Esme. But then, she fulfilled a very specific and necessary function for you, did she not? You said it yourself,” he said, not awaiting a response to his rhetorical question. “The boys have no conversation. Humans tend to take things on face value, and you, my dear, definitely do not. In that sense, the interaction between the two – you and them – brings to mind that old expression: never the twain shall meet.”

Again, she nodded. “The way I've conceptualised it is as a picture in a frame. The picture has width and height but no depth whatsoever, unless the artist is truly gifted and can paint into the picture the illusion of depth. That is what humans are like to me. If, by chance, and a rare thing it is, they seem to have depth, that depth turns out to be merely an illusion. Scratch a little below the surface and you see the illusion for what it is. When that happens, I withdraw. I mean, when I come across someone who has the illusion of depth, I hope, and then I come up against their internal boundaries, and I pull back disappointed. So now I don't even bother trying to connect with them. I just stay withdrawn and closed up. I got sick of being disappointed, and I have to shut down too much of myself to interact with them. It's painful. You, of course, were always the

exception.”

“Good god,” Samuel said quickly, “you've been aware of this, then?”

“Absolutely.”

“Why did you never speak to me about it?”

She thought about her response to the question before answering it. “I'm not sure. Maybe because we haven't tended to speak of such things.”

“No,” he said, “how right you are. There is much we haven't spoken of, or so it would seem. Again, I have to take much of the blame for that. I really have been quite lax where you are concerned. I really have.”

“Well,” she said, smiling broadly, “we are speaking about these things now, so all is forgiven.”

He chuckled appreciatively. “So we are. So we are.”

“Are there any more signs I should maybe know about?”

“Oh yes, there are a few more. Have you noticed how bad humans are at being perfectly still?” While she pondered that statement, he continued, “You, on the other hand, are naturally very good at it . . .”

“That's because there always has been a lot to entertain me in my own mind.”

Again, he chuckled. “And there I rest my case. You do not require the distractions and the stimulations they simply must have. They fill their lives to overflowing with things that must be done and with 'things' in general in a desperate bid to avoid themselves. You, on the other hand, know how to be with yourself, and you do it so well.

“Then,” he continued quickly, “there is the matter of your beauty. Humans see only the physical expression of it, but I have always known your beauty was much, much deeper than that. It radiates out from the very core of you, and you hold it in your laugh, in your smile, in your touch, in your eyes. And then, of course, there is the matter of your intelligence – a transcendent intelligence if ever I've encountered it.”

“A transcendent intelligence,” she said simply. “I like that. Do you mean my intelligence is based on . . .” when she faltered, he helped her out.

“An innate knowledge of 'the more'. You may not have been conscious of it, but you have always intrinsically known there is more to human existence than you've been taught

or led to believe. I'll give you a perfect example. Do you remember when you were much younger – barely a teenager – and one of the little boys in one of the villages was killed in an unfortunate accident?”

“Yes,” she said quickly. “I won't ever forget. I thought it unfair that he only got to live seven years of life when most people normally get to live much longer than that. That's when I found books in the library that spoke of reincarnation, and I realised that the boy will get to live many more lives, possibly, very probably actually, for much longer. Of course, I tried to keep the recognition of this truth to myself but the chaplain got it out of me. It was, then, his god-given mission to convince me otherwise. I couldn't be convinced, though, although I have never told the chaplain that. He couldn't convince me because he failed to realise I didn't just *believe* reincarnation was a fact of human existence, I *knew* it was. You can't deny what you know to be truth. Since then, memories of other lives I've lived have come to me courtesy of my dreams and visions.”

“Really? By the gods, you've never told me! How do you know they're memories?”

“They're very clear, clearer sometimes than my memories from this life. They come from a very deep place within me, and I always feel a deep connection to them.”

“Well,” he said, picking up his spoon again, “so there is, indeed, a lot we have kept from each other.”

“Yes, there is. We have a lot of lost time to make up, which is fortunate given the fact that I'm probably going to be spending a lot of time here.”

She, too, returned her attention to the bowl in front of her, dipping her spoon into its contents and was in the process of bringing it to her mouth. But the howl of a wolf tore through the silence of the night, long and mournful, heard in the distance and carried easily across the grassy ravine between the castle and the forest. She froze as chills rippled down her neck and back. The howl was loud and eerie, wrapping itself around her and penetrating every fibre of her being, raising the hairs on her arms and neck. She put her spoon down, and she and Samuel looked at each other in silence.

“He is not baying at the moon,” Samuel said eventually. “He howls a warning, and those he warns will understand. Alas,” he sighed, “it will also confirm what they must already know. You are here . . . somewhere near. They must be able to see you, somehow,

in the higher dimensions." He studied her for a moment. "What have you done to uncover your Light, dearest one? Do you know?"

She shook her head. "I've done nothing I don't normally do, except meet a wolf, of course, with whom I can speak. Perhaps this is his doing."

"Perhaps," he said, not committing. "'Tis not usual for one such as he to instigate such a powerful process in one such as you. Still, anything is possible, I suppose."

"One such as me?"

"A powerful being of Light. That *is* what you are, my dearest. The wolf is right. Thinking of you as Fae oversimplifies matters somewhat, although you Work with the Fae. You are very familiar with them, in fact. They are a part of you."

"Oh," she said as his words evoked images from her dream of the last few nights. "Wait a moment, Samuel. Perhaps there is something I've done . . ."

"What, dearest one?" he prompted when she fell silent. "What might you have done?"

"A dream."

"A dream?"

"The same dream for the last three nights, only the dream expands each time I have it. I am in a forest that knows me and welcomes me – a forest of great and powerful energy. It takes my ordinary clothes from me and clothes me in a gown of beautiful light, and then I reach a place where tall and beautiful and graceful people live. Last night Jebediah was there, in the dream, I mean."

"Ah," Samuel said. "That would be it then. That makes a lot more sense. This process *is* coming from you as I thought. As soon as you entered the forest, which was real despite the fact of you seeing it in your dreams, Jebediah would have felt you. He would have known you were there, and now he has come. In that sense, you have called to him . . ."

A sharp rap on the door effectively put an end to their conversation. Samuel rose to answer the knock himself, opening it wider when he saw who it was standing on the doorstep. "Come in. Come in."

Drusille grunted – her way of acknowledging Samuel's invitation. She hobbled over to stand at the end, or the head, of the table, squinting at Samuel's guest. "The wolves are a-baying tonight," she said. "Or, more aptly, the *wolf* is a-bayin' tonight." She pointed a

crooked finger. "Now what, do ye think, could have got him so agitated?"

"As you well know," Samuel said, taking his seat again, "there is a malevolent presence in the castle now, and he likes it not."

"Aye," she replied, turning her squinting eyes upon him. "I like it not, too, Samuel. I like it not at all. Lock the windows and close the curtains, and lock the door properly after me when I leave. Them in the castle will be paying attention to the castle itself, methinks. A couple of small cottages behind the castle near the forest won't attract their attention for a while, or so we can only hope. But we cannot be too careful. And we dun want no prying eyes peering in through the windows. She's not ready, not ready by half. She'll be vulnerable at the moment."

She to whom Drusille referred raised her eyebrows in silent question, but it was Samuel who responded. "I know. I will keep her safe, my Lady. You have my solemn word on that."

"Oh, aye, Samuel," the witch said softly. "She's in the best o' hands with ye. I know that. Now," she said brusquely, the usual gruffness returning to both her voice and her demeanour, "to the forest must I go . . ."

"You're going into the forest at night? Will you not be frightened?"

"No. The forest doesn't scare me, girl." The witch raised a crooked finger and pointed it again. "Just as it doesn't scare you."

"I wouldn't like to go there at night, though."

"Bah," the witch said, waving a hand in the air, "the moon is full this night. She will bathe the forest in her luminous light to light my way. I must needs go and settle your wolf, girl. He's passing his agitation on to me. 'Twill keep me from sleep. Can't have that." She turned, awkwardly given her bent over state, and waved her hand again.

"Don't forget them curtains."

She who was Samuel's guest got up from the table to check the window to the right of the door was shut tight. When satisfied it was, indeed, shut tight against the night, and locked, she reached up to close the curtains. Drusille lifted the latch on the door, but she hesitated before walking through it. "Know this, my beautiful girl. I will protect ye. I am here, and I will protect ye."

In the act of drawing the curtains closed, she to whom the witch spoke looked at the witch in surprise. Never, in all the years they'd known each other, had the witch used such a term of endearment. Drusille grinned at her and winked.

"Sleep well, my petal, and enjoy your dreams," the witch said softly, her voice rich and melodious. For the briefest of moments, like a brief flash of lightening, a tall woman stood in place of the hunched, bent-over crone. The woman wore a gown of sky blue, with an undergown of white shot with silver. The blue gown and its undergown were long, with flowing skirts and long sleeves. Her hair was unbound, long and white like luminous spun moonlight, flowing down her back like a pale waterfall, and her eyes were startlingly, vividly blue, the same colour as her gown. Her smile lit her eyes so that they shone with a vibrant inner light, and there was light all around her. There was even a hint of long, fine, gossamer wings at the woman's back, but that could have been a trick of light. Her beauty was utterly bedazzling, certainly indescribable. But in almost the same instant the image of the woman appeared, it disappeared, leaving the haggard crone to step through the door, shutting it none too gently thereby leaving the cottages occupants alone again.

For another moment, her hand frozen on the curtain, she could not drag her eyes from the place she had last seen the beautiful woman, as if the image remained imprinted on the air, and the cottage will filled with a profound and shocked silence that was punctuated only by the cracking of the wood as the flames of the fire consumed it.

Samuel chuckled at the look on her face. "Her real name is Indira," he said, still chuckling, "and, yes, she is, indeed, beautiful. Now I understand why she is here. She would never tell me. In fact, she steadfastly refused to tell me. As for the witch," he said, "far better the villagers see a witch and stay away, dear one. She has worked hard to cultivate their fear of her. They would never handle the truth of what she is, and when she interacts with them, her energy changes them without them knowing what has caused the change or how they may handle it."

"And what is she?"

"Local folklore refers to her kind as faeries. I would say she is more goddess than faery, or maybe she is a faery goddess. She is here for you, and has been all along. Are

you beginning to get the true picture?"

"I'm not sure . . . ." She finished closing the curtains and then moved to the window on the other side of the door, checking it was shut tight against the night and closing the curtains. "Why," she asked as she came to sit opposite him again once she had locked the door, "has she been gruff and distant with me all these years if she is here for me? Why did she not let me see the truth of who and what she is?"

"Well, I think she has let you see a little bit of the truth. You have seen those little things in her that don't quite add up, have you not? And," he continued when she nodded, "those little things you've seen have negated and neutralised your fear of her, have they not?"

Again, she nodded.

"She could not reveal herself to you in all her glory, dear one, because you were not ready to know the truth about yourself, and you could not see the truth of her without knowing the truth of yourself. She has had to wait for the signal that you were beginning your transition, and, well, there is no greater signal than the appearance of your wolf, Jebediah, is there?"

"Ye gods," she breathed, "how would I know? So much has changed in the last few days, I can hardly keep up. You are not what you seem. Drusille is not Drusille at all. And I am . . . well, only the gods, and Indira . . . and Jebediah . . . and you know what I am at the moment. I certainly do not."

"You are a being of Light, not unlike Indira, actually. That is why she is one of your guides. You are vibrationally alike, which effectively means you appear alike."

"I am as beautiful as she is?"

"Oh, yes."

"How do you know that? Yesterday, I was just like everyone else to you."

"You have never been just like everyone else to me, never. But now that the scales have been removed from my eyes, I see you. Or, rather, I am beginning to see you as you begin to see yourself. As you emerge, I will see more of you, too. Oh, yes, you are every bit as bedazzling as she is. You don't have to believe me just yet. The time will come, very soon too, when you won't have to believe at all. You will know. Just as you did with the

fact of reincarnation being an inherent part of the human experience.”

~

She lay on her makeshift bed in Samuel's nightshirt facing the flames of the fire in the hearth. Although no longer roaring, the fire was still healthy, its flames still consuming the couple of fresh logs they had put on it before going to bed. Sleep, after everything that had happened the past couple of days, was all but impossible. The best she could hope for would be, she knew, to fall asleep from sheer mental exhaustion. She was, however, not quite at that stage as yet.

There were fragments of things said throughout the day that were coming to her, involuntarily, things remembered now in the silence of the night. The wolf had called her Lady of Light. What was that? Or what did it mean? How was she a Lady of Light? And, then, Drusille who was not actually Drusille, had told Samuel she wasn't ready by half and that made her vulnerable. Vulnerable to what? And ready for what? And wasn't Drusille . . . or Indira, the Lady of Light?

The last few days had been full of such strange events and even stranger revelations. Two of the people she'd known all her life were not at all what they seemed, and now, with the help of a wolf who could talk to her, she had been told she, too, was not what she seemed.

Turning over restlessly in her makeshift bed, facing away from the fire, she realised there was, really, only one single question that mattered. In fact, if she discovered the answer to this question, she knew she would discover the answers to all the other questions that were also presenting themselves. Who or what was she? Really, by the blood of the gods themselves, who was she? But perhaps even more importantly, *what* was she? Really. What was she?

~

## *A Fourth Night of Dreaming*

As she slowly fell into sleep, lulled by the warmth and comfort of the cottage and by the gentle, almost soft sound of the fire consuming its wood, the thought floated through her awareness that she could have the dream now, and in having the dream, she could go back to that same place in the powerful forest. But in this perfectly understandable and valid expectation, she was to be thwarted. This time, although she knew, somehow, she was in that same place, in that same, powerful forest, the images were different, very different . . . .

*Wearing the same beautiful gown of light, she found herself standing in one of the round temples she had seen in the clearings. There were columns all around her, stone benches in front of them, an opening in the domed roof above her that allowed in the starlight, and, in the centre of the temple, a large, ornate bowl full of water lying flat on a stand of stone. The bowl and its water looked like an enormous, framed mirror lying flat instead of hanging on a wall as they did in the duke's castle.*

*All around her was night, so the water had become a perfect reflection of the moon and the stars above. She could tell the temple was high up, perhaps built on a rocky outcrop or on the side of a mountain, so that the beautiful village of wood and stone and glass, built in and around the thick, tall trees of the forest, was spread out below her. She could see the lanterns and lights from the forest village below her, glowing like fireflies in the dark of the night. The effect was beautiful, mesmerising, and calming. She was standing close to the bowl of water, her fingertips lightly touching the ornately-sculpted lip of the stone bowl, and she looked down at the perfectly still surface of the water, noting and appreciating its own unique beauty.*

*And then she knew. She was not alone, not alone at all.*

*She closed her eyes to concentrate her focus on the connection between her and them because that connection was weaved within and through and around them all, her included, and it bound her to them in a way that was impossible for her human mind, her human consciousness, to grasp, let alone articulate. Although they were many, each unique, the connection between them made them one. She could feel it, powerfully.*

*She opened her eyes to look at them and saw tall beings in long sapphire-blue cloaks, their hoods covering their heads and hiding their facial features. They stood with her, around her, so that together she and they formed a perfect circle around the bowl. There were twelve of them, the beings in their long cloaks, so that she was the thirteenth member of the circle. If the energy of the forest was powerful, and so it was, the energy emanating from these beings was even more so. The power of their energy was potent, and it wrapped itself around her so that their energy became her energy. Again, as with the forest, she was not afraid either of them or their power. Rather, she revelled in it, their power, and in their presence, their companionship. She basked in the warmth of their collective embrace. Even while she basked in the knowledge of their existence and their companionship, she observed herself doing so, and could not help but wonder. Who were they, these powerful beings? What were they?*

*"They are as you are. To answer that question, you simply need to ask yourself what you are?"*

*The words were a clear thought in her mind. Turning her head slightly, she saw him, Jebediah, her wolf, near her, slightly outside of and apart from the circle. He was sitting, as if he'd been there for a while and so had made himself comfortable.*

*"I am the same as them?" she asked him.*

*"You are. You asked the question, now you have your answer. Humans call you the Elohim – powerful beings of Light – and that is, indeed, what you are. But the word is just a word, just a way of referring to the Elders."*

*"And you? Are you not an Elohim Elder, too, if I am?"*

*"Indeed, so I am."*

*"Then why do you not join the circle?"*

*"But I am already in the circle. I am a part of the circle. I am standing right next to you."*

*She turned back to face the inner centre of the circle, honing her awareness, searching for him. And so she felt him, standing next to her, on her left. He had his hand on her shoulder, comforting her, supporting her. He it was who had taken her hand and lifted her from the stone bench. When she spoke again, she spoke not to the being standing next to her, but to Jebediah, her wolf. "I carry them, these beings, within me, do I not?"*

*"You do. They are a part of you, and you are a part of them."*

*"And you?"*

*"I, too, am a part of them, and they are a part of me. And I, too, carry them within me as you*

do."

*"They are our reflection?"*

*"They are your truest reflection, my Lady. Remember, your reflection is not to be found in the separated dimension of the humans. You may look upon humans in that realm and see only what you are not. You will not see yourself in them because you are not one of them. They are zebras to you, the separated, third-dimensional humans, are they not?"*

*"Yes, they are. So, if I am to run with a different herd . . ."*

*"There is none better or more suited for you to run with than the Elohim Elders. They are the truth of what you are, Lady of Light. They are your giraffes. You may look upon them and know what you are, for you are as they are."*

*"But I cannot see them. I can only feel them. They are cloaked . . ."*

*"That is because you cannot yet see your Self, my Lady. Look upon your own beauty, see your own beauty, and you will see theirs. See the truth of who and what you are, Lady of Light, and you will see them remove their cloaks. To cast one's eyes upon one's own reflection, one must first know what is the reflection that one casts. Remove the binds from thine eyes, beautiful Lady. Remember who you are."*

*Instinctively, in direct response to his words, she leaned over to look at her reflection on the surface of the water. Light. Blinding Light. Dazzling Light. Beautiful Light. Light swirling like a moving current on the surface of the bowl's water. Light blinding her. She recoiled and took an involuntary step back, breaking contact with the bowl of stone as her fingertips slid off its sculpted edge . . . .*

She jerked awake, her heart pounding, thumping, really, as if a fist was constantly and consistently punching her from the inside. She rolled onto her back and looked up at the darkness, not really seeing it, and she laid a hand over her chest in a futile attempt to calm her furiously-pounding heart.

Samuel was right. She did look like Indira. By the gods! She had seen herself. She knew now. By the gods . . . .!

~

## *Lady of Light*

*She looked up, deliberately removing her eyes from the water's surface and the images thereupon. In response, the Elders, too, looked up, at her. As one, their faces turned to her. While she didn't exactly look at one of them specifically, she was, really, looking at them all, encompassing all of them in the scope of her outer vision.*

*But it was they who spoke first, as one collective consciousness, but speaking through the one next to her, the one who had his hand on her shoulder.*

*"You know, do you not, Lady of Light, this must be?"*

*"No," she replied, shaking her head for emphasis, "I know no such thing. Why must it be?"*

*"The darkness must be put in its place. Else it will continue to rain death and destruction down on all, not just on humans. The human existence has, again, reached a critical mass of trapped and lacerated souls. The darkness must be stopped, and the human experience must be restored to the Light for the sake of all souls trapped there."*

*"But the darkness will grow strong again as it has before . . ."*

*"And it will be stopped again."*

*She had no response to that, so she bowed her head, careful to avoid looking at the surface of the water.*

*"You wonder why the darkness is allowed to even exist," the Elders said, again speaking through the one next to her.*

*"Yes."*

*"Because exist it does, my Lady. It cannot un-exist. Nothing can."*

*"Who conceived of it in the first place?"*

*"The All That Is, because the All That Is knows if Light is, as it is, then, so, too, is*

there an absence of that Light – darkness. Where one is, the opposite must also be. The darkness is your absolute antithesis, Lady of Light, your polar opposite. The Universe must exist in a natural balance, and darkness, being the opposite of Light, is that balance. However, when and where the darkness gets a foothold in one creation or another, imbalance occurs because that is the truest nature of the darkness. If Light stands for balance, the darkness stands for imbalance. Darkness cannot exist in the Light, so it must eradicate that Light, and therein lies the source and the cause of the imbalance that must follow. The darkness has long had a foothold on and in the human experience. Balance must be restored, and you, Lady of Light, are the one to do so.”

“Why restore balance? Why not just let them destroy themselves?”

“Is that what you would like to see happen?”

She breathed deeply and let the air of her breath out on a sigh. “No. I would like to see them thrive not die. I would like to see them evolve not devolve. I would like to see them connect to that beautiful higher part of themselves, not remain so utterly separated and alone. I would like to see them awaken, not remain in a zombie-like sleep. And I would like to see them build something of value, not destroy everything they touch.”

“We know. We would like that, too. Humans have learnt the lesson of destruction before, many times, and, yet, they allow themselves to devolve to the same place, over and over again. Enough. Balance must be restored, and there is only one way that can occur. They must move beyond the reach of the darkness, once and for all.”

“Why me? Why am I the one to do this?”

“You are Light, my Lady. And you are powerful enough to go there, to transcend and master the traps and pitfalls of lower dimensionality thence to set free your beautiful Light. What better way is there to bring Light to that realm so that balance may be restored? Can you think of a better way?”

She raised an eyebrow as she raised her head and glanced sideways at the one who

*spoke for them all. She would have responded with a facetious comment, but her sense of humour had deserted her, at least temporarily. She noted the fact, and then perpetuated their conversation with facts she knew they were well and truly cognisant of.*

*“You ask a great deal of me. You ask me to be in a place of extreme imbalance, surrounded by darkness, mourning the Light, cut off from my own Truest Nature. You ask me to put myself, deliberately, consciously, in a place of extreme pain.”*

*“We know. We would not ask this of you if you were not capable of doing it or of bearing that pain. This, you know, Lady of Light. You are perfectly capable of doing what must now be done in the human reality.”*

*“Humans are not capable of ascending to higher levels of dimensionality in their current state. They are too crippled with ignorance. Yet that is the only way to put them beyond the reach of the darkness. They cannot follow me to the higher dimensions, so how can they, then, go beyond the reach of the darkness?”*

*“No, they are not capable, and, no, they cannot follow you. Such is the state of devolution in the human experience now, as tragic as that is. This is why we do not depend on them. You are not going there to save separated third-dimensional humans, so do not allow yourself to become distracted by the notion. You are not going there for the third dimension, Lady of Light, so do not waste your time or your focus or your energy tampering with it in a futile attempt to fix it. It is lost as it is. You must accept this simple truth.”*

*She looked at them in silence for a moment, and then she asked them, “We do not depend on humans to ascend the human experience itself?”*

*“No, we do not.”*

*She inclined her head. “Who then?”*

*“You think you will be alone there, and, as you have now seen for yourself, so you will be initially. When you are ready, though, when you have identified and then de-identified*

*with humans – a process that can and must only be undertaken alone, in a state of pure solitude – you will be joined by those who will Work with you. Call upon them, those beings of Light who come with you. Were you not told? There are those who will follow you across the barrier of time and space. Call upon them, Lady of Light. Call them to you. Awaken your army. Now is the time. Restore the Light. Awaken the Elohim Priesthood.”*

*“The Priesthood,” she whispered. “Yes, the Priesthood. Of course. They are powerful enough to do this. They are perfectly capable. There are none more suited, in fact.”*

*This time, she nodded her acknowledgement of what they told her and her understanding of it. This time, when she bowed her head, it was in subservience. “I serve the Light,” she said, “with all that I have and with all that I am. I will do as you would have me do.”*

*She leaned forward, again.*

*But this time, instead of simply looking upon the water, there to look upon the images seen on its surface, she leaned right over, and, becoming a ribbon of pure Light, she disappeared into the water, and into those same images she had formerly seen on its surface, becoming a part of them, becoming one with them. Even as she vanished into the images, she heard the Elders speaking to her, their voice carrying across space and time, across dimensions.*

*“Always remember, Lady of Light, we are with you. We are a part of you. You hold us within you. Always remember . . . .”*

~

## *Come, My Lady, Step into Your Light*

“Always remember . . . . Always remember . . . .”

As she lay, looking up into the darkness, the words of the Elders echoed around her and within her as if they were carried on an unseen breeze that possessed the power to seep into her very bones, like a chill, only their words were full of warmth. The cottage was full of darkness, the fire beside her long ago having burnt itself out. The pieces of wood she and Samuel had added to the fire before going to bed were now nothing more than cold, black embers. She lay thinking about the images in her dreams. She could see them clearly, the Elders, standing around the bowl of water in a perfect circle – a circle she had been, and was, a part of.

Then, in the darkness, Samuel appeared at the end of her makeshift bed, looking like a pale-grey apparition.

“All right,” he said, not bothering to whisper. She vaguely saw him fiddle with something on the table, and then she heard the distinct strike of flint, and a moment later, a flame appeared on one of the candles on the table. When he came, candle in hand, to sit in one of the chairs they had moved out of the way to make room for her makeshift bed, he finished what he had begun to say.

“Do you think Indira is beautiful?” he asked as he sat. “Really. Is she beautiful?”

“Yes,” she replied, “beautiful almost beyond one's ability to fully comprehend it. She is beautiful in a way that reworks the whole definition and application of the word. That is, she takes beauty to a whole new level, a whole new dimension . . . .”

“Ah,” he said quickly, involuntarily, raising a finger, “yes, my dearest, that is the key, is it not? She takes beauty to a new level, a new dimension, such that those things in this physical, material dimension that you would normally consider beautiful no longer seem so.”

She nodded, not at all surprised that he understood so well, so easily and so quickly, without the necessity for further explanation. “Yes,” she agreed verbally, “that's it exactly.

She makes lower-dimensional beautiful things seem plain, bland, dull . . . .”

He leaned forward in the dim light to skewer her with a meaningful look. “She is what you look like were you to see yourself as you really are. She is one of the purest of your reflections. You have a few, you know. Do you see?”

Remembering the image reflected in the bowl of water, she sighed softly. “Yes, Samuel, I see. But you should know, I recoiled . . . .”

“Ah, but that matters not, dear one, not at all. You saw. You were given a glimpse. Now you have but to come to terms with what you saw, and then you have but to come to accept. Remember our conversation earlier tonight. You have been bound by lower-dimensional mindsets. You have held a lower-dimensional perception of yourself. Do you really think it is as easy as looking upon the truth of your reflection and being perfectly at ease and comfortable with what you see, particularly as you know it is yourself you are looking upon? No, dear one, 'tis not that easy. 'Tis not that easy by half. You have been given the glimpse. Now your consciousness will Work with that truth, like a farmer ploughing his field ready for new seed. And when you are ready, you may look upon your reflection again, and your reaction will be entirely different.”

She sat up in her bed. “If only it was that simple . . . .”

“It *is* that simple. Can you see the Elders? In your visions, I mean. Can you see them as they are?”

She shook her head. “No. They are cloaked, and their cloaks are long, with long sleeves that cover their limbs, and hoods that hide their features.”

“They are cloaked because you are cloaking them,” he said, “to protect you from the truth of what you are. Were you to see the Elders in all their glory, you would have to face the truth of yourself in all *your* glory. And you are afraid of that.”

“Why?” she asked him, looking at him intently in the muted light of his one, single candle. “Why am I afraid of my own Light, my own truth?”

“Because, as I just said, you have bound yourself in lower-dimensional mindsets. But also, because you have been cut down many times for being what you are, often violently and viciously, because you are the greatest of threats to the protagonists – the perpetrators – of this dimension of separation. So you have learnt to hide your Light. And you hide it

from yourself more so than from anyone else. You contain it, control it.”

She absorbed that. “Well,” she whispered, “no more. I do not want to hide from it anymore. I want to set it free to be what it is. Actually,” she said, smiling slightly, “I want to unleash it.”

“Oh what a thing to behold,” he said, reflecting her smile back to her. “How thrilled I am that I will be around to see it. How utterly thrilling it will be . . .” He sobered. “We have not focussed on it before now, dear one, but you know, do you not, that in unleashing your Light, you will take them on, those creatures of the darkness. Why else do you think they have been hunting you so desperately? You *will* take them on.”

She swallowed nervously as she nodded. “I think I knew it even in the forest when they disturbed Jebediah so. But first, I must stand solid in the truth of myself, must I not, Samuel?”

He nodded once, definitively. “Go back to that place consciously, my dearest, and ask the Elders to show themselves to you. Ask them to remove their cloaks.”

She bowed her head. “All right.”

Making herself as comfortable as she could, and, with only the light of a single candle to illuminate the space around her, she closed her eyes and visualised herself in that place she had seen in her dream . . . .

*She kept her eyes closed while she adjusted to being back in the place with the bowl of water and its mirror-reflection of the starry firmament above. Deliberately, she raised her hands and put her fingers back on the edge of the bowl, reconnecting with it. She could feel the smooth, cold marble of the bowl under her finger tips, and she could feel the presence of the Elders as they stood in the circle of which she was a part. Their energy enveloped and embraced her.*

*She opened her eyes, not at all sure of what she would see. But all was as she had last seen it. The Elders were covered and hidden in their dark cloaks. She opened her mouth to ask the question that hovered on her tongue, but the one next to her pre-empted her.*

*“Welcome back, beautiful Lady. Are you ready?”*

*She turned her head to look at him. He, too, was cloaked as they all were, so she could not see his features. She could feel his energy, though. His energy wrapped itself around her, and she thought she could see the Light in his eyes in the interior of his hood.*

*"I do not know if I am ready," she answered him. "But I do know I yearn for this. I yearn to see the truth of us . . ."*

*"Then look again upon your own reflection, my Lady. See the truth of yourself."*

*She nodded her acquiescence and looked at the surface of the water without leaning over to see the images thereupon.*

*She could feel her fear.*

*Smiling ruefully, slightly, she thought that was at least progress because this fear had been so deeply buried, it was beyond feeling, so feeling it was a step in the right direction.*

*Slowly, ignoring her fear, she leant over the water . . . .*

*She took a deep, steadying breath, and held the edge of the bowl more tightly for support. Reflected on the water's surface was blazing Light, pure Light, and all around her was Light – Light around the bowl of water, where the Elders stood, Light reflected on the water's surface – Light that completely eclipsed the reflection of the stars above. Blazing Light. Swirling Light. Powerful Light. Beautiful Light. Spectacular Light.*

*She looked upon herself reflected on the water's surface, and then she looked up. The Elders were no longer cloaked. Their Light was pure, white, exactly like hers, and it was as if their Light was constantly moving in a single direction around them. There were no shadows in them. There was no corruption. There were no discordances, hence the movement of their Light in the same direction – harmony, resonance, vibrancy.*

*She felt utterly breathless, overwhelmed, but she did not take her eyes from them. Instead, she drank in their beauty knowing, now, that their beauty was her beauty.*

*"Are we angels?" she asked. Indeed, she thought she could detect a form in their Light that resembled wings – luminous, gossamer wings, like Indira's.*

*"I thought you did not like that word," he who stood next to her said.*

*"I don't. It has too many connotations. Humans have turned the word and the concept into a trite religious cliché. But still . . ."*

*"'Tis a limiting word, and a limiting concept, too, for that matter. We do not think of ourselves as angels."*

*She turned to look at him directly. His blazing Light caused her to feel breathless all over again, but she faced him nonetheless, absorbing his beauty, his glory, his power, knowing it was also hers.*

*“Ye gods,” she said softly, “how beautiful you are.” And then she inclined her head. “How do we think of ourselves?”*

*He smiled at her and it altered his Light, heightened it, brightened it, intensified it. “We do not limit ourselves by thinking of ourselves in terms of human words, human concepts, human perspectives or human mindsets, so do not ask me to label what we are. We are as we are. We are what we are.”*

*She smiled at him then and reached out to take his hand in her own. And then she threaded her fingers through his, or at least, that is how her human consciousness perceived it. His fingers tightened in hers. And she turned, again, towards the pool of water, and, again, leant over it. She wanted, suddenly, to drink it in, her own beauty.*

*“Well done, beautiful Lady,” she heard him say beside her. “Well done. And now, it is done. You have done well. You have done well. . . .”*

*“Yes,” Samuel said passionately in the muted light of the small cottage, “it is done. Well done, beautiful Lady. You have done well. You have done well. It is, indeed, done.” And then, he smiled and his smile was dazzling. “Now,” he said, putting the candle on the floor beside him, and then straightening, grinning broadly, clasping his hands together, turning them outward and flexing them in eager anticipation, “Let the games begin.”*

~

## *The Duke*

She stood at the end of the great bed, next to one of the carved wooden posts, watching as Drusille bent over the duke. She stood straight and tall, calmly watching Drusille tend to the duke. And then, briefly, she lifted her eyes from the duke and glanced around the room. The bed alone was bigger than the rooms in many of the cottages that surrounded the castle. It was canopied, made of beautifully carved and polished dark wood, and it was covered in a multitude of expensive blankets, quilts and linens. The bedroom, one of the rooms comprising the duke's personal suite, was enormous, long, with a high ornate ceiling, a polished wooden floor, a large sumptuous carpet covering much of the floor, and large windows on either side of the bed along one wall, that should have allowed in plenty of light except that heavy drapes were pulled shut against the outside world. Consequently, the room was dim, not gloomy, just dim. At one end of the room, near the door as you walked in, an enormous stone fireplace dominated the wall. At the moment, the flames within it were reaching high, devouring the new wood that had been placed on the fire.

When her glance encompassed the fireplace and its roaring fire, she couldn't help but glance, also, at Jebediah because he was standing right near it, and she could easily see the tension in his body as he stood, ears back, tail down and still, every sense alert. She smiled briefly, fleetingly. When the summons from the castle had come for Drusille, and Indira had asked her to come too, Jebediah had been right there, outside the door of Samuel's cottage, no longer awaiting her in the forest, and it was obvious to her and to Indira that he was not going to let them attend the castle without him.

Thinking of the summons, and the news that the duke had taken ill, she looked at the bed again and the man lying under its covers. Her memories of him were from her childhood. She had been a girl when last she'd seen him, and so, seeing him now through the eyes of a grown woman, he seemed strange to her, dwarfed as he was by his own big bed. She remembered him being larger than life itself, vital, powerful, tall, handsome, like

a god. The pale man with the sunken eyes and cheeks who lay with his eyes closed in the bed was but an echo of the man she remembered he had been, or so he seemed to her.

When Drusille laid a dry, gnarled hand on his forehead, his eyes opened. For a moment, he looked at her because she was in his direct line of vision, and there was only blank incomprehension in his eyes. But then his vision seemed to clear and he recognised her. Surprised recognition replaced blank incomprehension.

“By the gods,” he said with surprising vehemence given his weakened state. “Is that you? How strange. We were just speaking of you last night, wondering what had become of you. Your father would not say. My, how you have grown into a beautiful woman. You look so much like your mother, I would have recognised you anywhere. You are grown beautiful, so beautiful, just like her . . .”

Revelation hit her with the force of a powerful punch, nearly knocking her off her feet. By the gods! No wonder her father had seen through her all these years. She was not really his. No wonder he had never given her responsibilities here in the castle. She was the duke's illegitimate daughter, and she had robbed him, her father, of the very great love of his life. No wonder she had never found her place here in the castle. She had no place. She was an anomaly, an aberration, belonging neither to the high born nor to the low.

“Are you apprenticed to the witch, then?” the duke asked her, causing her to refocus her attention on him. “We thought you would be married by now with children of your own.”

Drusille hurrumphed beside him. “She ain't no apprentice of mine, Leo. If anything, 'tis me who is her assistant. And she ain't the marrying type so dun go gettin' ideas.”

The duke's eyes held a silent query as he turned them upon her again.

“Are you a healer then, girl, like the witch?”

“She is no witch,” she said calmly. “Look at her again, Leonardo, and look at her properly.”

He did as she bade. Actually, he found it impossible to disobey her. It was not so much that she commanded him, but still, he obeyed as if she was the school mistress, he the errant school boy. He looked at Drusille who was not Drusille. Indira stood in Drusille's place.

"What . . . ?" he stumbled, unconsciously pushing himself back against the pillows as if trying to get away from the lady who stood beside his bed, looking down upon him.

"She is of the Light, Leonardo," she said calmly. "As am I."

The duke looked at her again quickly. "I thought you were standing in front of a light," he said quickly, involuntarily. "I thought it over-bright in the darkness of the room. I was going to ask you to dim it?"

"I cannot dim it," she said. "And nor would I if I could. I have been dim enough for too long." She held his eyes with her own, trapping them so that, try though he might, he could not look away. She inclined her head at him. "You have cavorted with utter darkness, Leonardo. Did you not stop to think that if such darkness exists, so, too, must Light exist? You have seen the face of devils. Did you not think there might be angels, too?"

He relaxed against the pillows as if trying to comprehend the truth of her and Indira was too much for him. "I had no need of angels. What could angels do for me?"

"Save you."

The words, her response, simple though it was, caused an expression of extreme pain to flicker over his face, and he closed his eyes against the potency of it. "Yes," he whispered, "so they could have. So they could have."

"You were a good man once," she said, "a great man, in fact. You were loved by your people, and you commanded great respect in everyone who encountered you, whether nobleman or servant. What happened to you? How did you fall so low?"

His eyes opened on hers again, and there was such intense pain in them that she drew in a quick involuntary breath, and she felt pain of her own for him.

"I made a terrible deal," he said, the pain in his eyes echoing in the tone of his whispered words. "It happened before I left here. A man came to visit me one night, and he offered me the world. Everything that came after that did so because of the deal I made. The king became ill, and I was summoned to rule in his stead. And so I have. I have ruled the world. I have been king in all but name. I have wielded such power, such unimaginable power."

"And what did they get in return?"

“They got me,” he replied, not bothering to ask her who 'they' were. He knew, and she knew that he knew. “I became their vessel. And I have done terrible things, terrible, terrible things.”

“I know, Leonardo, and now those terrible things are eating away at you, eating you away physically from the inside. You did those things to solidify and to preserve your own power and control. And now, as a consequence, you have an arduous road ahead of you – the road of massively imbalanced karmic debt – and you have lacerated your own soul. I see the wounds in your heart. Deep and suppurating they are. Your heart bleeds out, Your Grace, and it is shrivelled and black.”

With difficulty given the pain in his body, he raised himself on his elbows as he looked at her. “What are you?” he asked her.

She ignored the question, turning the conversation, instead, back to that which they had spoken of earlier. “You are free of them now. How did you withdraw from them?”

The effort to hold himself up was too great and he fell back onto his pillows, his eyes closed and the skin around his mouth turning slightly grey with the effort expended. “I did not withdraw from them. They withdrew from me. I became ill, and the illness caused me great pain. The pain made me weak. And crippled by the weakness of pain and illness as I was, I was no longer useful to them.”

“And so, it is not you who brings darkness and malevolence into this house. Who then? Who brings darkness here . . . . ?”

“William,” he said, his breathing becoming laboured and difficult. “William, my second son and your one-time playmate. They have attached to him. He is their vessel now. They have promised him the world.”

Indira leant over him again, and, with surprising strength, lifted his head and held a goblet to his lips. “Here, Leo, drink. This will help you with the pain, for you know, do you not, there is naught I can do for you other than to ease your passing?”

“Yes, I know it. I am dying. I have not long to go. I feel death coming to claim me. Thank you, witch, thank you.” And then, with failing strength, when Indira removed the goblet and placed it on the bedside table, he raised his head and looked at her, she who stood at the end of his bed. “Can you save my son? Please, I know not what you are, but

can you save my son?"

"No, Leonardo," she said calmly, "I cannot save your son. He has set his feet upon a path of darkness, and I cannot reverse that. He must, now, live the consequence. You did not just bring your sons into the lair of a monstrous darkness, you introduced them to it. What were you thinking? What did you think would happen? Now the darkness has its claws into them, the younger two especially."

"Yes," he said weakly, "it is as you say. There is nothing you can do then?"

She looked at Indira. The two of them exchanged a long look, and then she nodded. The duke, for all his waning strength, watched them closely, intently, hopefully.

"There is one thing I can do for your sons," she said softly. "I can embrace them, Leonardo. But in doing so, I will wrap my Light around them. The darkness within them and attached to them will be obliterated, forced to release its hold. But you need to know, if they survive the process, they will lose their sanity . . . completely. Their psyches will crack, shatter. They will become as if insane, and they will not be capable of living normal lives. But they will also no longer be in danger of wounding their own souls by harming others."

The duke closed his eyes again against the enormous pain that washed through him. Tears oozed between his closed eyelids, escaping and forming trails of moisture as they made their slow way down his cheeks, disappearing into his grey beard. "Oh what have I done . . . ? What have I done . . . ?"

And then, he opened his eyes again, and his eyes were starkly, vividly, intensely blue. His eyes held the depth of his anguish, but it was his implacable determination that turned his eyes so blue. He looked at her and when he spoke, his voice held his incredible strength and power, and, at last, she recognised the man she had known in her childhood, the duke of old.

"Do it, my Lady. Do it. 'Tis only their souls that matter now, and I would not have their souls lacerated and full of darkness as mine is. I would not condemn them to this pain, the pain of regret most of all. Do it. Embrace them. Wrap them in your Light.

"And may they and the gods forgive me . . ."

She nodded once, slowly. "So be it then," she said softly. "You have begun to

rebalance your karmic debt, Your Grace. And yes, may they forgive you. But my hope and my prayer, Leonardo, is that you can come to a place within where you can forgive yourself.”

~

Stop waiting.  
Start living.  
Stop waiting  
For what you want to appear in your reality.  
Start living  
Your own unique and very powerful destiny.  
Step away from your father's kingdom,  
And step into your own kingdom.  
Leave the old identity behind.  
Let it fall from your shoulders like a discarded cloak.  
Leave your mundane life behind you,  
For it serves you no longer.  
Step into the truth of who you are.  
Come alive, come awake.  
Believe in who you are.  
You won't change this reality from the outside in, remember.  
You can only change it from the inside out.  
Let it come forth from within you,  
Your inner rich world,  
That world that is truly where you are and who you are.  
Bring it forth from within you  
So that it overflows into the physical world around you.  
Merge the two worlds, so that the two become one,  
And you begin to see what is within you  
Appear outside you,  
In the landscape of your outer reality.

# ***The Return of the Elohim Priesthood***

*How do you fight hatred?*

**With Love.**

*How do you fight darkness?*

**With Light.**

*How do you fight stagnation?*

**With Movement.**

*How do you fight entrapment?*

**With Freedom.**

*How do you fight ruthless exploitation?*

**With Compassion.**

*How do you fight abuse?*

**With Care.**

*How do you fight starvation?*

**With Nourishment.**

*How do you fight stuntedness?*

**With Nurture.**

*How do you fight ignorance?*

**With Knowledge.**

*How do you fight fear?*

**With Courage.**

*How do you fight corruption?*  
**With Implacability.**

*How do you fight weakness?*  
**With Strength.**

*How do you fight woundedness?*  
**With Healing.**

*How do you fight confusion?*  
**With Clarity.**

*How do you fight doubt?*  
**With Certainty.**

*How do you fight separation?*  
**With Connection.**

*How do you fight the power of negativity?*  
**With the power of the Positive.**

*How do you fight bleakness and blandness?*  
**With the vibrancy of Colour.**

*How do you fight sameness and conformity?*  
**With Uniqueness.**

*How do you fight aloneness and loneliness?*  
**With Communion and Fellowship.**

*How do you fight the cold?*  
**With Warmth.**

*How do you fight death?*  
**With Life.**

*How do you fight deprivation?*  
**With Abundance.**

*How do you fight despair?*

**With Hope.**

*How do you fight insecurity and inadequacy?*

**With Confidence.**

*How do you fight hell?*

**With Heaven.**

*How do you fight divisiveness?*

**With Unity.**

*How do you fight lies and deceit?*

**With Honesty.**

*How do you fight conflict?*

**With Resolution.**

*How do you fight war and violence?*

**With Peace.**

*How do you fight judgement and condemnation?*

**With Acceptance.**

*How do you fight agenda and manipulation?*

**With Transparency.**

*How do you fight ugliness?*

**With Beauty.**

*How do you fight sadness?*

**With Joy.**

*How do you fight masculine domination?*

**With the return of the Sacred Feminine.**

*How do you fight chaos?*

**With Calm, and with serenity and tranquillity.**

*How do you fight mundanity and ordinariness?*

**With Extraordinariness.**

*How do you fight illusion?*

**With Truth,**

**And with altered Focus and Perspective.**

*How do you fight devastation?*

**With Restoration.**

*How do you fight the twisted, malevolent agendas of the priests of darkness, their suppression of the human soul, and their control of the human experience and human reality?*

**With the return of the Elohim Priesthood.**

*The Army  
of Light*

*This is who I am.  
I am She who is the core,  
The beating heart  
Of the Elohim Priesthood.  
And I am returned.  
The darkness knows me,  
And it knows I am coming.  
Oh, how they fear me.  
How they fear my Light.  
And well they should,  
For I will destroy their malevolent agendas  
Once and for all.  
They shall not rise again  
To control the human reality.  
I will take this reality  
Well beyond their reach.  
So hear me now and heed my call  
All ye who are assembled here  
To restore that which was torn asunder so long ago.  
Awaken, arise, remember who you are.*

*Here I come.  
I am Light.  
I am the Lady of Light.  
Watch me carve a swathe  
Through the fabric of darkness  
That shrouds and cloaks  
And characterises the human experience.  
Watch me.  
And watch out  
Because here I come.*

## *The Army of Light*

*The ground was hard underfoot. So hard was the ground under her feet that it was cracked in places, and the cracks were wide, long, and dangerous so that she was forced to watch, carefully, where she put her feet to take each new step.*

*And so, concentrating as she was on the ground under her feet, it had taken her a while to realise she was walking on the dry, parched bed of a river, the river itself long ago dried up, disappeared, gone, leaving the earth to become hard and parched and in desperate, desperate need of the unique nourishment provided by the river's water. The surface of the ground was dusty, too, so that, as she walked, she was forced to hold her gown and cloak high off the ground. The dust was fine and black, as black as the earth itself, and the black dust would have stained the beautiful, delicate material of the hem of her gown had she allowed it to drag along the ground, hence her need to hold it clear.*

*So it was not an easy walk, navigating the cracks and rocks on the river bed, watching where she put her feet whilst trying to hold her gown and cloak clear of the earth underfoot. With her focus thus drawn, she had not the time nor the inclination to study the landscape through which she walked, which was probably just as well given the fact that the landscape around her was as dry, as parched, as arid as the river bed. There was certainly no beauty in the landscape, and the landscape was, too, utterly devoid of colour.*

*There was, in fact, very little diversity and only a few minor variations in the tones of the black and dark grey that characterised the scene. Every now and then, she glanced up and noticed some new feature in the scenery on either side of her, a large rock or a tree, for example. The trees that could be seen, occasionally, on the edge of the river bank were black, seemingly charred, completely devoid of even a single leaf, their branches jagged silhouettes, like arms reaching towards the sky with gnarled, twisted, desperate, blackened*

*fingers. Once or twice, the seeming desperation in the trees hijacked her focus, and she was forced to stop so she could study and absorb the sight. Whenever she did, sadness filled her so completely she was forced to tear her eyes away and concentrate, once again, on the ground under her feet.*

*She was not alone as she walked through the desolate landscape. He, her wolf, moved with her, sometimes jumping lithely over the rocks and cracks that punctuated the river bed, sometimes trotting quietly beside her, sometimes deviating to explore the larger rocks and crevices further up the bank of the dry river bed. Always, when he deviated to explore something seen, or a scent caught, he came back to her, returning to walk beside her once again. They traversed the landscape together in silence, externally and internally. Silence, eerie and unnatural, hung over the landscape, so neither felt inclined to break it.*

*She fitted into the landscape perfectly, her dark blue cloak appearing almost black against the backdrop of the dark, dry river bed, but he did not. In fact, his silvery, blue-grey fur, lighter in places and darker in other places on his body, was a stark contrast to the darkness and drabness of the landscape around them both. And, while her features were hidden in the shadow of the hood of her cloak, his were revealed so that the blue of his eyes, when he turned them her way, became like sparks of vibrant colour against the backdrop of the drab scenery. Whenever she caught sight of his blue eyes, she could not help but smile. He seemed blissfully unaware that he did not appear to belong in this landscape in which they found themselves, or, if he was aware, he chose to ignore the fact.*

*Always, when she smiled, her smile was heightened by the fact of him being able to draw a smile up and out of her even in this tragic landscape. Her smile, when it appeared, was definitely out of place there in the blackened, desolate, lifeless landscape, but none would have noticed had they been watching her because her smile was hidden in the shadow of the hood of her cloak,*

*The unnatural silence – the silence of death and destruction and desolation and despair*

*and decay – and the equally unnatural appearance of the landscape were not the only eerie features that characterised the whole scene, and her experience of it, for that matter.*

*Worse, by far, she thought, was the darkness that shrouded them, making the way they walked even more difficult to navigate. The darkness that shrouded them was not the darkness of night. Had it been so, then perhaps they would have benefited from the silvery, luminous light of the moon to light their steps and guide their way. But neither sunlight nor moonlight were able to break through the darkness, such was its hold. The darkness prevailed, completely. It dominated, and it was implacably resistant to the power of either the sun or the moon to break its domination and light the landscape.*

*She paused to raise her eyes and look at the darkness, concentrating on it for a moment, focussing on it. Her wolf bounded ahead of her, but stopped, too, when he realised she was no longer following him. Ever patient, he turned his head to watch her and wait. Her eyes scoured the sky, raking it in the hope of finding some sign, even if small, of a fracture or a tear or even a thinning in the veil that covered the land. Her eyes scoured the sky even though she was very well aware she hoped in vain. If she lost hope, though, she knew she, too, would be in danger of succumbing to the despair that accompanied the darkness and desolation of the landscape, and if she succumbed to the same despair, she would struggle to keep walking. She could not let that happen.*

*The darkness, she knew, held sway so completely because it was deliberately and powerfully sustained and perpetuated by forces of Darkness – black magic, to be precise – a darkly magical manipulation of energy. For, you see, the darkness that covered the land was there courtesy of something dark and heavy and malevolent that hung low in the sky like a blanket of thick, dark, heavy thunder clouds. The veil that shrouded the landscape was not clouds but, rather, something far, far more sinister. 'Twas a veil conceived of, contrived and fabricated by an unimaginable malevolence, and it was that same malevolent Darkness that was holding it in place. The veil that shrouded the landscape was designed*

*with such evil intent and purpose in mind, with the most dire of consequences, that the human realm suffered greatly as a result, hence the darkness and desolation of the landscape.*

*That was why she and her wolf were there, walking the dry, hard river bed. That was why she had come to this place of utter, abject darkness and desolation. She was there to pierce that veil of darkness, to set free the Light once again, and to restore nourishment to the landscape. She lowered her eyes to look at her wolf. He looked back, steadily, his blue eyes holding hers as was usual whenever they communicated in the deeper recesses of their joined minds. To anyone watching, the look they exchanged was long and steady and completely silent. But the look of a thing can, of course, be deceiving, and usually is. In truth, though silence continued to surround them, there was much said. Yes, indeed, much was said. Much passed between them, but what passed between them was for them and them alone. What passed between them cannot and must not be revealed.*

*She nodded once, slowly, or maybe she bowed her head. 'Twas impossible to tell the difference, so completely did her cloak and its hood cover her, hide her. But, whatever he said to her, she resolutely continued her navigation of the difficult terrain.*

*Satisfied, he turned and continued to jump lithely over the rocks and cracks that punctuated the river bed.*

~

*Even though her focus on the ground underfoot was pure, uninterrupted by wayward, stray thoughts as she maintained a heightened vigilance, she still knew something had caught the attention of her wolf. She sensed the stillness about him even before she hesitated and looked up. He was a good dozen or so long strides in front of her, with his back to her, and he was, indeed, still . . . very still. Half standing on a rock and half standing on the ground beside the rock so that his back legs were below the rock and his front legs were on it, he was higher up on the dry river bank,*

*She could sense the tension in him, but when she looked at him, she could see it in his stance and in every limb of his body. The effect of his stance elevated him to a greater height than her so that when she joined him, she had to look up at him, and he had to look down at her. Again, they exchanged that strange, long, steady look that was unique to them, and then she jerked her head around, looking up the river bed and, beyond it, to a point almost on the horizon.*

*What she saw there made her stare and caused the same tension to permeate her own limbs. For a long, elongated moment, the two, she and her wolf, became as if temporarily frozen, both with their vision fixed and transfixed.*

*What they were fixated on was a tower, and even though it, too, like the landscape around it, appeared like a black silhouette, it was still beautiful. Resembling a lotus flower, it was tall, much taller than anything around it, the top of it appearing, even from this distance, like the partially opened, partially closed inner petals of the core ring of the flower. A circular lip supported the petals of the flower, the way a saucer supports a teacup, and the entire top of the structure sat on top of the long stem of the tower itself.*

*The whole structure seemed, to her, slightly incongruous – something so beautiful suddenly appearing in the jagged, harsh, dark and desolate landscape – but, still, the tower, like everything around it, appeared dead, and therein lay the source of the tension in both her and her wolf. The tower should not have been dead or empty or lifeless, as it was. On the contrary, the tower should have been wondrously, joyously, vibrantly alive. The tower should not have been a dark silhouette, as it was. On the contrary, the tower should have been giving Light to the landscape around it for leagues in every direction. The tower should have been a beacon, a powerful beacon, in the darkness, and that it was not was a testament to the power of the black magic that held the dark veil in place.*

*Again, the two, she and her wolf, exchanged their unique look. The Darkness and its black magic was powerful, yes. There was no disputing that sad and tragic fact, especially*

given the evidence in the landscape around them. But the power of the dark magic was no match for the combined power of their Light – hers and her wolf's. The reign of the Darkness had come to an end. It just did not know it yet. It would soon enough, though. Yes, very soon the Darkness would know its rule was over, its hold on the human experience ended. And even now, the Darkness knew she was coming and so was ever-vigilant, ever on the lookout for her and her wolf. The Darkness was searching . . . nay, scouring the landscape for her, but it would, she knew, utterly fail in its objective to find her and snuff her out.

For now, she was hidden, cloaked, disguised, and even were their eyes to turn to this part of the landscape, they would miss her – her and her wolf – for those of the Darkness had not the wherewithal nor the power to see him at all. They were nearly home, she and her wolf. They were so nearly there, because, you see, the tower was their destination, hers and her wolf's. Home was in sight. At last, she knew where she was going. At long last, she knew where he had, for so long, been leading her. The Darkness was too late. It could not stop her now, she and her wolf.

Yes, the tower was their destination. And once they reached it, the changes wrought in the darkness would irrevocably alter the landscape. How, I hear you ask? How would they change the landscape once they reached the tower and brought it back to wonderful, beautiful, vibrant life? Well may you ask. Perhaps you should continue to follow their journey, hers and her wolf's, because soon, very soon, all will be revealed and you will have your answer . . . .

Resolutely, she took her eyes from the tower, lowered her vision and continued her navigation of the difficult terrain. Her wolf lithely and with renewed vigour jumped from the rock and began leaping, ahead of her, over the rocks and cracks that punctuated the river bed.

~

*She lifted her eyes from the ground again and hesitated while she looked up, surprised by how much distance they'd covered in a relatively short period of time. But then, she reminded herself, time behaved differently here. No, she corrected herself, smiling slightly, it would be more accurate to say her perception of time was different here.*

*Looking up, up, the tower loomed over her in the darkness, and from this close, she could appreciate how tall it really was. No wonder it dominated the landscape. No wonder it could be seen for leagues and leagues in every direction. Removing her eyes from it, she looked around for her wolf. He had, of course, anticipated her. Looking down on her from the top of the river bank, he instructed her on the best way to climb up and out. She followed his instructions perfectly, and easily made her way up and out of the dry river bed to stand beside him.*

*For a moment, they both stood looking up at the tower, revealed as it was in all its glory now that they were standing under it. At its base, there were a group of ancient temples, like the temples of the ancient world, with entrances, facing every cardinal direction, and with steps leading to tall columns. The temples were built as arms that extended in the four directions so that they were, when seen from the flower at the top of the tower, an equal-sided cross – that cross known, correctly, as the Aquarian Cross – the cross of perfect balance.*

*If the Aquarian Cross is the cross of perfect balance, what does that say about the cross of the Christians . . . ? A cross of imbalance, wouldn't you say? That is why it has to go. As a symbol, it would be powerful anyway, but as a symbol, a talisman, of death and entrapment that is worshipped and venerated, it is a profound, darkly magical and powerful tool of manipulation, and it is one of those darkly magical talismans that has human consciousness trapped. And, it has characterised and dominated the last two thousand years of human existence. As I said, it has to go. There will be no place for it or talismans like it in the new paradigm of existence, and it will be replaced with a more*

appropriate symbol – one of *Light and freedom* – so you'd best prepare yourselves for that.

*Back to her, she who will pierce the veil of darkness and bring back the Light.*

*Spiralling up around the stem of the tower, she could see the staircase that curled up and around it, like a snake curled around the trunk of a tree. The staircase was ornate, with an ornate wrought-iron railing, and the staircase was open to the elements. She sighed inwardly as she followed it with her eyes, releasing the materials of her cloak and gown. She would have to climb the staircase. There was another way up to the top of the tower, but she wasn't quite ready to make use of that way just yet. Soon, she would be ready, but not right now.*

*Holding her cloak and gown clear once again, she began to walk towards the entrance of the temple that faced them. Her wolf followed her, no longer paying heed to the scents and crevices around him. He stayed close to her, almost touching her, and he walked as slowly as she did.*

*When they ascended the steps to the temple, and then passed through the forest of columns that guarded the entrance, they were both struck, she and her wolf, by the emptiness within. As with most temples, this one was made primarily of marble, but the beauty of the marble was hidden in the dimness and darkness of the temple's interior. She thought the temple was made of different coloured marble but couldn't be sure, so dark and dim was it. And the emptiness was like a vacuum – a vacuum that had long ago sucked all the ambience, the atmosphere, into itself, so that the temple was left like an empty, discarded, forgotten vessel.*

*His footsteps as they continued to walk deeper into the temple were silent, but hers echoed in the silence, the stillness and the emptiness of the room, and the echo hit the stone walls and bounced back at her and her wolf like staccato beats.*

*They passed a beautiful mosaic pool in the floor, the tiny, blue and white tiles only just visible in the dimness, the pool completely empty of water. She thought the pool would*

once have been a fountain so that the sound of running water would have filled the room. Beautiful. She knew each mosaic inlay in each of the floors of the different arms of the overall temple complex held a different element. This should've held the element of water, and in the others, fire, a garden for earth, and a decorative, spinning fan for air. It was appropriate she and her wolf had chosen this one as their entrance point. Water was her element, after all.

At the back of the marble room, a row of columns marked the entrance to a courtyard, in the centre of which was a series of circular steps that led to the very base of the stem of the tower. As they passed into the courtyard, little stones crunching under her slippers, she could see there were actually two staircases that circled the stem of the tower, one for ascending the tower and one for descending it. Since there would be no one else using the staircases or the tower, for that matter, it didn't matter which of the staircases she used to go up into the tower, so she chose the one closest.

The steps of the staircase were made of the same ornate wrought iron, and they were wider on their outer edge, thinner on their inner edge, the edge closest to the tower itself. So, again having to hold her gown and cloak clear, this time for a different reason, she trod on the outer edge of the steps where they were widest. With one hand she held the materials of her gown and cloak, and with the other, she held the railing for support. Her wolf had chosen to follow her rather than go ahead of her. Without asking him, she sensed he wanted to keep an eye on her and knew he would instruct her from behind if necessary. She hoped he would concentrate on his own steps and not hers or he might miss a step. That would be disastrous.

Around and around they circled, spiralling up around and around the tower, and with every step they took, they were elevated just that little bit higher above the surrounding landscape. And although the elevation meant they became more and more removed from it, the widespread desolation in the landscape was more and more in evidence as more and

more of it was revealed. After many revolutions around the tower, the desolation began to weigh heavily upon her, and she was forced to remove her eyes from the landscape, concentrating, instead, on the steps and the staircase in front of her.

When they emerged from the staircase, they were on one side of the circle formed of the partially opened, partially closed petals that resembled the inner core of petals in a lotus flower. She took a moment to assess their new situation, finally able to release the materials of her gown and cloak. The space around them was large, far larger than it appeared when looking up at the top of the tower from below, but the space was empty. The purpose of the tower did not require furniture to fulfil it or to make anyone comfortable, nor did the tower require anything else to aid its functionality. It was what it was. It needed no adornments.

She began to move around the edge of the space, her wolf still staying close to her and moving with her, so that she and he could look out between the petals of the flower. Depending on which direction she looked, the river bed she and her wolf had walked in either disappeared as it snaked close to the tower underneath them or continued towards the horizon, breaking the monotony of the landscape as it did so.

As had been the case when in the river bed, there was very little variation in the colour of the scenery, but the contours, appearing darker and darker still depending on the shape of the features of the landscape, she could make out. In nearly every direction, she could see the outline of the mountains in the distance, and between the riverbed and the distant mountains on both sides of the river bed, surrounding the tower, there was a dry, flat landscape, all the same and broken only, occasionally, by the appearance of those same trees she had seen on the edge of the riverbed. These trees, too, appeared like black, desperate silhouettes, reaching with their jagged branches to a sky that afforded them no light or nourishment whatsoever.

So, beyond the river bed, there was nothing of the landscape, nothing but flat, dry,

*parched, cracked, bare earth.*

*But! There wasn't nothing **in** the landscape . . . .*

*Between the trees, small lights littered the landscape, dotted across the vast, flat plains, from not-quite-at-the-base of the tower all the way to the mountains that shaped the horizon. The little lights appeared to her like thousands upon thousands of little fireflies in the darkness, although still, not flitting around as they would had they really been fireflies. They were camp fires, and around them all, from her vantage point high up in the tower, she could make out the darker masses of those who sat or lay around the flames. Those closer to the tower appeared to her as black masses or silhouettes tinged with the light of the fire they were sitting or lying near, as if they were figures in a painting that the artist had outlined with a faint nimbus of light. All around the tower, surrounding it, there were so many of them they were far too numerous to even contemplate counting, and they spread way, way off into the distance.*

*Many of them, most of them, in fact, were curled up in warm blankets, huddled close to the flames for added warmth, sound asleep. But many, too, were awake. Those who were awake were sitting up beside the fires, eating food from beaten metal plates or clutching mugs of warm tea, wrapped in thick, dark cloaks for warmth. Many of them were chatting quietly to companions, but some were polishing pieces of armour or honing swords or sharpening arrows or tightening the strings on bows. Some were reading, others playing cards or dice.*

*Of those who were awake, most sat in silence, contemplating the flames, lost in their own thoughts. As she watched them, she concentrated her focus on those who were awake, noting the fact of them being awake but waiting and making no attempt to awaken their sleeping companions. In fact, whatever activity they were undertaking, they seemed to do so quietly and carefully, not wishing to disturb their sleeping companions. She noted the fact to her wolf. They both, she and her wolf, understood, and they both knew why those*

*who slumbered were left to their slumber. She probably would've preferred to have remained asleep in their situation, too.*

*She watched them for a long time, moving around the circle to watch different ones of them. Watching them, a unique tension tightened her throat, causing it to burn with pain. Those encamped on the plain below her were special, special souls, all, without exception. They were courageous and brave, loyal, devoted, faithful souls, all. These were souls of incredible beauty and Light and strength, precious souls, all. Precious souls, beloved souls.*

*What happens when a queen bee is removed from her hive? The hive collapses, does it not? It implodes, and it scatters to the fore winds, unless another queen can be found to hold it together. Without a queen, the hive loses its beating heart, its raison d'être, its purpose and its ability to function as it should, and so it scatters, shatters and ceases to be. Well, these brave souls encamped on the plain below were her hive, but instead of collapsing, scattering in her absence, they had retained their faith and their faithfulness, their sense of community and their sense of belonging to something greater than themselves, and they still very much existed as a complete whole.*

*They had remained absolutely and implacably loyal, and they had waited for her return for aeons, patiently, never waning in their determination to be ready, like those famously-prepared bridesmaids awaiting the bridegroom with their extra oil in that famous biblical story. Did you think he was talking to everyone? Really? Most of you have no idea to what he was referring. You think it's a good story, and you know it's important somehow, but you don't really know what he meant. He was talking to very specific souls, those capable of knowing and understanding, as rare as those souls are.*

*But such was the calibre of the collective soul, the spirit, of all those souls who were encamped on the plains around the tower that they had awaited her in absolute darkness, probably mourning the Light as she had done. But still, they had waited. Not one had deserted. Not a single one of them had left or abandoned their cause.*

*Precious souls, all.*

*Finally, turning away from the plains surrounding the tower and its thousands of little camp fires, she knelt on the floor facing the centre of the circle and removed the hood of her cloak. He, her wolf, privy as he was to the inner workings of her, moved to offer her his support, touching her neck with his nose. The gesture made her smile, and she raised a hand to sink her fingers into the fur of his neck. She would be taking the greatest of risks in revealing herself, setting free her Light, here in this place, because they of the Darkness would see her easily and quickly once she revealed herself in this landscape. She knew it. Her wolf knew it.*

*In truth, they of the Darkness existed not in the lower dimension but in this higher one, and they were watching for her, ever vigilant, knowing she had always planned to return. They were expecting her. So she had to be sure. She had to know she was ready because once she revealed herself, they would know where and who she was, not in this, the higher dimension, but in the lower one, and if she wasn't ready, she would be vulnerable.*

*Well, unfortunately for those of the Darkness, she was ready. That was why she and her wolf were there. They had journeyed long and far to be ready, and the journey had been arduous, characterised by enormous pain. But he had painstakingly and patiently led her here, often waiting for her to catch up, and she had followed him willingly and steadfastly. Now, here in this place, it was time for her to step into her transcendent power.*

*It was time.*

*She and her wolf exchanged one of their long, steady looks, saying much in the silence, communicating in their own unique way, using their own unique language. After a long moment, she nodded, and, removing her hand from his fur, stood. Undoing the tie of her cloak, she let it slide from her shoulders so that it fell in a pool of dark-blue fabric at her feet. Underneath it, her gown appeared as though spun from bright, luminous, lacy*

moonlight. Its sleeves were fitted and long, almost reaching her fingers. Its bodice hugged her body to her hips and then fell in glittering, sparkling folds around her legs. Its neckline was low and scooped, exposing the luminosity of her skin. She wore a necklace of moonstones around her neck, and those same moonstones decorated her partly caught up and partly unbound hair. She was beautiful, but only her wolf was there to witness the unveiling of her beauty.

She exchanged another long look with him, and then he turned, preceding her into the very centre of the circle formed of the petals of the lotus flower. The centre of the circle was marked with another circle of those same tiny blue and white mosaic tiles she had seen in the temple below. She had seen these circles often in her visions, but always, they were damaged. Not so this one. This one was perfectly intact and perfect in the beauty of its inner pattern.

In its very centre, she stood with one foot slightly in front of the other for perfect balance, bowed her head and closed her eyes. He, her wolf, sat beside her, ever-so-slightly touching her so that she would know he was there . . . always there. Gathering her essence, her inner being, and fortifying the strength of her Voice, she thought long and hard about what she would say to them, all those who were encamped on the plains around the tower, because once she set free her Light, they would know what her message to them was. It would be carried to them in her Light. They would hear her speak, but not with their physical sense of hearing, their physical ears.

When she was ready, she opened her eyes, raised her head, and lifted her arms out beside her, palms up. She wasn't sure what to expect so she thought it might happen slowly, like something that builds up, gathering momentum. Not so. She and her wolf had worked hard to prepare, and they had prepared well. In an instant, her Light filled the circle around them both, her and her wolf. Then it filled the inside of the flower, and then even the flower no longer contained it. When she turned her head to look along one arm,

her right arm, it was as if a spotlight was shining on her, so bright was the Light. But the Light was not painful. She smiled, noticing the incredible detail in the sleeve of her gown.

“Ground zero,” she said clearly, knowing those encamped on the plains below would hear and understand, for her message was carried to them in the Light.

Her Light broke free of the tower's lotus flower and rolled, like a powerful shock wave, out across the landscape in every direction. As it rolled across the plains, it touched all those encamped there, those asleep and those awake. Whether awake or asleep, they felt it like a whisper in the deepest recesses of their consciousness. But those who were awake and aware also saw it, and some heard the whisper as if it was a sound that washed over them.

Regardless of what it was that caught their attention first, they all looked up. Light radiated across the landscape from the flower atop the tower, lighting the land, but it also formed a column of powerful Light that rose high into the air, piercing the veil of darkness above it, tearing a hole in the veil. And with the hole in the veil of darkness, sunlight spilled through, mingling with her Light, so that, for the first time in aeons, the sun's light began to caress the landscape, beginning, just beginning to nourish it.

Those who were already awake stopped what they were doing to look at the Light, putting down, or putting aside, whatever had held their focus, ceasing whichever activity they were engaged in, and they stood, facing the tower. Some just stared, but others leaned down to hasten the awakening of sleeping companions.

Their heightened awareness, and their suddenly focussed attention changed the energy among them as a whole, and the changed, charged energy and atmosphere spread and began to be felt by those whose slumber still clung to them, so that the last dregs of sleep fell away. And then they, too, stood. Like moths to the flame of her Light did they awaken, rise, and come closer, leaving the warmth and comfort of their own fires. They surged forward, towards the tower, changing the shape and texture of how they looked from the

vantage point of the tower. They became like a dark carpet covering the plains, or a forest, or like rows and rows and rows of dark, silhouetted soldiers standing to attention, side by side, all looking up.

She felt them, and she knew they were ready. They had been ready for aeons such was the calibre of their collective spirit, their transcendent intelligence, their loyalty and devotion to a common, powerful cause and a higher Purpose.

With the ever-changing texture as more and more of them awakened, stood, and moved forward, towards the tower, whispers, too, heard in the silence of the landscape, rippled out from the front of them, moving backwards through them like an out-of-control brush fire, reaching the outer edges of them.

"She has come . . . The Lady has come . . . She is here . . . She has ascended . . . She has risen from the abyss . . . The Lady has returned . . . She has come . . . She has mastered the separated third dimension . . . She has released the shackles that bind and entrap . . . She has returned . . . She walks among us once again . . . She has set free her Light . . . See it sweep across the landscape . . ."

She waited, sensing, allowing the whispers to sweep from front to back of them, gathering momentum as they went, because those whispers prepared them every bit as much as the sight of her Light touching the land and reaching high, high up to pierce the ugly veil of darkness. When she knew they were ready to hear her, she spoke.

"Once upon a time," she said, high up in the tower, knowing her words were carried to them in her Light, "an Elohim Priest turned his True Face upon the world, and the ripple effect of that incarnation has remained in the human experience, echoing through thousands of years of history and time. The Darkness tried to cover his Light, his truth, with a stolen myth, but they could not negate the power of him completely. They have only succeeded in diminishing it at best. But it can be restored, and so it will be. Such is the power of the Guardians when they choose to turn their True Face upon the world. And oh

*how the Darkness fears the truth of the Guardians. Oh how the Darkness fears the Light of the Guardians. And well they should, well they should . . . .”*

*She paused, savouring the truth of her own words.*

*“Because, if one can have such an effect, how much more so the many? How much more so the combined power and beauty and glory of us all, the Guardian Priesthood in its entirety? There has never been in existence a more powerful army. None can stand against it, especially one made entirely of shadows . . . .”*

*Again, she paused to allow her words to penetrate. And then she continued.*

*“Beautiful, brave, faithful souls of Light,” she said to them, “I thank you for your devotion to the Light. I thank you for your commitment to our very great Purpose. I thank you for your patience and your fortitude and your determination when you did not know what was happening or what had become of me. Special souls you are, all, and I thank you for your service. You are precious to me, most precious . . . .”*

*“Now, precious souls of Light, hear me. Come forth from your mundane lives. Shed your mundane identities the way one sheds a cloak no longer needed, for those lives and those identities no longer serve you. Let those identities fall from your shoulders.*

*“Arise, awaken, remember who you are. You have been biding your time, living your lives as best you can. But you have been awaiting my call, my summons, and you have been waiting for Destiny Herself to tap you on the shoulder. Now, feel my call stir your hearts and awaken your collective consciousness. Feel your destinies stir within you. See my Light in the darkness, know my Light.*

*“Come, take up the mantle of your very great destinies, for your destinies call to you now. Come, souls of Light, awaken, arise, join your Light to mine, merge your Light with mine.*

*“Feel the winds of change,” she said. “Let the winds of change stir your hearts at the deepest levels of you. Let the winds of change bring your hearts to life, so that they beat to*

*the rhythm of your very great destinies, the deepest Purpose for which you all exist. We will elevate the human experience, take it beyond the reach of those who would keep the human soul imprisoned, and we will tear the fabric of the Separated third dimension to shreds. We will restore that which was torn asunder so long ago.*

*“From the darkness of that reality, shall Light – our Light – come forth. We will restore this landscape to its former beautiful glory. We will restore creation . . . .”*

*Silently, all those who had been encamped on the plains surrounding the tower raised his or her right arm, fingers curled as if in a fist, or splayed, palm down, left hand laid flat against the chest in silent acknowledgement of her words, her summons, and in silent affirmation. They knew what must be done now. From high up in the tower, she sensed the forest of raised arms, their silent affirmation, and she altered her own position to reflect theirs, raising her right arm, fist closed, and laying her left hand over her breast.*

*Closing her eyes again, she said, “We serve the Light. Indeed, we **are** the Light. So awaken the Light within you now. Awaken your Light.*

*“Let us go to Work,*

*“We **will** prevail.”*

*As each soul encamped on the plains below the tower signalled his or her affirmation, his or her own Light was set free, and so Light swept across the plain, again, like an out-of-control brush fire. And, each individual became a column of Light, like hers, that further tore at the veil of darkness that shrouded the landscape. And the veil of darkness began to disintegrate, quickly, not slowly, becoming like fine dust that dissipated, swept away on the wind that whirled and eddied above the army.*

*The army itself, encamped on the plain, lost the look of dark silhouettes and became soldiers of Light, the beauty, colour and uniqueness of each member revealed. And the Light sweeping across the plains joined and merged with that of hers emanating from the tower. The landscape was changed.*

*And then, as Light swept across the landscape, altering its face, the sound of running, cascading water could be heard, distant at first, but rushing closer, filling the dry river bed . . . .*

*Not the End, rather, a new Beginning . . .*