

Rhiannon – Child of Twilight

Chapter 9

Love's Candor

When Jenna had first understood that Taliesin was to be made Rhiannon's Chosen and Second, it had been nearly as surprising to her as it was to Taliesin himself. Not that she didn't feel him to be worthy yet just like everyone else of the Bardic lifestyle, she assumed the Chosen would be someone who was at least a Council Member, if not one of Rhiannon's Advisors. Of course, Rhiannon had been an unusual case herself, being virtually 'raised' for the position since birth. And though there were histories in the Archives that bespoke some of the Bardic Heads had known their Chosen for years before the actual Choosing, the Chosen themselves was not told until the defining time when the Head knew their own reign was nearing its end. Therefore, a Chosen may well have been of lesser status when the Head knew their Successor and yet could gently guide and oversee their Choice, allowing a growth and maturity without the pressure and stress such knowledge would afford.

There were such strange circumstances that had brought Rhiannon into her role, so perhaps it should not seem so peculiar that she would choose in the manner that she did. And what did this really mean for Jenna? For Dylan? For the Bardic family of Lord Sean's Court? Taliesin swore that he loved her, more than he had ever loved anyone, and yet she sometimes wondered why. Why her? Who was Jenna? Especially now. Now when he would be deliberately bonded to Rhiannon and all that that would mean in duty, ritual and its consequence. Jenna knew the Histories of the Bards; anyone of Chief Bard Status had read the Histories, had memorized a fair amount and certainly understood the ramifications of what amounted to as a sacred union between the Head and their Chosen. A sacred union beyond and above any other known, for it was more akin the union of Divinity within the depths of the All.

Jenna did her best to be there for Taliesin as the Festivities went forward for Litha; to comfort, to be loving, to watch out for any signs of fever. She did what she could to help Erina with Jesse, though she felt sometimes a bit clumsy, as she had never had a child of her own. Erina always smiled and was patient, as happy for Jenna's company as anything else, enjoying being able to be part of the inner life of a Bardic household and listening to the beautiful music of Jenna's rather sultry voice. And Jenna had come to greatly take pleasure in her own place in this household as well as she tried to learn to be a bit of a mother to Jesse as much as Taliesin's companion and mate. Dylan, too, had fast become a close, brotherly friend that she counted and relied on, somehow making the household complete in its feel of family bonds and closeness.

Jenna had made relationships these last several months in a way she had never done in her life before. In a way she had always been afraid to before. Her childhood of a broken and scattered people, no matter that the village she finally found sanctuary in were good to her, still haunted her and made her forever wary. Even her training with the Bards did not seem to totally eradicate that part of her; at least in the sense that relationships could last. That friends once made could be friends that spanned a lifetime. Only this little group at the Court of Lord Sean and Taliesin had Jenna come to begin finding an easing of her restless dreams. What connections had she made she never could before? Could Taliesin himself be so powerful, as Dylan had once intimated?

When Taliesin had been summoned to stay three days in the rooms with Rhiannon, Mab and Kyle to truly begin the Bonding process, Jenna felt a terrible apprehension go through her that she knew she could not really expose. Yet, she could not help weeping some that night without Taliesin at her side and though she was being quiet in her

discomfort, Dylan became aware, coming into the room to sooth her. "I know this man." Said Dylan softly, stroking her hair and letting her release her anxiety in his arms. "He would never desert you. And he does not lie about what he feels. I know we all feel a little apprehension. But his feelings for you, I do not doubt."

Jenna sighed, remembering earlier words, "Yet, you said that he and I would have had a season or two, then parted ways."

"Jenna. Let us say, I 'know' when Maerdynn is truly in love. When his heart is 'given'. I saw him like this only once before in all the time I've known him. And it was she who decided the leaving. Not he."

Jenna looked at Dylan with a certain imploring in her eyes. "Branwen. Korwyn's mother?"

"No, actually. That was before my time. Perhaps her, too, I don't know. He claims so. And she, too, decided differently."

Frowning at this Jenna pulled away in thought. "Why, then? If he so loved them. Why would they leave?"

Dylan shrugged, smiling a little at Jenna's change in mental direction. "Lifestyle, I think. Not everyone desires this life, though we ourselves might have a little trouble imagining that." Having drawn a smile from her, Dylan stroked her face as he went on. "Though in honesty, one would have to say perhaps their love did not match his somehow. Anyway. I have real hopes myself anymore for the two of you. He loves you. Very much, Jenna. And so do I. You are family, now." He hugged her fully and firmly as if to show her the warmth there was for her.

"But... Why me?" She finally said in a tiny voice.

"Jenna, Jenna, Jenna." Dylan said with some concern. "Goodness, one. You know, it always really boils down to, you are you. There's no 'true' reason. The closest I could possibly come is that you do share lifestyle. After that. It's just you. Why do you love him? Do you really, honestly know? You could say a million things about what you like or love about him. But, it's still because he's Maerdynn. Just Maerdynn. Plain and simple. And that's it. That's all there really is."

Plain and simple. Plain and simple, Dylan had said and at the time it seemed to ease her greatly. Perhaps more than anything because she trusted Dylan, trusted his insight and instinct now that she had come to know him on such a daily basis as they jointly cared for the Court and often cared for Taliesin as well.

Yet, when Taliesin was called at last, called to go down for the Bonding accompanied Kyle, attired in a simple, homespun shift, Jenna's heart skipped as she watched him leave down the Greathouse halls. He glimpsed at her and smiled nervously as he sent a tentative tremor of energy that seemed to quickly embrace her. It caught her breath as she felt a warmth filter inside her as a tear trickled the edge of her eyes. He swallowed a little, it concerned him, too, but then he moved on as he must, with Kyle as his guide.

All that night she could not sleep, Dylan's great calico cat nestled in her arms as the animal used its own efforts to soothe with subtle purrs and warmth. Erina had also decided to stay, sleeping on makeshift, though comfortable bedding next to the baby's crib in the outer room. A gentle snore drifted in from the area, catching Jenna's ear for she had left the door cracked that she might hear anything if something might be amiss. Not currently involved with anyone, Dylan had also left his door cracked and soon Jenna could hear the subtlety of his soft breath in sleep as well. Sighing, Jenna pushed into the pillows around her, looking out the windows left open to allow some of the night's coolness to filter in. The fullness of the moon cast a certain amount of light across the room's images, creating an eerie sense of aloneness between each shadow cast. Pulling the cat to herself, Jenna leaned back in the bed, allowing her senses to touch in with the animal in her arms. The cat responded with an understanding, a certain healing and comfort, somehow telling Jenna she knew Jenna's mate was not here and that she realized it can be hard to be separated from loved one. The purr became like a healing salve that emitted from the animal's very being and finally Jenna's body relaxed enough that she fell into a grateful slumber. In her dreams

Jenna felt like she was surrounded by soft protecting fur that vibrated gently in an echo of healing that resounded deeply in her heart.

Near morning she woke back up, a strange sense of silence that almost startled her as Jenna's mind slid back to consciousness. Opening her eyes to the dim grayness, the cat still nestled near her, Jenna reached over and stroked the animal. "Thank-you, little one." She whispered. "I'll bet you could teach Mali a thing or two, eh?" Smiling a bit, Jenna moved from the bedcovers, removed her sleeping clothes in favor of a simple green shift and trousers. "Still." She sighed, then looked back at the cat as she pulled on some slippers shoes. "Perhaps if I go about a bit. Find breakfast, check in at the Runner's area. There are things to do and that, too, may help." The cat looked up at her with half an eye, seeming to smile. Petting the top of the animal's head as she left, Jenna gave a final remark. "Don't be disturbing Dylan, now. Or Erina, or Kymon, either. It's early, early yet. Be good, one. Let the sun be coming up." The cat seemed to wink a bit causing Jenna to almost laugh as she shook her head. "Sweet Missy. Be good." With that, Jenna quietly left the room and then the Bardic apartments themselves, knowing the calico would do as had been requested.

After checking about and realizing that for the most part the Greathouse was still commingling in dream, Jenna went to the kitchens, trying to decide if she might try eating something though her stomach hardly bade her with any need to eat. A few servants rustled about, preparing breads and starting soup causing Jenna to avoid the area where ovens and fires made their heat an uncomfortable presence even in the early morning airs. She opted for the area just out from the actual working kitchens where people might sit on long benches with equally long tables. It was a place people came and went during the day and night to grab a bite or sometimes sit and chat between chores and duties. It was the communal eating area, not the more formal hall where dinners were often served the House's family and guests. Being Court Bards, Jenna, Dylan as well as Taliesin, often ate in the formal hall; yet Jenna preferred the casual and relaxed air near the kitchens, watching people come and go with the variant bustle of human life.

Doors that led to the outside were open to the morning light in an effort to ease some of the oven's heat as were whatever windows existed there. Gazing about to the outside, Jenna sat a moment near the doors trying to decide if she'd partake of anything or not. Noting the movements of sentries as they walked about checking over things, sometimes pausing as they met up with one another to exchange thoughts and directions, Jenna's eyes also seemed pulled to the stables. "Ah, yes." She smiled. "My friends." Deciding that to be her best plan, Jenna got up again just as one of the servants offered her a bit of morning gruel. "No thanks, Henna. Maybe in a bit." The servant shrugged as she moved off and Jenna got up to leave.

The morning was heavy with dew and the potent fragrance of wild flowers seemed to pervade as Jenna made her way to the stables. As she neared, the scent of animal and leather met her as well as a gentle whicker or two in greeting in recognition of a friend. Though stable hands were already rustling about to tend to the animals' needs, Jenna asked, "So, who'd like a little extra attention this morning?" By this time all the humans present knew this Bard was not speaking to them and were hardly surprised as she moved to a particular animal remarking, "Ah, yes. Had a hard day yesterday, eh, Jester? Let me see to you, then." With that, Jenna picked up some curry brushes and began some slow, methodical strokes along the horse's body.

As Jenna worked diligently at this chosen task other figures on foot moved to the kitchens coming from the direction of the gates outside. Bardic Council Members, their bodies clad in robes of deep forest green were returning from the night's ritual seeking a respite and refreshment. Now only three Members sat outside the hut in the woods below the Greathouse to be relieved in three hours by the others, a cycle that would be maintained until the Head and her Chosen returned to the Greathouse themselves. Among those who sought the kitchens was Mab, the one who would not rejoin the cycle, for though considered a Member of Council and having a fair and equal duty to be present at the Bonding Ritual, was not a Bard and could not hold the energy in the prescribed manner needed for

maintainance now that the main ritual was over. A tiredness drew across her face, but it had a personal depth not seen on the other faces, a certain difficulty and some sorrow. She knew her lover well, at least she thought she did and this new cast of the die confused her. What had she expected of this ritual, really? What was it really going to mean?

Sitting on one of the benches, some gruel, fruit and a hot cup of tea to help break the fast she and the others had been required for the ritual, Mab caught herself slightly tearing and biting at her lip a bit. She wished Kyle had come up with them, but he had remained for the first watch, being one of the strongest Members energy-wise. Besides, he was Rhiannon's Chief Advisor and it was rather expected of him. In fact, the other two were Advisors as well, as Rhiannon maintained five, the other two being almost like alternatives in their duties to the Head. Yet, they would be part of the second watch along with a fairly new Member named Gwen, who though young for a Council Member, was proving to have great strength and resilience.

One of the other two Advisors, a tall man with light hair and an open face, sat across Mab, watching her with understanding. Mab's eyes were closed, her hands about the steaming cup. As his watch would be within a couple hours, the man chose not to eat at this time, only a cup of tea before him. He fingered the cup a moment, and then reached over to touch Mab's hand. "Mab." He spoke gently in a near whisper.

Drawing in a breath, Mab slowly opened her eyes again as a tear glinted her cheek. "It is alright Pwyll. I'll be all right... It is not like she has not been Bonded before. Nor could I ever have been her Chosen." She spoke as a brave smile drew across her face.

"But, it is under such unusual circumstances... None of us can totally understand what all this shall mean. Yet..."

"Yes. She has told me so many times. I am her heart's chosen. I know." She sighed. "I know. Magickal relationships are not private relationships." Mab sipped at her tea in an intentional move to ease a certain tremor inside. "But sometimes they can be the same."

Pwyll frowned and looked back at Mab seriously. "Not in this case, Mab. You 'know' that."

Not sure how to feel, Mab looked off away from Pwyll watching out the door to the outside that had been left open to help mitigate the temperature inside. As she did so, her senses caught movement in the stables as her eyes noted the shimmer of early lights. After a moment or so she recognized some of the energy that touched her. "Ah." She breathed. "You, too, Sister. Perhaps." Standing, Mab smiled at Pwyll, though her eyes remained a bit sad. "Let someone else have my breakfast, will you? I shall return in a bit, but by then this may turn cold."

"Where are you going?" Pwyll asked carefully.

"It's alright, friend. There is someone whose heart reflects a similar sense of concern. Perhaps we may ease each other. Perhaps I would have been the wiser to have befriended her before now." With that, Mab stood and moved to the door as Pwyll nodded a little, understanding of whom Mab must be speaking.

For several moments Mab just stood near the stables' entrance, her dark hair a glittering raiment as the first rays of the sun lightly touched upon her. The dark green of her robe and the paleness of her skin made her look as Eldritch as her soul surely was. And some of the stable hands felt a wariness as they noticed her. Yet, her focus was not on them as she watched another green clad woman, though more simply dressed, work a kind of magick about a weary and grateful animal.

Finally Mab chose to move near the stall that Jenna occupied, "You have such a wonderful gift to be able to speak with our furred and feathered friends." Mab said quietly so as not to startle the other woman. "I hear a certain 'whispering' around them, but nothing I honestly understand. I envy you that."

Only a slight show of surprise glinted in Jenna's eyes as she looked up and continued to groom. "I don't know why I have this. This ability. To converse with animals.

Sometimes plants, too. It's just always been there. It took me a good while as a child to realize not everyone did so. Though the animals tried to indicate as such to me often enough."

Mab smiled widely despite herself. "How wonderful... and what a serene picture you make, so attuned to your animal friend as you groom him."

"I don't feel serene." Jenna sighed deeply as her hands shook slightly from the reminder that Mab had now created in her.

"No. Nor I." Spoke Mab frankly as she chose to sit on a low stool by the wall of the horse's stall. "But, you have such a delightful spirit. No wonder he loves you so."

Furrowing her brow some, Jenna quit her strokes to look more directly at the other woman. "Do you truly think so?"

Arching her eyebrows, Mab responded with a certain amount of surprise. "Why should you wonder? Even the Mother, even Rhiannon was surprised at the power and bond between the two of you. I have watched him, as I might; the impact touches me as well. But the love I see in his eyes when he looks at you is unmistakable. I admit the Bonding is not an easy thing for me. Yet, I am solid in my faith of Rhiannon's love for me. And I 'know' the love between you and Taliesin is as strong. Perhaps, even as old."

Putting the curry brushes down, Jenna came over to stand by Mab, biting at her lip, her thoughts a bit tangled. "Dylan says I must realize that Maerdyann loves me simply 'because'. Simply because I am me."

"Wise man. But Dylan struck me that way from the first." Smiled Mab tentatively.

"It's his training. He... was trained to be... a Wise Man." Jenna said haltingly realizing Mab probably didn't mean it quite that way.

"Ah." Mab replied, quickly grasping Jenna's remark and passing it off with an understanding nod. "Well, yes. I should have guessed. He is good for both of you, I expect."

"He's a dear friend to Maerdyann. And to me."

"He needs his own mate, though." Spoke Mab in an offhanded manner, not sure why she even remarked it.

"Yes. He probably does." Smiled Jenna, a little more relaxed than she had been. "Sometimes he forgets his needs. And he shouldn't. He's a very loving person."

"We all have our own timing. I'm sure he'll find someone... But, do encourage him a bit. I sense he almost dotes on both of you when there are others who might like the chance to dote on him." Far more relaxed, Mab appraised Jenna a bit more. "You are a lovely thing, you know. Your life force hums with great Earth awareness. Do not wonder so much. I suspect you help Taliesin be more grounded, more 'here'. Attached to Earth and Sky. There is adventure and freedom in you, too. I like that. It makes you more attractive than you know."

Blushing slightly, Jenna nearly stumbled over her words. "Are they done? The Ritual, I mean. The Bonding."

Looking off into space Mab replied. "The Bonding is complete." A note of seriousness re-entered her voice as she continued, "But the Head and her Chosen remain for a time with Members of the Council maintaining and monitoring their energies as they return to normalcy, though I do not know for how long. They may be back by this evening, or it could take a couple days... It was an unusual Bond, it may take some time. Yet, neither had any real difficulty... I admit, it was a strong Bond... But, both of us must have faith in our own bonds for they are woven with our hearts." Suddenly receiving a full impact of Mab's energy, Jenna sat beside the other woman and hugged her to herself. Mab laid her head on Jenna's shoulder and lightly closed her eyes as Jenna rested her own head back on Mab's. They sat that way a long while seeming to draw upon each other's energies, recognizing a new sense of friendship in each other that was like to last them the rest of their lives.

Corryn felt some sorry for Anwir the night Megan had summoned him in a cave whose energies allowed Megan undetected contact. To find that Rhiannon had chosen to name Taliesin in such a fashion and to hear it from the very source whom Megan had charged with despoiling Taliesin's stay in the human world was nearly more than Megan could contain. "I've a mind to cast you into the shadows that you might eat the dust of human horrors and despair for eternity like some mindless worm!" She raged, "Corryn can tell you just how wonderful such a state would be!" She spat, her eyes large and gleaming with a deadly light.

"My liege..." Anwir trembled in the portal Megan had created in a small fire. A small dark Elf in disheveled array, as if just awoken from the depths of sleep, Anwir seemed confused as much as frightened by Megan's confrontation. "There are others who know to help him. And he, too, has power. I will continue to call him, to pull. Surely..."

Corryn sat in the shadows watching, the gleam of his eyes the only true appearance of his presence, yet Anwir was aware of the silent being well enough. Megan had turned away from Anwir as if deeply disgusted by the Elve's sight, yet Corryn saw her mien to be more thoughtful than purely angry. "You will stay your course." She finally said, having let Anwir stew in fear for several moments. "Tell me all he does. Bedevil him all you can. Win him home. And if he proves too strong, then at least give me information and I shall find recourse myself." She had said this in a low, deep growl that gave out pronounced vibrations causing shimmers of fear that affected Corryn as much as Anwir. Corryn had guessed before that Megan must be an Elven Sorceress of some note and strength, yet now she seemed to draw on a great, unguessed force as she rumbled. Her voice a seeming channel from elsewhere, as if something beyond reached through to send icy tentacles within his chest, Corryn swallowed impulsively as Megan turned back to Anwir with an evil smile. "Go... Do... Bring me news. Be ready to do whatever service I ask." Shakily Anwir bowed, then faded within the flames as if he had melted from within the sparks themselves.

Watching Megan as she chose to sit down near the fire clothed in only a loose, light robe, somehow giving off the impression of being vulnerable and small to Corryn, he frowned and exclaimed, "Who are you?"

"Who am I?" She replied, looking up at him, a coyness in her demeanor. "My Corryn. What can you mean?" He caught the slight sliver of dangerous depth that lit her eyes, but as she patted the place beside her and smiled openly, he let himself relax as he did what she requested.

"You are an enigma." He had ventured as he sat, noting that she only looked at him in an almost passive shyness.

"Do you fear me, Corryn?" She asked in a little voice. When he did not answer, when he turned his face to look off into the fire and beyond, she said, "I would not have you fear me." There was an unexpected honesty in this statement that surprised both of them as Corryn turned his face back to her and she had looked in his eyes with a certain graveness. "Do not, Corryn. Do not fear me."

"You are not as you seem, Megan. And I am not certain at all what that seeming is. I have come to think there is something more here than an Elven Sorceress and her claims. But I admit that I can not guess it." He breathed in deeply of the air though he hardly needed it.

"Tonight I bring you gifts, my one." Her face had a glow of innocence that made Corryn narrow his eyes as she smiled widely. "You have learned well and there is a need to begin to speed our pace a bit, I think. Perhaps in time I may gain the ear of Briton's king. But for now..." These were half thoughts that Megan quickly realized Corryn did not fully understand. She shook her head at him. "You 'need' companions. You need to train others. Command them. I know this. You were a leader once. I know. I chose you because of it. And you shall lead again. Yes."

Corryn's heart raced, a hopeful trickle moved itself within. "You shall teach me, now? To make others. To spill my blood upon them and make them as I am. To make more

like me?”

“Ah, yes. Like you... yet not.” She grinned, the firelight falling upon her, giving a feralness to her eyes. She took a cup near her and placed it between them. “When I ‘made’ you I told you that you need but spill a little of your blood... A little of your blood. Perhaps so. But that, too, must be learned. Understood. ‘Created’.” Saying this, she reached over where her things that she had brought with her lay and pulled out a knife, sharp and ritual looking, placing it before him. “Draw this across your arm.” She had said, indicating the area between his elbow and hand. “It will not hurt you, you know.”

For a moment he watched her eyes, unsure what she meant by all this; yet his long repressed desire to bring others both into the human realm and to command them finally won his feelings as he cut a long slit in the manner she had appeared to indicate to him. It was with great astonishment and some consternation that he saw nothing had happened when he did so. Neither blood flowed, nor even a cut on his skin appeared, as he had looked at Megan in disappointed amazement. “What is this?” He burst in unconcealed anguish for what suddenly seemed like a cruel joke.

Megan had looked at him thoughtfully. “You have a great will, Corryn. I may have brought you into this realm, but it is your will that sustains you. Yes, there are rules to your existence here, but in the end it is as much your continued will to be here as anything else. In many ways you are a creature of illusion, Corryn. Not quite ‘real’ in this realm, in the true sense. In many ways, ‘you’ are what makes you real.”

Corryn frowned low and hard, the furrows so deep-set in his face it caused Megan to laugh as he looked at her. “I’m not sure I understand.” He had nearly growled eliciting Megan to laugh some more.

“Dear, dear, Corryn. In truth, it doesn’t matter. What matters is this. You must will it. Will the cut, will the flow. What you give to those you ‘make’ is some of your energy, your life force. Willing it to be a small flow of blood lets you see and be aware of its reality. Lets you control it, to. And as you think on this, as you ‘will’ this; remember that those you ‘make’ become part of you. Part of your essence. As you are part of mine. And you shall need some of my blood, too, to seal it. For I am a part of this realm. Or at least, have reality in it.” She sat back and watched him, trying to gauge his understanding of what she was explaining.

“But... how. How shall I ‘will’ it?” Corryn had become flustered and somewhat despondent, his face near lost and boy-like.

“Do you know whom you would chose? Only one or two at first. Ones you trust, ones you can command. Ones you love, perhaps.” She inquired, nudging him and watching him closely, judging his reactions with her instructions.

“Yes, yes.” He finally admitted, having thought on such things a long while hoping for this night. “A female. A male. We fought at each other’s side long ago. And have suffered together in the darkness many eons. They are more like to stand by me than any else I could name.” A sense of hope had welled in Corryn to be able to give this new life to his comrades. They would be grateful to him and he would teach them and thereby control them. It was a dream long sought near since the night Megan had brought him into his new reality.

“Call them, then. Call them here. Call them before you. It is time.”

“But, the blood. I do not...”

“Trust me, one. Call them. Bring them before us. And only them. Shadows cling about the edges, but once you call them and they are before us, I shall encircle us all. You must learn this as well. It is a simple illusion and you were once an Elf yourself.” Megan had barely moved as she spoke to him, but he felt her presence as if she had filled the cave with her essence.

For a moment or so Corryn had paused both in excitement and some fear. How much would Megan really allow him to understand the proceedings, would he really be able to do it again on his own? Finally he called two names into the airs. “Dudaere, Braen. Friends, comrades. It is your dark brother that you remember as Mawrth, but in my new

form has been renamed, rebirthed as Corryn, for I am blessed as spiders are. And you, too, shall weave webs with me in the darkness. Come to me, beloved ones. Shake your bonds and regain your freedom. And I shall guide your feet on a new path that leads to victory.” For several moments time had seemed to stand still, the air about he and Megan frozen until dark shapes slowly separated from the shadows at the far edges of the cave and moved to enter where Corryn and Megan sat.

Seeing that the two shapes had fully entered their area, Megan rose and walked the perimeter, a deep hum emitting from her throat. As she did so, the two dark shapes gathered in a huddle as if bedding down onto the ground. Having made her circle, Megan turned to Corryn and smiled. “Now the circle is closed. Your companions sleep and no one else can garner what we may be about. It is best so. I will teach you so that what you do is something known to only you until ‘you’ decide who may be worthy of such knowledge. As I have said. Choose carefully. Your companions. Be sure of them. And what you allow them to know.”

Corryn was both awed by Megan’s command of the proceedings, yet confused on what he must now do. “But, now what? I cannot draw my own blood. Yet, you say I must to create them.” Looking in the darkness beyond them, Corryn saw the flash of immense, yellow eyes as Kimble watched as if rapt. For a moment it made Corryn smile despite his consternation. The great cat had been a wise move on Megan’s part for he was very devoted to Corryn and would aid him even in keeping others in line. Though not in words, Corryn could hear the cat’s thoughts anymore, the feelings and understandings and he knew the cat received his as well. They had become a curious comfort to each other in a way few creatures of such differing realities might ever reach.

“Now what, yes. Close your eyes. And imagine. Imagine your life force. Your energy. Your powers of imagery are great. And now you shall make use of them in their highest fashion.” For a moment Corryn frowned, searching Megan’s face closely, not sure he totally understood. Then Megan came up to him to sit in front of him, the cup clasped in her hands before her as she reached up to his face and gently closed his eyes with her fingertips. “Go inward, Corryn. Breath deep. Feel this breath that you do not need, yet partake of. You are not corporal, yet you are. Between. Real and not, though your spirit is very real. Very strong.” He did as she said, still unsure, still uncertain, but desiring. “Feel your being. Your spirit. Your existence in this form is due to the strength of your desire. Your resolve to be here. Your will to be here in this reality. Listen to my chant, Corryn. Chant as I chant.” At this Megan began another hum, low and long, repeated in a sonorous monotone. After listening to her for several beats until he was certain, and surprised he was so certain, Corryn began to chant as well.

As the chant continued, Megan broke from it extolling Corryn to continue. “Yes, one. Chant, hum. Do so over and over. Feel the vibrations. Feel yourself becoming one with the vibration. And let that vibration take you into its arms like a lover, warm and sweet.” For a while Megan had just let him chant, letting the sound of his voice fill the cave, echoing everywhere until it felt full of his presence. As this seemed to begin to peak and almost burst, Megan spoke again. “Begin to sense your essence, to sense your essence as blood pounding through your veins. Moving through you to the rhythm of your chant. Becoming the whirl and whoosh of blood in your veins. Feel it, know it. Turn your essence into substance. Let it move through you, let blood be its expression.”

Hearing her words as he chanted, hearing them as if in a deeper tone than her voice in its normal pitch as if over-layered by something else, Corryn felt a change moving through him. It was as if blood did suddenly surge through him, that he could even ‘hear’ a whoosh in his inner ears like the movement of rushing water over a forgotten stream’s bed. Soon he felt it, too, a running movement throughout his body that caught him unawares, nearly causing him to quit his mantra. Realizing what he was doing, Megan laid her hand over one of his and chanted with him a moment to steady his emotions and move him through until he was sounding easily on his own again.

For some time, this, too, had continued as Corryn’s sense of confidence increased,

recognizing a certain power in himself he would never forget, and in fact, intended to experiment with further and hope to use. There was also a pleasure in it as well, a pleasure that seemed to grow as he chanted, as he seemed to become one with the process itself. It was at the height of this communal experience that he had felt a burning pain along his arm. Pain, but exquisite gratification, too, as Corryn continued to chant, knowing what Megan had just done. He slit his eyes as he softened the tone of his mantra and watched a firm trickle of bright red flow from his arm into the cup Megan held below it. Finally he slowed his chanting, letting it die in the night airs around them, his eyes open and watching. As he quit the low, toning hum, the flow of blood quit from his arm, the wound closing and seeming to magickally heal and dissipate as he watched in detached amazement.

“And thereby do you finish, my Spider. And the essence you have given remains as if made corporeal in this cup.” With that, Megan showed him the cup, a bright, red liquid within causing Corryn’s eyes to dance slightly. “It’s real. Made real by you. By your capacity. By your magick.” Having said this, Megan had set the cup back down, took the knife and made a careful slit on her hand to squeeze a few drops of her own blood out into the cup as well. “My blood seals it, for I am corporeal here, in this realm. Now take the cup. Spill a little on each of your chosen ones and chant anew.”

Taking the cup from her, Corryn’s hands shook slightly with barely concealed excitement, delight drawn across his face touching into a sense of unremembered happiness so far distant that not even dreams could touch it. A little unsteady, Corryn had risen from his spot, anxious but ready, clasping the cup to himself as if holding the essence of all his dreaming, which it surely was. Standing, he resumed the chant as Megan watched and nodded to him as his humming increased strength and depth. Then she pointed to the shadows strewn upon the ground and Corryn carefully walked over to them. For a moment Corryn looked at the liquid in the cup as if to gauge how much was within. Then he knelt down beside the shapes deciding it best to get close as he drizzled some of the precious liquid; his blood, his essence, his life force; onto the two forms as if they lay in shaded sleep.

Having released all the blood from the cup, Corryn stepped back from his task, continuing his toning as he watched. It seemed almost painfully slow to Corryn as the shadows finally began to change; two pale and naked figures on the ground before him, male and female, as if he were some god in the act of creation at the beginning of time. And it felt god-like to Corryn as he watched his new/old companions appear before him, wrapping him in a warm sense of near emotional bliss. He was barely aware of Megan’s presence as she stood next to him, taking his hand in his to squeeze it and whispering, “It is done. You may stop. They are here. I have robes for them, but they will need other clothes, too... And sustenance. You will show them. You will train them.”

As the two beings at their feet began to show signs of waking, Corryn grinned widely in enjoyment. “Yes. Yes. I will train them. I will show them.”

It had been the greatest night that Corryn could remember. There had been rejoicing, then soberness as both Corryn and Megan explained the conditions of existence for the newly made. And now, after several nights of training, feeding and pleasure, Corryn felt a satisfaction in his new role as Megan played her daylight games and he with his companions rested in the shadows from the sun. He watched his friends as they slept, wrapped about each other as the lovers that they actually were, though both loved Corryn as well. And for the main, it was that love that Corryn would count on more than anything as he deliberated. They did not think so much as he, they seemed content to follow and let him lead and to Corryn that was more than well. So he sat and watched over them and thought. Thought about Megan, thought about his friends, thought about his life and condition and where it might lead him in time. And he would bide his time, now, pleased for the moment as he watched from the safety of the shadows as the sun went down and a moon rose up in the ever increasing darkening of the sky.

Looking over the mountain range beyond the Greathouse of Lord Sean from a huge and rambling forest of many varieties of tree, bush and flower, three women stood. Beyond the Greathouse, beyond the mountains, in an expanse of forest seen as ancient, wise and sometimes perilously dangerous, they stood; their clothes in various shades of forest colors in greens, gold and browns. Three women with differing shades of red hair from sunset fire to deep burnished gold; their faces thoughtful and sister-like, their eyes green cast and concerned as they gazed upon the mountainous range before them.

“The mountains rumble, the trees whisper in the breeze. Even the flowers tremble with anticipation. For the Bards look for a new home, a new place of power, a place of strength.” Spoke one of the women as they all continued to watch as if noting every nuance of the sky, wind and land about them.

“Yet, their old power remains. Ever connected, though hidden. Hidden now. Hidden from the sight and understanding of those who might abuse it.” Said a second.

“So now the Bards look for something. A place, an anchor, a focus. Where they may draw power from their ancient source, to connect with that source. It is wise. In these times. In the times to come. The world shifts and some things must be protected else more than just one Realm suffer for it.” Said the third.

“It is your forest, Daerwydd. Your deep and precious wood. It is the sagacity of these trees they will seek, the knowledge of the very spirit here. And those mountains are full of caverns, caves, tunnels. A source of great power and mystery unto themselves. Rhiannon knows this, feels this and she will seek it.” Said the first turning to the woman with burnished hair that shown from copper to gold in the afternoon.

“Yes. I know. We all know. And it shall touch us all. Even unto your Holy Isle, Gwyniffar. And truly, all of Cymru. Whether in the Realm of the Wheel, our own Realm of Light or any other... Yes. May she seek it. We are here to aid her. She, too, is our Sister, our kin. When the time comes I shall take my retinue and meet with her. It is well. Let them come. We are here.” For a long while they stood, seeming to watch and wait as the sun moved across the land over the fields, the trees, the mountains. Their beings seemed to hum together as they stood, as they watched, nearly merged in their silence and thought. In time, they seemed to fade within the woods as if they had become part of it, part of the bark and leaf of tree and bush. And yet, it seemed as if the forest watched on, waiting and silent, gazing out over in a knowing meditation.

Having spent the morning with the Runners going over some of the intricacies of Court duties as a couple of them seemed possible candidates for such activity, Jenna also felt a certain ease of tension in their presence. It was always good to listen to their chatter, especially as there was so much activity of late. Some of the young folk really weren't Runners yet at all, being rather displaced students in Rhiannon's retinue, getting lessons from Council Members in a rather unsettled fashion here and there. Even a couple were young Bards yet to be fully vested who were more than pleased for the opportunity to see a Court's activities. Especially one as active as this one had become. Jenna did her best to answer questions and at least felt satisfied that some sense of understanding it lit up on a couple of the curious faces.

Knowing that Rhiannon and Taliesin had returned now from the Bonding Ritual some time in the night before and that they had been conferring with Council Members in what now was thought of as Rhiannon's apartments, Jenna's nerves were more than usually unstrung. It had been Dylan who had suggested she spend time in the Runner's area and she was grateful for the suggestion. The only thing that prevented her from totally relaxing was the presence of Korwyn, now recognized as a young Bard by the Council right before the Bonding itself. Taliesin himself was likely not aware of this as he had already been sequestered for the upcoming Ritual and Jenna assumed other matters were still at hand for

him. At least when Jenna finally decided it was time for the young folk to attend their other duties and that she ought help Dylan in whatever Court functions needed seeing to, she was more settled from the distraction.

Surprised to find the apartments quiet on her return, Jenna frowned, a little astonished that even Erin was not there as she had stayed throughout Taliesin's leave with Jesse, more to give Jenna company and distraction than anything. Even Dylan's cat, Missy, seemed nowhere to be found being almost always the first to greet Jenna when she arrived. Smiling some as Jenna had been noticing that Missy had become heavier than usual of late, she also could extract no definite reply from the cat, which caused Jenna to smile even wider. Shrugging it off, Jenna went into the room she shared with Taliesin to check her notes and possibly rethink her garments as she could feel the day becoming warm and slightly cloying.

Opening the door, Jenna felt a sense of startlement and consternation to see a figure seated by the open window, gazing out in a contemplative stance. "Maerdyinn?" She asked quietly as if nearly afraid he might be some sort of apparition.

Turning to look at her, Taliesin gave a bright, warm smile, then beckoned she come in and close the door behind her. "You are surprised, my Love?" Something in his energies seemed different, changed, new and though his mien appeared as loving as always, it caught in Jenna's heart, making her feel uncertain. Stepping in silently and carefully closing the door as if others could be disturbed by her movements, Jenna's hands began shaking as a couple tears dotted her cheeks. Seeing this, Taliesin came over to her and took her roundly into his arms. "You are so distraught, my own. Please. It's alright."

Gratefully releasing herself in his arms, Jenna sighed. "Oh, Maerdyinn. I expected you would be staying with..." Jenna could not finish the sentence as she gulped, somewhat ashamed of the strain she heard in her own voice.

"No, my one. There were some things we had to discuss with the Counsel. And it was very late when we returned last night. But it was also thought it best we rest some and return. Return to our lives a little. Get some grounding. Be with the people we chose." As he spoke, Taliesin gently guided Jenna to come and sit on the bed where they sat and could fully regard each other. "Which means you." He smiled and lightly touched her face. He wore plain, undyed garments, off-white and cool in the summer heat, something that caused Jenna to realize added to the sense of newness about him. It was not really like him to dress so plainly in daily wear, yet it also showed off a body that Jenna delighted to look at. "I recognize things must be discussed. And that some things may not be easy. But... 'You' are my Chosen, Jenna. My love. Above all others. You need to know that. You need to believe that. Because... There will be rituals. There will be times when I'll be away for a day or so. But, my heart. My heart is yours. My soul is yours."

Jenna looked at him, a serious cast furrowing her brow. "You will not be leaving this Court? Surely, as Rhiannon's Second..."

"I won't be leaving this Court, no. We are discussing. The mountains near here are being scouted. A new Bardic Seat is needed. Possibly three Seats eventually. But, it would make sense to have it here. Where I am." The warmth of the day caused Jenna's hair to curl even more into a mass of wonderful ringlets as a drop or two of sweat trickled at the edges of her face causing Taliesin to touch the curls lightly.

"And Rhiannon?" Jenna queried, a curiosity finally playing in her, a need for answers that welled up.

"Well. Not all is decided, by any means. I expect she will stay the Winter and help me adjust to my new Standing. However, I don't think she intends to stay much longer than that." He said somewhat frankly as he continued to play with Jenna's hair.

"Not stay? At the Bardic Seat?"

Chuckling, Taliesin ran a hand through Jenna's curls more firmly, nearly tugging on it. "I have told you more than I probably ought. But, your fears must be put to rest. I am Rhiannon's Second. That is something different than just her Chosen. And it 'means' we are not meant to operate in the same place most of the time. Of course there are things she

must pass to me. Things she must teach me and rituals we must perform together. But, the division is intended. So, it is to the best we both have our own families, our own lives and loves. Else, neither of us could do this. And we 'must' do this." The quietness of the apartments was only broken by the sounds of children playing outside overlaid by the occasional call of a bird. For some moments Taliesin listened to the sounds, obviously deriving some pleasure from it, smiling a bit to himself. Realizing that Jenna was suddenly looking at him rather intently, he brought his focus back to her. "Aren't you a bit warm?" He said, fingering the dampness of her trusses again. "It must have been a bit cool to you this morning, eh? Surely you could lose some of that clothing now?" Having said this, he began to pull at the cloth of her robes which now felt more than a bit heavy and warm to Jenna herself.

"Did you send everyone away?" Jenna asked knowingly, a slight thrill beginning to play through her being.

"Umm. For a bit. But, they will all return soon enough. I suggest we take advantage of it." Raising his brows, Taliesin began to pull at Jenna's clothes in earnest.

Fingering his face and beginning to kiss him, Jenna asked. "I love you with my whole heart. But, why should you love me? Who am I?"

It seemed a question she'd been meaning to ask forever to Taliesin's ears and he heard a desperate seriousness in it that made him stop momentarily. "My Love. I could give you so very many reasons. Would they satisfy you? But, in truth, it is only the heart itself that can answer. I don't know, my own. I just do. Can there be a better reason in the world?"

Hearing nearly the same answer that had been echoed by Dylan and Mab, Jenna finally relaxed, knowing now the truth was truly told that gave her a sense of complete satisfaction of it. "Yes. The best. For I feel the same."

The smile that played on Taliesin's face was great and warm, his eyes dilated with pleasure. "So. Let us make use of a little private time." With that, they moved into a gentle lovemaking that seemed to soothe and settle both their souls.

Riding from place to place all day for several days, looking over some prospective areas, Rhiannon said little as she kept her mode as much in observation as possible. She wanted clear thoughts from all without influence even in her facial expression. She had chosen both Kyle and Pwyll to accompany she and Mab to this task, looking over the range of mountains near Lord Sean's Greathouse and holdings. They had quite literally left the next day after returning from the Bonding Ritual even though she was keenly aware there would be great need to spend real time with her newly Chosen and Second. Yet, she also felt it best that they both step back, consider and renew the valuable ties they already had, relied on and would need to rely on both now and in the days to come. It was difficult to hide her contrasting emotions, though she had rigorously schooled herself all her life, often catching herself in emotional swells as she rode with her companions. She did as she could to keep Mab from being too aware of her brief lapses, yet knew some of it would touch her lover no matter what she did to try to conceal it.

Being high Summer, thunderstorms would sometimes develop in the heat of the afternoon, causing the small fellowship to take shelter in the various caves, caverns or even crannies that the scouts had discovered and were reporting on. Admittedly, it was the sort of task Rhiannon enjoyed, for though she had spent many years at the old Bardic Seat, she remembered the early childhood days of travel and discovery with her mother with great fondness. Even the journey from Waljanargel to Lord Sean's Greathouse seemed to suit Rhiannon well and she thought on this many times as they inspected the landscape. Certainly the caves were comforting, they brought a sense of peace, especially to those whose emotional side was not only unusually keen, but intentionally worked with and developed. Sleeping in a cave always seemed to renew and strengthen the spirit to Rhiannon,

as much as any Bard, so that any find of such in travel was considered a boon, quickly committed to memory and its whereabouts given to all Bardic travelers for future reference. Yet, Rhiannon found she also enjoyed the open sky and that she liked to sleep beneath the stars when weather permitted. It, too, could give a sense of peace to her for that is when she could hear the murmur of the trees as they communed within the wafting of the night breezes through their leaves.

Even though to many Rhiannon could seem nearly unemotional in her daily duties and ritual, it was hardly the case. Sometimes it made her smile slightly to herself when no one was aware. She was a Bard, after all, and even more, as Eldritch a soul as any who walked in human guise, if not more so. Yet, it was from that Eldritch soul that she could elicit a stoic face no matter the rage that might be taking place within. And Bardic training had helped to extract the same. As amiable as Taliesin usually seemed, she knew he, too, had the same sense, ability and firmness. She didn't know if she really wanted to love this man, this Elven being posing as a human for who knows how many years. Yet, of course, she did. One couldn't help loving one's Chosen; and at this point she had come to realize that the Head loved their Chosen more than the reverse. Always did. That Danu had loved Rhiannon with a depth she was only now realizing for another. That there was something almost parent/child about it, and certainly teacher/student, only more. Much more. In many ways it was strange and confusing, yet there was really no one to explain or discuss these feelings with. Not even her Advisors, not even Kyle. The Head and their Chosen was a lonely role, and Rhiannon knew it was always so and always would be so.

Mab sensed that there was some consternation and confusion in Rhiannon as they rode or walked. She also knew a certain aspect of Rhiannon's mind and being was starkly and clearly closed off from her and from this point on, always would be. Mab was not a Bard, and though an Elven soul as much as Rhiannon was, was not as stoic or able to control her heart. It wasn't that Rhiannon didn't have times when she could withhold her thoughts and feelings, especially of late; it was that currently it seemed a whole aspect of Rhiannon had become removed, never to be glimpsed again. It caused Mab to wonder what future they could honestly have and what place Mab would ultimately fulfill.

Coming upon a place of especial note by the scouts who also rode with Rhiannon off and on as they continued in their own task, the clouds suddenly bunched up in the sky, promising an equally sudden shower. A nearly hidden entrance proved itself to open into a large cavern and the whole party was able to enter in, horses and all. Lighting torches as they heard a crack or two of thunder rumble without, all looked with both pleasure and wonder at the place they had found themselves in. A scout that had currently caught up with them smiled brightly, opening her arms wide on the scene before them. "Isn't it beautiful?" She smiled. "And it is huge." The flicker of lights from the torches revealed that the cavern was not only very large, as the scout was indicating, but that the walls were riddled with crystals that sparkled and winked from the torches' lights.

Outside, the rain abruptly began to pour as thunder and lightening echoed all about them. Rhiannon smiled and nodded, seeming to let all know that they would stay here the night. Even the horses had plenty of room and shelter as they unpacked enough gear to settle in for the night. In deference to the scout's presence, Rhiannon kept her words as minimal as possible, accepting that it was unrealistic to expect herself never to utter anything at all. Building a small fire from various branches, twigs and roots found within, it became clear that there must be other ways to and through this cavern for breezes seemed to filter through, flickering the fires. And though hidden, the entrance they had come through was fairly large, having let their horses in with ease.

Holding a torch, Rhiannon walked about some as the others settled the gear and began some preparation for an evening meal. The spark and glint of the crystals amazed and intrigued Rhiannon as several times she reached out and gently touched upon the surface. "Eldritch touched." She whispered to herself. "A blessing. Yes." She spoke so low not even an echo of sound came from her, yet a shimmer of energy fanned out, touching the rest. For a moment everyone turned in her direction seeming to know what she had said,

remarking on the beauty of the place. After a time, Rhiannon felt drawn to an area in particular to the right in the cavern and paused. Soon she realized that a tunnel pulled off from where she looked and that it appeared to call to her. Cocking her head a bit and frowning some, she tried to listen with her inner senses. Discerning nothing negative, she walked a little ways in, mindful not to go too far, especially as she had given no word to the others of what she was about to do.

The tunnel did not lead very far and was easy enough to pass into, a certain amount of crystals still littering themselves within the walls. Ending itself in a notch, Rhiannon realized that the roots of some gigantic tree wove itself in the earth here in such a way to present a space where someone might crawl into to meditate or sleep. “Ahhh.” Sighed Rhiannon softly. “So. You would have me confer with you?” She nodded slightly. “I will return in a bit, then.”

With that Rhiannon turned back out to go to her companions, slightly startling when Mab met her at the tunnel’s edge as she carried no torch and stood in near shadow. “Lady. Where did you disappear to?”

Rhiannon smiled warmly at her lover, then pointed back into the tunnel. “I will repose there tonight.” She whispered lowly though they were far enough away from the others that no one was like to hear them speak even in a normal tone.

Lifting her brows, Mab touched on Rhiannon’s mind gently where she received the image of the tree’s roots and sensed its beckoning to Rhiannon. “Oh.” She said, some surprised by the vivid imagery. “How wonderful.” At the same time she also picked up that Rhiannon meant to do this alone. Looking into Rhiannon’s eyes in frankness, Mab nodded. “I understand.” But she sighed as well. “Some tea and stew are ready. Would you come and sit with us a bit?”

Rhiannon passed her hand on Mab’s cheek, tenderly letting her mate know that love bound them. “Of course.” She smiled again, then kissed Mab lightly on the mouth. Drawing back again with a deeply serious cast in her visage, she looked into Mab’s eyes with intensity. “Do you know how much I really love you, my darling. Without you I could not steady myself for all the tasks before me.”

Feeling the wave of intended energy move through her whole being, Mab caught her breath as a tinge of tearing stung the corners of her eyes. “My life is yours, Lady.”

“I know. And I never forget that. Never. I know that your entire soul is open to me. In all ways.” Rhiannon continued to whisper, some concerned that their conversation might have some impact on the scout, and even the Council Members. But what was said needed to be as Rhiannon did her best to say things as succinctly as possible. “I know it concerns you that I close some parts of myself off to you. But, dearest, I must. As I did, as I had to, with Danu. You know this. Please. Please understand.” Rhiannon entreated with all her being, hoping some of what she said might satisfy, if only for a little while.

Mab lowered her eyes and pursed her lips that began to tremble as a tear finally trickled down her cheek. With her free hand, Rhiannon hugged Mab to her the best she could, staying clear of the torch she carried. “I will not desert you.” Mab whispered in Rhiannon’s ear. “Never... ever.”

Drawing back, Rhiannon nodded. “Alright.” She breathed, “I accept that. I promise... I will include you in everything I can. I promise.” At that they heard voices calling them from the fire at the other end of the cavern to join in for supper.

The storm proved thick and long, the thunder and lightening nearly constant as the small company had eaten their meal in what all now viewed as a clearly magickal place. “Even the storm seems appropriate here.” Remarked Pwyll pleasantly, his soft, light voice an interesting contrast to his large, athletic frame. “It seems so blessed. As if one might travel between the realms with ease.”

“These are good mountains.” Said Kyle as he looked at the cavern walls that sparkled back at him. “Every place we’ve been has felt so good. So renewing. Refreshing. My old bones have been some re-invigorated by this trip.”

Rhiannon smiled warmly as she listened. Kyle may have been her Chief Advisor,

but Pwyll was quickly becoming the second strongest Advisor she had. She liked Pwyll's demeanor; firm but never pushy, fairly young with a certain youth's enthusiasm still intact. In some ways he helped to remind her that she, too, was still young, despite the responsibilities that this life had dictated to her. Perhaps it was that contrast in the two men that Rhiannon found most important. To help her see life through both the wisdom of age and the wisdom of youth, and that both these men had a great and true love for life and the Realm of the Wheel.

"This shall be an entrance." Remarked Mab, clearly receiving this information from Rhiannon. "A Blessing to all who come here." This brought a real round of smiles from all as well as agreement for it was the most impressive thing they had found thus far. It also seemed the idea that the new Bardic Seat would be these mountains was right and true and this, too, settled over them with a sense of firmness.

The meal had been light, but the talk had carried on for a long while, the scout suggesting places they might wish to view on the morrow, Kyle and Pwyll discussing the places they'd already seen and Mab occasionally inserting both Rhiannon's as well as her own thoughts. It was as if the crystals that filled the walls like stars in the night sky touched and transformed, giving a sense of timelessness and otherworldliness. Rhiannon might have gone on to the place she had found in the tunnel, but decided it better to remain until all retired for she knew Mab would be some ill at ease otherwise. When they did all finally start to bed down as the rain outside continued in a steady downpour, Rhiannon gathered a couple candles before quitting the group on her quest.

"Mother?" Asked Pwyll watching Rhiannon begin to leave as the rest were settling themselves as comfortably as they could about the dwindling fire.

"She goes to meditate." Said Kyle, knowing Rhiannon well and having already sensed she had found something she wanted more time with.

Mab's eyes followed her lover though she had already lain down, letting a soothing tiredness begin to drift over her. "Yes. She goes to meditate." Mab whispered. "This place is blessed, yes. She listens for its heartbeat." At that Mab's eyes fully closed as if sleep could no longer be held at bay. And with this answer the others also seemed to quickly move into a sense of peacefulness and slumber as Rhiannon, a lit candle in her hand, moved back into the tunnel she had found earlier.

Settling herself within the roots, Rhiannon also managed to place one of the candles before her where it flickered some as she moved into a meditative state. It felt as if the roots began to encase her, to hold and hug her as her mind began to alter into a sort of communal awareness. Soon images began to move across her mind's eye of ages and forests, roots and mountains, stars and sky. As if, somehow, the very history of this place moved through her as she watched. Finally, as she had hoped, Rhiannon stepped into the imagery, looking about and willing it to slow some so she might gather her own thoughts, that she might understand better how to proceed. "I am here." She seemed to say, standing in a rich, green woodland beneath a starry night sky. The perfume of the vegetation and earth was fertile and pungent, as if it permeated her very soul and the imagery was bright and vivid in a way waking life never knew.

"Daughter of two Realms." She seemed to hear from within like soft sighing in the rustle of the leaves. "We welcome you. We have things we wish for you to know. To see." With that, imagery seemed to fill Rhiannon's senses again, although this time with more direction. Soon she realized she was being shown the various places, entrances, caves, tunnels that these mountains had and how they might be connected, utilized or sometimes what ought be left alone. It please her to note that many tunnels could be made from the cavern the group was presently in and that it would lead to other caverns and places deep within.

The roots of the tree Rhiannon sat in appeared to go within the mountains, joined to the mountains as if to make the trees and mountains one being. It was as if the roots pulled Rhiannon within, down and in until they had moved within the very core of the mountain range itself. Here Rhiannon felt age itself about her, an eternal age beyond time and

understanding. Something part and parcel of the core of the Earth Herself, centered into the very being of the Earth Herself. A stillness entered Rhiannon, a sense of oneness as if her reality melted and she, too, was one with All.

Then a sense of movement filled her; slow, steady, measured. The life force of the mountain range moved within its depths and the trees sighed to feel it. It was the power of the Serpent, the Dragon of the land, the being of the mountains, its soul and spirit. In this, Rhiannon realized that a new source of Bardic power had been revealed to her and that in reality, anywhere the Bards might choose to create a Seat, they would find such. For the Dragon, the soul, the Serpent here was kin and parcel to the Dragon of Cymru, to the very Earth herself. “Ahhhh...” sighed Rhiannon, knowing that the opal she now carried with her always glowed as its inner threads connected with the power, too. “Now I understand. Now I know. Nothing is ever lost.” She whispered into the airs and she felt the soul of the mountains, the Dragon, join her to move through her, to weave her soul and the soul of the Bards to it. Yet, it touched her lightly, carefully, delicately, seeming aware of vulnerability, that here was a being only recently touched in other ways as well. Be careful. Be temperate. “Yet, I am renewed by you.” Whispered Rhiannon again, finding herself in a near state of bliss.

On the edge of this, Rhiannon began to receive more visions; but this time it no longer was of the conjoining of the mountains or the awareness of forest and countryside. She saw battles ensue. Battles of men and horses, the rage of arms and blood, the howl and curdle of screams and anguish. It was almost a jolt to Rhiannon’s senses as she stifled a cry that tried to escape her lips. She wondered why the Dragon would be showing her this of a sudden. She knew the clash humanity often brought and the pain the Earth felt from such struggle. It was not like Rhiannon did not comprehend what suffering this brought.

Then she saw a banner flying as if it meant to catch her eye. The banner of a red dragon upon a field of gold and a young warlord astride a great dun warhorse beneath it. She could not really make the figure out that much other than to seem to know he was fairly young for his responsibilities. The armor and leather was blackened upon the tartan colors of rust and gold and he gave a true sense of authority despite his age and youth. Taliesin had mentioned something of this to her, of his own visions of a young warlord when they had spent time together after the Bonding. The House of Don, yes. She knew of this House, of a young family that seemed well endowed with potential and talent in many areas, including the workings of magick. Yet, why, why this sort of vision? This House was by the sea in the far West nearer the old Bardic Seat and had been some connected to it. It did not seem to make much sense to Rhiannon; yet because of these visions, of Taliesin’s visions, she knew she would not put them aside. They would need to be discussed and considered.

Just as her thoughts wandered off, considering the banner and battles brought before her, a new vision surrounded her. Stars winked above and a shimmering of gentle lights filtered all about as she saw Taliesin standing as if waiting for her. Here, in this awareness, she could see a different cast to him, that he wasn’t quite a human, but rather something else. His image bore the clothing of a Bardic leader and in this state, it shimmered some. She realized she must appear something similar to this and gave a smile to him. Slowly she walked up to him as he smiled back in a quiet and patient manner. She looked about as she stepped up to him, the glimmering of the air all around them of constant, shifting energies.

“We belong here. We will build here.” He said as he took her hands somewhat formally and she realized he was in a dream state.

“Yes. The mountains are wonderful. Perfect. The Serpent lives here.” She replied knowing she was now fully in this altered awareness in some other reality with him.

“No. Here. We will build here.” Taliesin stated firmly and rather flatly.

“What do you mean?” She asked, a little uncertain of his statement.

“You and I.” He looked about them a moment, then indicated the area of stars and shimmering airs. “Here. Do you not see?” He queried, questioning with his face as well. There almost seemed a sense of urgency in his voice, a voice rich with layered texture only

another Elven soul could here in its nuances.

“In Between.” She whispered to him as if a bit afraid to put the thought into the airs. “Not in one realm. Not in another. Within, without, neither here nor there. Everywhere, nowhere.”

“Yes.” He replied as if to get her to quit, though there was no harshness in his voice as he said it. “Where our dreams meet.” Then he took his hands to both sides of her head where he slightly pulled on her hair and face gently as he searched her eyes and face with his own. “I must go now. I am awaited.”

This made Rhiannon smile with inward warmth. “Yes, dear friend, you are. Be with them. We’ve much to discuss. But, it will wait.” They kissed softly and formally, a sense of being old friends drifting through them as they hugged. Then Taliesin’s figure melted from her, leaving her to watch the landscape a moment and consider what he had said.

Not long after Rhiannon stirred from her meditative trance in darkness as the candle before her had guttered long before. Yet, the tunnel was not so deep as that and she could just make out some reflection of flickering light from the low embers that remained in the cavern beyond where the others slept. Knowing her commune to be over for now, Rhiannon stood, and after thanking the mountains and trees, left to go back out. Everyone was full asleep as she returned, her steps soft and quiet in a way no human could ever be and she settled down by Mab without the awareness of anyone there. Even Mab slept on in her own private dreams and Rhiannon wrapped her arms about her to settle in. For a time Rhiannon considered all that passed to her that night. Yet, soon, she, too, fell to dreaming as she moved into a welcome and comforting sleep.

