

TALIBAH, THE EGYPTIAN

Chapter 8

Friends and Lovers

“Why do... what do they call themselves?”

“Humans, dear... humans...” said Cordelia to Jared as they worked with energy around some small tress, encouraging them to grow. Soft, slowly shifting colors filtered the air in shimmering waves as all around gave off gentle pulsations of life. Even Jared and Cordelia seemed to glimmer gently with their life force as they moved. As they touched the trees a flow of energy went from them as they briefly merged with the tree, feeding it, encouraging it. Sparkling energy from the airs around them also moved into them as they did this so that they acted as a line from the life force all about them to the trees. It was the type of work that Jared especially enjoyed and Cordelia was pleased at how well and quickly he had learned to do it. Though many Elves worked with plants and trees, only some few could really feed them the healing, filtered energy from all about them as she and Jared did.

“Why do... ‘humans’... seem so... confusing?” Jared stopped what he was doing to rest a moment, sitting on a stump encased by long waving grasses that gave out little bursts of bright energy like colored puffs of smoke.

“You mean, why does Talibah confuse ‘you’?” Cordelia smiled gently at her younger cousin, her wonderful hair flowing like a river around her in various shades of red and gold. “As I am sure you confuse her... Do you like her?” Cordelia straightened herself up from her work to lift her arms outstretched to the airs where shifting colors suddenly seemed to move towards her, then streamed into her, lightening her whole being.

“Think so... want to... But... I’m hesitant... she ‘says’ I’m her friend.” He said shyly kicking his feet on the stump, causing flashes of color to burst haphazardly.

“Don’t you believe her?” remarked Cordelia bringing her arms down, “You ought take in some life-force, too, cousin... You’ve worked hard for quite some time here.”

“Alright...” Jared seemed to almost sulk, though he got up all the same. Stretching his arms up and out to pull in the energies, he closed his eyes to feel it as it moved through him. Feeling better, he smiled lightly and lowered his arms as he opened his great hazel eyes again, “She made me safe... With the Dragon... Can all ‘humans’ do that?”

“Oh, no, cousin... That is something especial to her, to her family... It has made Maerdyann very pleased to see her utilize it.” Cordelia sat now herself in the grasses as she looked out at all the plants, pulsating, many having been enriched by her gentle touch. The air shimmered softly around her as she moved as if in some delightful, sensuous dance.

Jared got up and walked over to her, “Wish she’d call me now.” He pouted a little.

Cordelia shook her head with an understanding smile, “She will... Don’t worry... She likes you, Jared... she just has so many new experiences to deal with right now... Humans do that, you know... Rush here and there... Trying to cram a lot in in the short time they have, I guess... To be honest, I really don’t know how Maerdynn manages it, being around them all the time... But, as I said, their time is so short... I guess they have to try to do as much as possible...” Cordelia smiled again as kindly as she could.

“Want to see her...” Jared said as he plopped back down on the ground next to her, his mood falling back into a bit of a sulky state.

“I know you like her, Jared.” Cordelia said stroking the bright fawn colored hair of his head that whisked about just touching his shoulders looking almost like spun glass in the ethereal light. “You’re meant to work together for a good, long while... but... you need to remember... You both live in other Realms from each other... This is a magickal relationship, my dear... not a personal one.” She breathed out slightly having said the last as gently as she could.

“Why?” Jared’s eyes suddenly turned dark and almost teary as he turned to look at his cousin, “Why not a personal one?... Why not?”

Sighing, Cordelia looked out into the airs being troubled by his expression, “Dear, dear Jared... It’s not a good idea, dear cousin... you can’t really be ‘with’ her on a true basis... How can you? You are in different Realms, as I said... but it hardly means you can’t care about her... Look at Maerdynn... I’ve told you his story before... about Rhiannon... he loves her deeply... but it is a magickal relationship... a great relationship, but a magickal one... one that builds a temple in the inner Realms... one we hope shall help protect and keep the Earth as She should be... but Maerdynn has a personal love... Jenna... Because he could share his life in the Wheel with her... his day-to-day life... a life he simply could not share with Rhiannon... and you cannot share Talibah’s day-to-day life, sweet... But... You can share great magick... and shall.”

Jared ran his hands through the grass watching the energies glint and sparkle as he moved the blades in a distracted manner, “I like her...” he pouted, not quite wanting to accept Cordelia’s words. “Want her to like me...”

“Jared... she does... she will... you need to be more patient... You’re young, dear... so is she... you ‘both’ need a little time... and... we’ve some trees yet I wish to at least visit before we truly rest... Let’s go... and I want to teach you a little about communing with the foxes again.” She said, hoping that that would distract him from his sullen musings.

“Oh!” Jared brightened almost at once, “foxes!” With that, Jared’s attention was caught as Cordelia had hoped and his eyes sparkled with the turn of thought.

“I thought that might get you...” She said, pleased to see him less distracted, “Yes, foxes... delightful creatures, they... Let’s go have some fun, shall we?” With that they both got up and moved into the trees causing the whole landscape to move in waves of colored energies and lights like some strange, beautiful sea.



The next day in the cave where the little group of Bards and Runners Talibah rode with had stayed was as wet and rainy as Taliesin had said it would be. It was just as well as the little group of Bardic folk slept long and hard through the day, truly needing a rest

after the previous day's events. Only occasionally did anyone stir to get up and eat or sit around and talk in whispers. It was also a very healing day as Talibah listened to the pelt of rain outside the cave. Once she got up and stood at the entrance to watch it, the colors seeming to deepen as the scents swelled in freshness to her senses. Somehow, it made the world seem peaceful, sleepy and full of renewal. For a while Brandon had come to stand by her and though he said and did nothing, she felt his warm, solid presence and found herself enjoying it. He was nearly as tall as Taliesin, and she found that that was something she liked as if somehow it gave him the ability to protect her even though she could well protect herself. When she had thought she might turn to him and initiate a little conversation, she found he had left. A bit startled, she also realized she had never actually seen him come up or stand with her, yet she had well known who it was. When she looked back in the cave, he was bundled in his cloak by the fire fast asleep and this, too, surprised her a moment, though it only served to remind her of the type and quality of folks she was with, causing her to finally smile knowingly.

The next several days they went through a couple more villages much as they had before except that Kevyn was now far more subdued than he had been and the Runners far less likely to tease or play tricks. Taliesin tried to lighten things up from time to time, but his efforts seemed nearly unnoticed, though Talibah also tried to help in that respect.

Then one evening as they rested once more in another cave, Taliesin remarked as they quietly ate, "Tomorrow we shall take some rest here. There's a stream a little ways down the hill and we can bathe and wash clothes... but... the next day we will move on and that evening we will meet up with a Troupe... And Sacred Singers, Dancers, Musicians... A goodly group, actually... I think as many as twenty, twenty-five folk..." Kevyn's eyes sparkled a bit causing Taliesin to smile a little. "They're coming from the Ricon's Court, Gwydion's Court... Thinking to do a Spring and Summer round... dancing and singing the land's life lines and giving some of that power to the people's crops and livestock. Do some ritual plays... entertain a bit, too..."

"Gwydion's Court?" asked Kevyn, a hopeful look in his face, "Do you know which Troupe?"

"The group that stayed all Winter last... Housed with the official Troupe at Court there... Not just a pass through."

"And you 'know' all this?" Spurt out Talibah, for once a little frustrated that he always said these sorts of things.

Taliesin just chuckled a bit and shrugged, "My dear... I don't 'know' everything... but... I'm a bit surprised 'you' are surprised... There are things you 'know' now, too, without using what might be called 'conventional means'." Though it wasn't exactly an answer, Talibah sighed, shrugging back in acceptance.

"Oh, it's Efa's Troupe! It must be!" exclaimed Kevyn excitedly and Taliesin was very pleased and relieved to be seeing Kevyn's face brighten up so much.

"Yes... I believe you're right... for I sense you have friends in this happy group." Seeing Kevyn smiling made the rest of them feel better as well, even a sense of relief moving through everyone's bearing. Soon there was singing around the fire that night, animated remarks and some happy laughter. It made everyone realize just 'how' sullen it had all been the last several days and now there seemed some real resolve to dispense with that and move on.

Wondering what Taliesin meant by dancing and singing the land's life lines Talibah gave voice to her question before they all drifted off to sleep having all snuggled into their clothes about the fire.

"Ohhh." Said Taliesin, still pushing around his things to make himself comfortable, "The power lines of the land... Sometimes we sing them, too, if we're moving along them... Energy, you know... where you can feel energy moving across the land... Troupes often like to do that... They move more slowly, often with some Sacred Singers and such, like a little band... They prefer to walk... just a few carts for things, oxen, maybe a horse or two... So they can go slow... Stimulate the land... they do a wonderful service keeping the Mother 'awake', 'aware'..." Taliesin settled into his bedding watching Talibah's face as she settled into her own. No one else said much, only nodding in some concurrence. "Perhaps we might do that some tomorrow as we ride... We 'will' be following a line as we get closer to the Troupe... I think you'll enjoy it." Many murmurs of 'yes, yes, that would be good' seemed to echo all around as they closed their eyes and Talibah found herself agreeing heartily with the sentiment as well as she drifted off to sleep.



In the Greathouse of Gwydion a little girl of about seven years old sat on a window ledge in one of the apartments overlooking the main courtyard lined with many pretty rowans, poplars and cherry trees. She watched the various people come and go, mostly people who lived within the main building, as she did, though sometimes those from diverse other places would enter to greet someone of the house or ask admittance to speak with someone. All in all it seemed a rather busy and interesting place to such a little girl so that she often enjoyed just sitting and watching. She liked to hold a great gray cat she named 'Smokey' and though he was a big tomcat who barely fit on her lap, he was loving and patient with his human. Great dark curls played about her face and wonderful big blue eyes as she pet her cat singing some song to herself and watching the people go to and fro. She wore a white and yellow shift with some bright yellow fabric through her hair and soft clothed shoes on her feet. Suddenly she heard someone at the door causing her to set her cat down and go that way seeming to know who it was. When a man with somewhat wavy brown and graying hair entered in Bardic gear, his arms about some scrolls, the little girl ran up to hug him quickly about his waist, "Dy!" she cried happily though he seemed taken a bit off guard.

"Ceri... Please, little one... Can't you see Dylan has his arms full?" he said sweetly, trying to find a place to put the scrolls down. Laying them in a chair for want of any better place, he finally picked the girl up to hug her back before putting her down again. "Are you being good?"

"Smokey and I were singing to all the people."

"People?" Inquired Dylan amiably as he closed the door though the cat ran out before he could. "Sorry... There goes Smokey... He'll be back, though." The little girl danced about the room singing a pretty tune that made Dylan smile as he sat in another chair near the fireplace of the apartment's main room. Though a very comfortable apartment, it was not especially extravagant, as most Bards never really cared all that much about that sort of thing. "Ah... That's from the play last night... did you like it?"

“Oh course she liked it,” said a somewhat younger man with light brown hair, though it, too, showed signs of graying. He had casually entered the main room from one of the two inner rooms and stood a moment quietly observing the other two. “You wrote a lot of the songs and helped me put it all together...”

“Hey, Rhys...” smiled Dylan, “Sorry I’m a bit late... I know you wanted to show me some new ideas you’re thinking of for Lamas?” The girl climbed into Dylan’s lap and sang a little more of the song. “Cerirhosyn, that’s very lovely... but do you think you might go for a bit and play in your room? Dylan is very tired and I think Rhys wishes to talk to him for a bit.”

“Yes, Dy...” she said plainly and ran off to her room singing and dancing.

“Yes, you’re right.” Remarked Rhys after she had left, “You’re quite late... And I see scrolls... Been sitting with Elen again? What is it this time? Records, histories?” Rhys folded his arms and sighed.

“Try both... We discussed things a long while and she sent me back with these so I can look at them more thoroughly...” sighed Dylan back, “I’m sorry, Rhys, but it’s necessary.”

“But isn’t that what Trent does?... Histories, records?”

“Yes... yes it is... but then Elen, as Senior Bard, checks it all over before it’s set in the scrolls and anyone can begin committing any of it to memory... but, you know that...”

“And Elen isn’t well again...” Rhys said sitting on a table next to Dylan in the chair.

“No... she’s not...” Dylan spoke wearily and rather distracted, “And I’m beginning to get a bit worried about her.”

Rhys rubbed Dylan’s neck, noting now the tension in Dylan’s body, “And Una can’t help some?”

“Ohhh... you know, Rhys... I’ve been here the longest... well before this was Gwydion’s Court... There’s things even Trent is like to miss and sometimes Elen has asked to make sure, anyway... I’m a full Chief Bard, after all... And this is my ‘Home Court’, even my first Court. I know a lot about it, whether it’s my favorite thing or not... I just much prefer working with you, the Players, the Sacred Dancers and all... the ‘fun’ part... to me, anyway... And I’m lucky enough to be in a situation where I can do that; let someone else bother about the other stuff... But... Elen has asked for my help... And that is what I ‘must’ do.” Dylan leaned back, enjoying Rhys’ attention and closing his light hazel eyes softly.

“How ill, love... how ill is Elen?” Rhys said quietly, rather afraid to ask.

Dylan pulled up again, then got up to cross over to the open window Cerirhosyn had sat by before, “She wasn’t real good this last winter, Rhys... The spring will make her feel better; the summer, too... but come fall, come this winter... I don’t know... It bothers me... It bothers me a lot... She isn’t even thirty-five... not even thirty-five... and the Healers don’t seem to know what’s wrong. They’ve done everything they can think of.”

“And Bardic Healing?”

Dylan shrugged helplessly, “Helps a little while... but nothing permanent.”

Rhys walked up to Dylan to hug him from the back in sympathy, “Do what you can, then, love... Do what you can.”

Dylan closed his eyes a moment standing encased by Rhys, feeling Rhys' face nuzzled in his neck, letting some healing energy the other man instinctively sent seep into him gratefully and placing his own hands over Rhys'. Then a strange sense tickled Dylan's mind as some knowledge suddenly filtered through. "Maerdynn..." he whispered, a bit startled.

"Maerdynn?" asked Rhys puzzled, "Taliesin?"

Dylan opened his eyes again looking over the Courtyard into the sky, "He's coming back... He's on his way to the Council Seat... here, at Wynseren."

"Are you sure?" spoke Rhys quietly.

"Yesss..." Dylan said, having gone into a light trance. "And Elen will send me to represent Gwydion's Court... and I will take Cerirhosyn with me." He whispered softly, a peculiar stillness moving through him.

"Taliesin's daughter... You mean to take his daughter to him?" Rhys seemed somewhat unsettled with the idea.

"I mean to have her tested." Spoke Dylan more clearly coming back out from his altered state. "If I am to go to Wynseren, I would have Cerirhosyn tested... I believe she is a Bard... Can't you hear it in her voice? How she moves?"

"And Taliesin will be there... And Cerirhosyn is 'his' daughter... And he's Head of Council..."

Dylan turned to face Rhys, a puzzled look in his eyes, "And why wouldn't he want her tested if I feel she is likely a Bard?... The only other child of his that was a Bard only lived to be fourteen... He was so thrilled, Rhys... and then so pained when the boy died... I can only think that this would thrill him again."

Sighing and shaking his head a bit, Rhys countered, "You don't quite get it, Dy... He's her father... he's likely to take over... and you've been her 'dad' for seven years... I mean, I love her, too, but 'you've' raised her since she was a baby... You have a way with children, you even handle Runners better than anyone I've ever seen... but you love Cerirhosyn more than anything. More than me, if truth be told... Be careful, Dy... just be careful..."

"He's going to have to see her at some point, anyway." Dylan walked from Rhys back to the scrolls in the chair feeling very uncomfortable with Rhys line of thought.

Staying by the window, trying to figure a way to get the idea more clearly stated and a bit frustrated with his lover, Rhys said a bit angrily, "Unless you mean it as some kind of offer?"

Looking up, rather taken aback, Dylan replied, "And what's that supposed to mean?"

"You could well ask to test her here... have a Council Member come here, for goodness sake, Dylan... Soften it... Talk to Taliesin some first... make him come 'here'... but you want to run out there with her where you'll have to face it all at once... You just don't realize what that might do... what it could stir up too fast... You don't like sudden moves. I 'know' you, Dylan..." Rhys slowly came back into the room, a little afraid of Dylan's reaction. "Unless you think you can get something 'from' Taliesin."

A bit upset and still rather puzzled, Dylan shuffled the scrolls a little, though not really picking any up, "Are you jealous?" he asked finally.

“Gods, I don’t know!” Rhys said a bit exasperated, “I’m not sure ‘what’ you’re thinking... but I’ve met Taliesin, too, you know... and he’s powerful... and willful... and beautiful...”

“‘And’ has been one of my ‘best’ friends since I was twenty... And I ‘certainly’ know him... and I’m not foolish enough to try and get involved with him that way... I had a chance ‘once’... when I was young and could have been foolish... but I knew better then and I certainly know better now... didn’t know that, did you?” he remarked seeing a startled look in Rhys eyes, “Well... he would have hurt me, torn me apart... Instead, I have one of the best friends I’ve ever known... I’d prefer to keep it that way.”

“Umm... he may hurt you yet, though, Dylan... I just don’t think you realize what that girl ‘means’ to you... I really don’t.” Rhys said much softer, trying to coax Dylan back to a better frame of mind.

“I’m taking her, Rhys... and that’s that... You might come with us, if you’d like...” he said rather hopefully.

“I don’t know... I’ve got a lot of work here...” Rhys replied, not sure he would want to go, the prospect of it all made him nervous and he thought perhaps if Dylan was so determined, he might be better to face it on his own.

“Okay... If you change your mind... It’s only a day’s ride away...” Dylan shrugged, finally taking one of the scrolls and settling back in the chair. Just then Cerirhosyn bounded back into the room where this time Dylan set the scroll back down to play with her a while as Rhys made ready to go out and work with the Players. Before leaving, Rhys made certain he went up to Dylan to kiss the other man warmly, then hugged Cerirhosyn as he whispered in Dylan’s ear, “I love you, you know.”

“I love you, too.” Dylan said assuaged as Rhys left quietly out the door.



The air was sweet with the smell of newly blooming flowers and sprigs of sprouting grasses as a light breeze brushed the faces of the little Bardic group that Talibah was a part of. The sun sparkled merrily in the greening trees as if responding to their singing as they rode. As promised, they were singing a song to stimulate the life line of the land, though Talibah and the Runners mostly sang a chorus as Kevyn and Taliesin sang the actual song as it was not a song Talibah had ever heard before. Nor would the Runners sing the main song, as it was not meant to be sung by other than Bards. As they sang, Talibah could feel the hum of responding vibrations to Kevyn and Taliesin’s voices. Enjoying the experience, Talibah did her best to memorize it as they went, knowing she would ask Taliesin to truly teach it to her later so she might join in at another time as was her due. It felt as if the whole ground moved with them in a graceful dance, the rhythm of the horses’ cadence falling in as they went. It seemed they might and could sing for hours this way when Taliesin finally called them to halt. For a moment he just sat on his horse, signaling for silence as he seemed to listen into the wind amidst the trees. Then he looked back at the rest with a great smile on his face before singing out something loud and clear, yet sweet. “Hallo brothers and sisters, brethren of the mountains and the sea; we come in love and friendship, the peace of the oaken tree...”

After a moment or so when Taliesin finished his lines they heard an answering verse upon the airs, “Hallo brothers and sisters, we hear your offer of peace and look for your love and friendship in hopes it may ever increase.”

“Efa!... That’s Efa!...” exclaimed Kevyn, “Hallo, Efa!” he said with full Bardic projection, cupping his hands around his mouth; then took up the reigns of his horse to ride on into the trees as quickly as he could calling, “Hallo, hallo!” as he went.

“Well, I guess that’s our signal, isn’t it?” remarked Taliesin pleasantly, “We shall be with friends tonight.” With that they all turned their horses to follow in the direction Kevyn had just gone.

When they caught up to Kevyn, he had already found the band of folk Taliesin had promised and was in their midst hugging and kissing just about everyone he could within his reach. The rest of them dismounted when they came up where Taliesin and the rest waited patiently as Kevyn continued his happy greeting. Finally Kevyn paused taking the hand of an older bright-cheeked woman with reddish curly hair, pulling her with him to walk up to Taliesin. “Brother Gwion...” he said a bit breathlessly, “this is Sister Efa... Leader of the Players of this Troupe, the Unicorn’s Horn... And I think she’s one of the best Players in all of Cymru!” he laughed, hugging her warmly and kissing her cheek, “I do! I swear!”

She pushed him away, a bit playfully, “Always did like to flatter... Young mind full of nonsense, yet...” Then she looked up at Taliesin and could tell something wasn’t quite what Kevyn had been indicating to her. “Brother?” she asked, seeming to question the title as much as anything.

“Yes?” asked Taliesin kindly, and then taking her hands; a gesture that seemed to calm her almost instantly. “I ‘do’ hope we are welcome.”

“Oh... oh, goodness... of course...” she said a bit flustered, not quite certain what had just happened or if anything had. “We were thinking of staying the night here as the energy here is very strong... a small power point, I’d guess... and we had had such an early start today... this ‘is’ a good, sheltered spot... Would you care to join us?”

“That... would be wonderful!” Taliesin responded gracefully and gratefully.

After seeing to their horses and making a small shelter, the three Runners fanned out to join the larger group, helping set up camp as they could. Not sure what to do or feel, Talibah stayed close to Taliesin as he walked about and greeted some of the folk quietly as Kevyn had disappeared again. After a little while they sat where the Runners had created a small sheltered area for their group having made some thatching from leaves and straw to go over them. “Not bad.” Remarked Taliesin as he sat, bidding Talibah do the same.

Just as they sat Kevyn came back up to them through some trees, his arms about a young woman and man. “Hey there.” He said happily to Taliesin and Talibah, “I want you to meet two dear friends of mine.” He hugged the two people closely as he said this, “This is Saffir... I am so surprised to see her! She’s a Wandering Bard, so she’s just tagging along, I guess.” The young woman arched her brows, but smiled, her loose tawny hair feathering her face and her bright green eyes sparkling wickedly. “And this is Neb... He’s a Sacred Dancer... A right good one, too!” Neb rolled his dark, expressive eyes a little as he tried to bow slightly, though it was a bit difficult as Kevyn seemed to have no intention of letting either person go. “And this is Gwion and Talibah; traveling

companions of mine... We've Runners with us, too... but, I guess they're off somewhere... they made a nice shelter, though."

"Yes, they did." remarked Taliesin, "Will there be dancing tonight?"

"Of course!" responded Neb, his dark unruly hair floating about his shoulders. "We're on the lines and we've found this to be a rather powerful point of life... Can't you feel it?"

"Oh, yes... just wanted to make sure..." Taliesin smiled, "Talibah, here, is not used to the road yet... this is not something she's experienced before..."

"Well, then... you're in for a most wonderful night, Sister... Bring your dancing shoes!" Saffir laughed, kissing Kevyn's cheek, "Come on, Kevyn... Let's go take a walk... there's time yet before anyone needs set up for tonight." With that the three young people left, close and chummy, seeming to be teasing and poking at each other some.

"Well." Remarked Talibah when they had left. "At least Kevyn is in a much better mood again."

"Thank goodness." Said Taliesin sounding truly relieved, "I wasn't too sure what else to do... and now the Runners are all back in better spirits, too... though it's hard to say if that is honestly for the best." As if that were some signal, all three Runners appeared, rather noisy and animated, letting Talibah and Taliesin realize that their quiet respite would now be over.

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After finishing a light dinner of dried meat and apples, Taliesin, Talibah and the Runners (Kevyn seemed set on staying with his friends for the time being) went to a central space that had been made by the larger group. The group had found an area where they had managed to encamp everyone in a great circle, leaving the area free in the center where no trees stood. Here they had cleared all the brush, dug a pit where they put in the clearings and some small pieces of wood to start up a good fire that they would feed with larger pieces of wood as soon as it was going well. Talibah noticed various interesting instruments being set out by the Sacred Musicians as well as lap harps that were obviously those of some of the Players. Taliesin had not encouraged any of their small group to bring their harps or other instruments, indicating they all seat themselves a little away from the edge of the circle. "This is something 'they do'." Explained Taliesin, "They work hard on this weave and know each other's energies... sometimes the Players work with them, sometimes not... The Sacred Dancers, Singers and Musicians will probably do a 'weave' first... to raise the power... Then, I expect, the Players will join in in whatever capacity they have the most propensity for... Later, we too, shall be invited to dance... At least, I expect so... I surely hope so."

"You like to dance?" asked Talibah, trying to picture him doing so.

"Of course!... It's not my best ability, but one I enjoy... I would not be a Bard if I didn't like to dance." He laughed. He hadn't said it, but somehow Talibah felt he really meant 'Elf' instead of 'Bard' and she accepted the 'hint' that that indicated to her. She had not mentioned that aspect about him before as she had been uncertain and still was, but perhaps he had grown a little concerned now that they were surrounded by Bardic

folk, though she had already guessed that that was not something he said at any time in an offhand way.

She smiled warmly and nodded, "Then I, too, shall have to dance, I expect." Though a bit uncertain, she knew she ought to try. As they sat she looked around noting that this group had wonderful colorful tents set up in this peaceful circle in the woods. Wisps of smoke drifted here and there from small well-controlled campfires that were now being put out as everyone's attention was being slowly drawn to the center.

"Yes... I expect that may be so." Remarked Taliesin easily, "Don't worry... At that point there aren't any particular 'steps'. You'll see..." Looking up into the darkening sky, Taliesin pointed up to a full moon just starting to skirt the edges of the tree tops of a clear starlit night. "It shall be a powerful dance... A full moon dance... Shall be magnificent magick tonight."

At that, Kevyn appeared again, this time by himself, plopping down beside them. "How's everyone?" The Runners who had been sitting with Taliesin and Talibah just quietly listening as they were a bit tired out from the various chores they had lent themselves to, tisked a little to each other. "And what's that?" asked Kevyn looking over at them.

"Where'd your friends go?" asked Osla regarding his brother suspiciously.

"You disapprove of my friends?" said Kevyn, frowning and shaking his head, "You are not a baby and there are more eyes on you here than you can count... Mine as well, believe it or not." He remarked a bit huffily.

Taliesin leaned over to Kevyn, putting a hand on the other man's shoulder, "You needn't defend yourself, friend... They well know they are in good hands... and so do I... you need some time to relax and enjoy yourself... you 'need' it and I 'want' you to do so."

"Well, yes..." Kevyn bit his lip and looked at the ground in front of his feet. "My friends... are helping set up... Saffir may sit with us shortly once she's helped Neb get together." Another snicker from one of the Runners made Kevyn exclaim, "What?... Goodness, so what?" Then he covered his mouth smiling, "Sorry... I 'am' being sensitive if the 'Runners' can goad me so." He shook his head out and laughed a little, "Like the lot of you don't have your own designs... and desires..." he said and then humphed.

Before the dancing started, Saffir did sit down with them by Kevyn as the fire in the center of the circle pumped up. The sky had gotten dark, though alit with the full moon making Her way above them as the sound of drumming began. After a moment or so some pipes and a stringed instrument could be heard as Dancers formed a ring about the fire, three men and three women. Wearing tight, scant clothing of reds and white, they also carried long strips of cloth in variant colors like long streamers. As they began to dance, their steps were at first slow and measured, moving to the beat clockwise around the fire, moving their streamers of cloth about them. As they went on, the dance increased in rhythm as Singers began, two men and two women, their voices hearty and strong. No actual words were used in their singing, only a sense of harmony and melody that matched the Dancers in move and gesture, almost as if the singing was dancing as well. Sometimes the Singers would clap adding a staccato sound to the beat as the Dancers would stomp their feet. Before too long, the Dancers were moving quickly, almost frantically as more voices and harps could be heard and Talibah realized the Players had now joined in the production before her.

A strange feeling began to go through Talibah at that point as she could sense the crystal of her spine had been stirred and was beginning to respond, sending shivers up and down her back. Suddenly it was as if something opened up wide in her, making her catch her breath as she watched the dance. At that point the energy shifted in front of her as the dance became a live thing, no longer separated as individual Dancers, Singers or Musicians, but ribbons of living colors weaving in and out, back and forth, like jeweled snakes, wrapping themselves tightly into each other and rising higher and higher about the fire into a huge cone from the Dancers' feet to the top of the fire.

Talibah's mouth had dropped open and her breath was catching when Taliesin quietly wrapped himself about her, "It's alright, Talibah. I'll steady you. Lean back."

"But, I can't stop it!" she gasped, looking about, seeing ribbons of colored energy all about. "Colored lights everywhere!" she cried as she felt a frantic sense of fear rising in her.

Trying to hold her gently and warmly, Taliesin whispered, "I know... You broke through... You 'see' the energy now, the life force in all... Please... lean back... I can help you... Let me." Finally she did as he asked, letting her body rest against his chest as the rhythm of his heartbeat began to calm her. She looked back out at the Dancers and the fire and though she continued to see the movement of energy as it spiraled up into a cone that seemed to send out a shimmer of energy into the night sky, she felt stilled and no longer frantic. "When the dance is finished, this will all calm down." Continued Taliesin. "And all will look 'normal' again... Or nearly so." She could feel him smiling softly, "Congratulations... You've achieved the Bardic sight... Realize that Kevyn and Saffir are as entranced as you are... Even our Runners are probably caught a good bit in it... Everyone here, including me... Amazing, don't you think..." he breathed out in a hushed manner. After a little while more the music and dancing went into a great crescendo that built higher and higher when suddenly the music abruptly stopped and the Dancers fell to the ground as a great dash of energy and lights rushed out into the night sky as if in line with the full moon directly overhead. Talibah felt as if she could hear an audible snap as a shimmer went up through her back as both she and Taliesin let go their breaths as if they had been tightly held. After several moments of quietly sitting there in silence, a silence that encompassed the whole encampment, Taliesin gently released Talibah and whispered low, "How are you doing?"

Looking about herself and seeing that things seemed far more 'normal' to her again, Talibah whispered back, "Okay, I think."

"Good... But, take it easy."

Suddenly drums started to pound again, startling Talibah, "Again?" she asked.

"No, no... Now's the time for fun... We all have excess energy now. Best to dance it out... and sleep late tomorrow... In all honesty, we've all worked hard today." Taliesin got up putting a gentle hand on the top of her head as she sat, "Sit a little if you'd like, but do try to come out and join in in a bit... You'll feel much better tomorrow if you do." With that Taliesin stepped away moving toward the continuing fire where others were already dancing again.

Talibah looked about herself to find that everyone else had also left to join in. Everyone except Brandon, who remained seated behind her, apparently watching her. "Aren't you going to dance?" she asked, surprised by his presence.

“Oh, I thought I’d stay a bit and make sure you were okay.” He shrugged, then asked, “You’re very close to him, aren’t you?”

“Close? To whom? Gwion, you mean?...” She turned to face him and frowned, the starlight of the night lighting things strangely.

“Taliesin.” He said rather defiantly.

“Well... I just thought it best to school myself to that name at this time... but, yes... of course, we’re close... he’s my teacher.” She said, somewhat curious where his questions were going.

“I know you’ve never asked for private space... but still... perhaps you’re just being careful, sensitive... he being who he is and all. Not like we’d really care. We’re all plenty old enough to handle it, you know.”

“Whatever are you trying to say? That he’s my lover?” she said rather surprised and taken aback.

“Maybe.” Remarked Brandon quietly and carefully.

“Goodness! He’s my teacher...”

“So?” said Brandon looking at her rather surprised that she had been surprised.

“Well... Just so... No, Brandon. We are not lovers... to be honest, I see him almost like a father to me.”

Brandon held her eyes a long time as if trying to decide whether or not he accepted what she had said, then finally nodded his head gently, “Alright.” He grinned, then took her hand. “Let’s go dance!” he got up pulling her up as well. “It’s easy, you know.” He nodded over towards the fire where people were basically dancing about in a clockwise movement, sometimes holding hands, sometimes just dancing about in no particular form. “Let’s go.” He pulled her with him to join the others.

Taliesin had been right; Talibah could feel extra energy pulsing through her as she and Brandon finally got up to the others. And there didn’t seem to be any particular steps as everyone moved round and round as drummers played and played. No other instruments or voices were used, only the six Musicians beating drums to exert their extra energy. All else, Sacred Singers, Dancers and Players were dancing, letting their bodies ground and exhaust them as the night wore on. Talibah found herself getting lost in the movement and rhythm, into another trance state, though this one felt soothing and healing, as if the earth were massaging her whole being. She was only vaguely aware of the others dancing, though she saw flashes of their faces, happy and free in the fire’s flames. The only other person she really remembered was Brandon, for he stayed with her as closely as he could, never leaving her sight or side.

When everyone had truly danced themselves out and went to find their bedding, it was no surprise that Kevyn did not come back to the area the Runners had made. “With his friends.” Remarked Brandon smiling at Talibah widely and holding her hand tightly as they got to their area. Osla, Adian and Taliesin were already back just snuggling into their clothing to fall asleep. As Talibah and Brandon also lay down, Brandon moved his things to stay next to her. “Is this alright?” he asked politely. She smiled, a little nervous, but nodded. “Good.” He remarked, moving his things out for comfort. When they had both laid down, facing each other but with still a little distance between them, Brandon brushed her cheek with his hand as he began to fall asleep, “I really like you, Talibah...” he whispered, “Practically from the moment we met.” With that, he did drift to sleep though Talibah lay there quite a while just looking at him, trying to decide how she felt

about him and that her decision needed to be quick one way or the other. As sleep finally began to grasp her so that she could barely hold her eyes up any longer, she blew on her ring and whispered the words for Jared's presence not totally certain why, but feeling a need to pull her attention elsewhere from the dance and Brandon's declarations.