



A dusty planet, a forgotten history, a world of unquestioned reality to some, and of mysterious apparitions to others. Into this world is born a child whose very existence will shake the foundations of all that this civilization has come to stand for: Apocalypse.

Guided by a Spirit whose name they do not know, yet whose Presence they have come to undeniably feel in their lives, her parents know that they must prepare her to one day find her calling and fulfill her destiny, whatever it might be. She is the hope of the future, but little do they know how literally this saying will be fulfilled in the frail little child they hold in their hands.

# apocalypse



# apocalypse

**BY MIKAMI KONO-E**

## CONTENTS

1 - The Wilderness .....	1
2 - The Wedding .....	13
3 - An Apparition and a Dance .....	23
4 - Merynda .....	35
5 - Seducement .....	41
6 - Division .....	49
7 - The Stand .....	61
8 - Starting Anew .....	73
9 - The Writings .....	79
10 - A Different Life .....	87
11 - Decisions .....	99
12 - The City of Temptation .....	111
13 - Life or Death? .....	127
14 - The Gentle Shadow .....	139
15 - Twilight and the Celestial Zone .....	151
16 - The Witness .....	161
17 - The Great Mission .....	171
18 - The Martyrs' Cry .....	189
19 - The Fourth Angel .....	197
20 - A Voice Crying in the Wilderness .....	211

cont'd...

Cover and illustrations by Kristen Taylor.

ISBN # 3-905332-52-3

© 1999 by Aurora Production Ltd.  
All Rights Reserved. Printed in Thailand.

21 - The Eclipse and the Flood of Evil .....	219
22 - The Hand of Darkness .....	227
23 - The Festival .....	237
24 - Ecstasy in the Pool of Truth .....	245
25 - Wings of Deliverance .....	257
26 - The Child of the Angels, and the Rescue .	269
27 - The Last Mission .....	281
28 - Dragon, the Deceiver .....	285
29 - The Celestial Conclusion .....	295

# The Playns of Wylder



In the heart of a child lies the hope of the future.  
In their hands is held the pen that will write of things to come.  
With the life of a child is born seed for tomorrow  
That will some day grow and bloom,  
As trees from desert sands do come.

-1-

## THE WILDERNESS

As if in rebellion against the dry and dusty world that Eryn<sup>1</sup> lived in, tears moistened her clear blue eyes. This day had been long awaited by her and her husband, Jerol. It was the birth of their first child, and a delightful-looking daughter she was. Reflections of years of joy for the old couple danced in her almond eyes—eyes that had never yet beheld anything but beauty and innocence.

“What will we call her, Jerol?” Eryn queried.

“Apocalyne<sup>2</sup>.”

“Apocalyne?” Eryn was puzzled at the odd-sounding name. But looking up into Jerol’s face, with its fatherly pride and maybe even a foreknowledge of what their daughter’s role would be—for everyone had one—Eryn acquiesced.

---

<sup>1</sup>Eryn: pronounced “Ehr-in”

<sup>2</sup>Apocalyne: pronounced like “apocalypse” but ending with the “ine” of “machine”

“Apocalyne it will be,” she said with a satisfied smile, adoring the little angel who had just entered their lonely lives.

Apocalyne’s light brown curls and almond eyes matched the color scheme of their desert world beautifully. With scarcely a tree or flower to justify the abundance of dirt and sand, the general populace had early taken to varying forms of cacti and desert plant life to decorate their plain homes and villages. Many of the villages of this world where Jerol and Eryn lived were really almost as large as a city, and were sometimes called such. But the simple ways of their inhabitants more resembled the village life.

No one really knew just how long their present world had been inhabited, or where (if anywhere) the original inhabitants had come from. But legends abounded. Most spoke of the original inhabitants having come from another world—the Old World, it was often called—one bluer of sky and greener of earth, though for what reason the journey was made remained unknown. Neither was it known when or how these distinctly human-like people could have traveled the expanses of space to this dusty planet—and if they could, why they couldn’t return.

Questions such as these abounded, but the answers had died with that first and well-nigh forgotten generation of original inhabitants who had now come to be known as the *Settlyrs*<sup>1</sup>. Intentional or not, very little knowledge of their history had survived past that first generation. What little knowledge did remain had either been passed on by word of mouth, or was recorded so poorly that much of it had been relegated to hazy legend by this time.

Most folk were just thankful that their forefathers had survived and made a good life for their progeny on this planet. They had learned to use the land’s

---

<sup>1</sup>**Settlyrs:** read as “settlers”

resources well, and the villages were for the greater part self-reliant, though several routes of trade had also been established between them. They were, for the most part, a united folk, except for their religious beliefs—which, if anyone possessed any, were mostly kept to themselves.

To enhance the reader’s vision of the climate of this distant world, it could be likened to that of ancient Egypt. Though dry, for this world had little surface water such as we know it, it was hardly barren. Crops grew well if one knew how and where to plant them. And this knowledge seemed to have been established from the earliest times of these people, for they had adapted well to this new environment. In fact, the abundant natural resources and the cultivation of those resources had served to catapult these otherwise plain folk into forming a more advanced culture than might even be known to man just yet.

The magic of this inventiveness is that, cultivated properly, nature and the elements provided the people of this world with not only a good home, but also a truly progressive culture. Yet their lands bore none of the scars we of Earth have come to accept as commonplace among our more developed nations—the piled-up buildings, rising yet higher into the sky in what could be considered a vain attempt to rise above the pollution created below. No—no such blemishes marred the simple advancement of this civilization—one which might make ours seem rather barbaric in many ways.

At least, up until now it could be deemed a true civilization. No one should ever presume just because something has been so up until a certain point, that it will continue on in the same fashion indefinitely. But that is scarcely the main point—or at least, not just yet.

How Jerol and Eryn came into being, or who their progenitors were, no one knew either. And that made

them fit quite nicely into the long list of other unanswered questions and mysteries left solely for those of an excessively curious and inquisitive nature, of which there were very few. People were content to go about their lives in a very methodical manner, and they appreciated it if everyone else did likewise.

It was their disregard for this rather docile existence that first brought Jerol and Eryn to the notice of the people of Ordyn<sup>1</sup>—one of the largest “villages” of this world. It was manifest to all that Jerol and Eryn held strong beliefs, which they, in a manner most uncharacteristic to these parts, professed with equal strength. They also possessed such spiritual gifts that would entitle them the name of mystics, psychics or seers in our culture. Some thought to call them “fortunetellers,” but seeing that many of their predictions could hardly be deemed fortunate, people just settled for “Tellers.” That soon evolved into “Tylers<sup>2</sup>”—for what reason, I know not.

Perhaps it was to indulge their civilization’s excessive use of the letter “y.”<sup>3</sup> There was hardly anything excessive about these people, to be sure, but oddly enough the exorbitant amount of “y’s” in their writing—a detail I include only for the trivially-minded—was one of those things.

<sup>1</sup>**Ordyn:** pronounced “ore-din”

<sup>2</sup>**Tylers:** pronounced “tile-ers”

<sup>3</sup>**Wylder writing:** It stands to reason that, having developed independently from our own human existence, the practice of writing on this world, while developed to a degree similar to that which we enjoy here, was nonetheless based on an entirely different set of sounds and their representative characters, which could hardly be reproduced within this book. The reference to the character “y” is merely a simplification, or representation, if you will, of this same character and the sounds it represents within their own language, the particulars of which would be an unnecessary tediousness to set forth, for which reason they have been omitted.

Then there were the *Planetyrs*<sup>1</sup>. These were almost akin to the Tylers, in that they could predict events. Their predictions, however, unlike those of the Tylers (which came from sources that in this story are described as “spiritual”), were based on their readings of the sky and the heavenly bodies that were visible there. They foretold the weather—if such predictions were ever needed, for rarely did the climate vary from the norm—and proclaimed the acceptable planting and harvesting seasons, which sayings were generally heeded without question, just as so many things there were accepted without question.

I should also mention here, lest it be far too late to be of relevance anymore, that the name of this people was the *Wylders*<sup>2</sup>, from the word “wilderness,” which is what their planet looked like—a vast wilderness, and after which it was itself also named, being the *planet of Wylder*.

Back to Jerol and Eryn. In the days of their youth, they had preached long and courageously about their beliefs, which were of a more definite nature than those loosely embraced by the common man. Their religious convictions were not of an inordinate nature—rather they preached peace, kindness and a belief in some supreme Spirit Being that watched over them all. Every day either Jerol or Eryn, or both of them, would be heralding some newfound revelation, some spiritual discovery or some mystical message they had heard in the night. But they did so with a passion, and it was this passion itself, more so than the things they were passionate about, that quite disturbed the uneventful lives of the peace-loving folk of their village.



As Jerol looked lovingly upon his beloved daughter, memories flooded his mind. He remembered the days

<sup>1</sup>**Planetyrs:** pronounced “planeteers”

<sup>2</sup>**Wylders:** pronounced “will-durs”

of his youth and the passionate, soul-stirring chapter of his life it had been. Nearly every morning he had awoken with some burning desire to get to know this mysterious Spirit in a more intimate way, or to purge his life of any iniquities that might stand in his way—iniquities which were commonly overlooked in this world, or not even regarded as such. With these spiritual experiences came an enthusiasm unequalled, and an overwhelming urge for both Jerol and Eryn to spread this enthusiasm to all who came their way. Naturally, people began to avoid them. Even their friends would suddenly become busy at any time Jerol and Eryn showed their faces—polite, but busy.

Jerol and Eryn didn't exactly know who this Supreme Spirit Being was that they felt so close to—only that it was full of Love, Truth and Light. Thus they went solely on their faith and personal experience, and the revelations they were given—revelations which told them to come out and be separate from those people who cared not for those things which they could not see or perceive with their natural senses, but also to go out among them, in the hopes that others, too, could be brought to the knowledge of this same Eternal Truth they had had the pleasure to discover and experience.

Regardless of the lack of any tangible proof, each new experience was burned into Jerol and Eryn's hearts and they could stand the solitude no longer. They would find excuses to visit others for the sole purpose of bringing these things up in their conversations, and eventually, they would just visit without excuses. This would be termed evangelization or proselytizing, I presume—something which we on Earth are all too familiar with in this day, and is embraced by some, despised by others. But these simple folk never knew of such a thing, for everyone kept to themselves almost without exception, and thus Jerol and Eryn found themselves in greater disfavor

as time went on.

Finally, people in their village had had enough. They threatened to do something dreadful to the couple if their passion persisted. "It's the ardor of youth. Get control of it!" some would tell them.

"Perhaps they're right," Jerol remembered telling Eryn one day. "We really should mind our own business and just let this passion fade. It might only take a few months, then our friends will leave off this tenseness and maybe things will be normal again."

"It won't be easy, Jerol. But let's do whatever is necessary to keep the peace with those in our town."

Where the notion of such beliefs as Jerol and Eryn professed had originated, no one knew. Nor did they care. Perhaps they came solely in visions, being passed on by some mystical being or apparition which Tylers alone seemed to be privy to. Or perhaps they stemmed from ancient beliefs of the older and first generation of Settlyrs.

These Settlyrs, which have only been briefly mentioned before, had passed from the realm of existence some 60 years earlier (by the reckoning of their sun), and even within so short a time their memory had all but faded from the consciousness of most Wylders. With each succeeding generation, more villages and settlements had been quickly built and established. In the arid and challenging landscape before them, the building of a home and a prosperous life was one of the paramount occupations of these people, leaving them little time or concern for remembering—much less recording—what scant details of their own history they could have gathered. Now, a hundred and some years after the Settlyrs had first set foot on this planet, and with their children's offspring rearing the next generation, the story of the Settlyrs had become little more than a legend.

As the legend went, when the Settlyrs had died,



they had been translated to a forbidden area just beyond the Great Dunes—sand dunes which seemed to have turned to rock, producing a range of, well, you could call them mountains, except that these people didn't think they had mountains. Anyhow, the range of dunes, then, formed a large circle—at least, that's how it appeared from the distance it was seen, though no one had ever attempted to walk its circumference to see if it actually was one. Legend told the Wylders that the souls of the Settlyrs, and indeed, of any who had passed from the realm of existence into the void of unexistence, rested within that range of mountains. There was no Heaven or Hell in this legend, for all Wylders and the original Settlyrs were good people, in their books.

There was, nonetheless, a spot on this planet that legend said held all sorts of vile creatures, but that these creatures kept to themselves and their dark caves, which were protected by the range of very tall and steep cliffs to the east of the Wylder plains. This range of rock had been called the Hills of Shadow from the earliest time, though these jutting cliffs were more commonly known as the Dark Hills. The ominous-sounding name, however, seemed to stem from little more than the fact that this range of mountains, according to the path of the sun in their sky, always found itself projecting its dark and shadowed side towards the inhabited plains of the Wylders.

The hills stood as silent sentries and an impregnable fortress around what was said to be a deep and ancient crater of sorts, within which were found the caves that housed these undescribed creatures. At least that's how the story went. But those creatures—the only intrinsically evil things on the planet—kept to themselves and only lashed out at people who sought to invade their territory. But then again, that was just the rumor, because no one that anyone knew

of had ever been so foolish as to leave home and loved ones to trudge through the strip of deserted land belonging to no one (accurately called “No Man's Sand”) to see the creatures—that is, if they even existed.

Apparitions of the former Settlyrs—or any form of spirit for that matter, good or evil—were scarce, and hardly spoken of. For the more spiritually minded, I say that this civilization was highly logical and rational, lending a greater understanding of why submission to such passion as Jerol and Eryn possessed was not taken kindly to. Aside from that fact, however, they still stood out somewhat among their fellow villagers. You see, they were too young to be old, but then ... they were too old to be young. It was as if they belonged to a generation all their own. They knew and understood things that were beyond the comprehension and depth of the new and younger generation, yet were too passionate and enthusiastic for the older. In short, they were a rare mix of youth and maturity, and thus still had the tendency to draw notice to themselves even if it had not been for their ardent beliefs.



Jerol's mind was suddenly drawn back to the present at the cry that announced Apocalyne's presence. Yes, there she was—a beauty indeed. Even in her baby features he could see the gentility and beauty of Eryn. But the fire and strength of Jerol's now-spent youth was unmistakably present as well.

“Come, Jerol. Bring her to me,” Eryn called softly. “Put her at my breast.”

Jerol gently placed the child in Eryn's arms.

“She's a rare beauty, isn't she?” Eryn smiled.

“I think that may be the standard feeling of every new parent,” Jerol answered with a smile.

“Oh, but she's far too lovely to think that anyone else would adore a child the way I adore her.”

APOCALYNE

Jerol just smiled. He felt that fatherly pride surging in his heart once again. *It's really happened!* He thought to himself. *I never thought this time would come, but it has!*



The blending of dimensions, the secrets of the heart,  
 Nature with eternity, mortality with life,  
 The shadow flees at daybreak, the darkness from the dawn,  
 The world is filled, as once it was, with beauty.

- 2 -

## THE WEDDING

With Apocalyne quietly nursing at her breast, Eryn closed her eyes for a moment of rest. She remembered the night when they had come to know that a daughter would someday be theirs. This promise hadn't come in words or writing, but in a strong feeling or premonition—the kind that can only be experienced, not explained.

Childhood friends and confidants, Jerol and Eryn could never remember when it was that they had begun living together. It seemed to them—and to everyone around them—that they were born married. But that was no excuse to skip the celebration and ceremonialism that even this civilization had not become too advanced to forgo.

Community of spirit was one of this land's great strengths. There were no rich or poor, free or bound—so far. Everyone was free, yet the loyalty of each to the other could be deemed marginally binding—at least to those of us who possess a selfish, self-centered

nature. This unity was only afforded you if you stayed within the unspoken confines of what was expected of you. And each held another to the rules of the land. These were few, though, for all took great pride in their world and did their best to preserve it.

Jerol and Eryn occasionally found themselves on the outskirts of this benevolent and somewhat socialistic circle of love and brotherhood. This was due to their aforementioned outbursts of religious passion—and passion was not a virtue encouraged by these people.

But, since Jerol and Eryn had regained the acceptance—or perhaps tolerance—of their village folk, at least for the time being, the village of Ordyn hosted their wedding. And a delightful wedding it was! Traditionally, all celebrations took three days, and their wedding was no exception. Beginning at the break of dawn, the first day was comprised of races, acrobatics, dance and song. The villagers seated themselves in one large circle in the outdoors on a specially paved area for such events, and the bride and groom were seated at the head of the circle (if there could be such a thing). All entertainment took place in the middle.

One interesting note about these very talented people, the Wylders, was that they all performed the entertainment for each other. It was some sort of talent show where all would participate. Everyone would alternate between facing the spotlight, and playing the role of the audience for the others. Thus it was called the cycle of entertainment. It was considered very cowardly for any to not contribute in some way, so even the bride and groom came prepared. A beautiful dance was theirs to perform. And beautiful, on this occasion, would be defined as acrobatic, exotic, yet graceful and emotive. This was all complemented by the traditional colors of the first of the three days: white for the bride to wear, and

royal blue for the groom. Any style was allowed as long as the two colors were adhered to.

Eryn dressed herself in a slight, sheer white dress, held up only by thin straps. It came just to her knees, with a leaflike hem, and a silver sash around her waist. Flowers crowned her dark, wavy hair. Jerol's royal blue vest, sewn with golden thread, revealed his fair but muscular chest and arms. He chose a golden sash and loose-fitting pants to match. Eryn loved the way the royal blue brought out the sparkle in Jerol's clear blue eyes.

It was a magical sight! Every move and spin, leap and landing was met with admiration and awe. Such skill was theirs that it looked almost as if the choreography took the slightest of effort, and was dreamed up simultaneously in both of their minds, enacted as they went. If anyone had been given the delicate task of dramatizing the love that Jerol and Eryn possessed for each other, they would have been foolish to choose anything but such a dance to do so.

“Ah, the magic of movement has been given into your hands!” *the Father*<sup>1</sup> of their village commented to them—Father Ordyn, that is, for each Village Father took on the name of his city.

This struck a fanciful chord in both of their hearts, especially Jerol's. Fathers of the Wylder villages were not seen too often, seeming to prefer a hermitlike lifestyle to that of a public figure. Public sightings of the Fathers were rare, giving them more of a godlike or sagelike image. Short would be the accepted life of freedom of one who should dare to dream up some scandalous rumor or ill word about these much-loved and respected officials. Their way of life proved the quotation true, “Absence makes the heart grow fonder.” Plus, their presence was hardly needed except as a symbol of government, being that their people

---

<sup>1</sup>**Village Father:** comparable to an earthly mayor or governor

minded themselves quite nicely.

“What gift should be given to those possessing such beauty of dance?” the Father then called out to all present. “The celebration is in their honor,” he pointed to Jerol and Eryn, “and yet they grace us with such talent!”

“Let them choose,” said one voice in the audience, holding up a sack of what appeared to be Grenyrs<sup>1</sup>, coins of the local currency. “Will Grenyrs do, or shall it be something else?”

“Any gift—the most precious one you can conjure up at this very moment!” cried another to the newlyweds.

Jerol and Eryn blushed at the appreciation they were receiving.

“Well?” smiled the Father. “What say you? This is an opportunity unmatched, is it not?”

Jerol looked uneasy. He was not used to coping with such attention, so he looked to Eryn, the more gracious and sociable of them both.

“Say on,” the Father prodded her.

The audience was silent. Such bright beams of generosity did not shine on many very frequently.

“A child,” said Eryn timidly.

“A child, saith she!” cried the Father. “What a noble heart she possesses to complement her noble figure! So a child it is!”

Everyone cheered. Then the Father turned to Eryn, his eyes sparkling with charm. “You know that I have not the power, nor does anyone here, to grant what you have wished for. But, I think that your wish shall indeed be granted.” There was something more to Father Ordyn than simple charm and wisdom of the old. He had a certain clever and crafty look that seemed to peek out from behind the charming front. Jerol and Eryn couldn’t be sure, though. He seemed

kind enough at the moment.

Eryn nodded, and then turned to Jerol and smiled. It was a very magical moment for both of them.—Even more so when they remembered their lives just a few years back, when religious passion had collided with, and overtaken, their desire to be accepted by the rest of their community—a desire that was strong in the heart of every Wylder.

The night that followed would always be fondly remembered by them both. It was their first wedded night! That is of importance, for it was most certainly not the first night together for two people who were thought to be born married. But the ceremony seemed to engrave the union even more deeply into each of their hearts.

“Here’s to the creation of our gift, Eryn! Let’s make our baby!” Jerol smiled as he caressed Eryn’s warm body and began their night with a kiss that was well-loved and returned by Eryn.

“Yes, let’s!” Eryn responded.



The next day, in pursuit of tradition, the bride and groom were to trade colors. Jerol substituted the vest of gold and blue of the night before with a brief, masculine, silk robelike shirt, complete with a silver belt that modestly kept his chest from being bared too openly. He kept the loose-fitting pants, only now in white, for many had complimented him on that look and Jerol was not above the human inclination towards a little vanity.

Eryn took the liberty to lengthen her apparel. She now wore Jerol’s royal blue, in a gown that draped her form nicely all the way down to her ankles. Contrary to the modesty Jerol tried to possess, Eryn’s long gown had a very low-cut V-neck, with a golden sash and high slits on either side.

It was another magical sight! Jerol and Eryn, who had felt uneasy the day before at the frank admiration

<sup>1</sup> Grenyrs: pronounced “gren-ears”

they were receiving, not sure what to make of it all, today basked in the spotlight of adulation.

*It will only last these three days*, they both thought to themselves. *The days of feeling ostracized and unwelcome will return and bring a balance to all this adoration when the festivities are over.*

The second day was nonetheless a more relaxing one. The intense parading of each other's strength and bodily skills the day before made this day of more restful feasting, song and storytelling, well appreciated. Tables formed a large circle in an open-air pavilion. Refreshments and delectable dishes of every kind, some that would tease the imagination of Earth's finest chefs, were served all the day long while musicians and storytellers entered the middle of the circle, serenading and entertaining the rest of the Wylders who looked on, only occasionally interrupted by lovely women who served the food.

These women who served were highly skilled, an integral part of the entertainment committee—for there was no such thing as “business” (as in “the entertainment business” of our present world), only committees and councils. There were no tasks that were considered menial and only fit for the lower class; this had always been a classless society. Each individual was highly skilled in the occupation he or she took up, which was only secondary to that of making a home and family. This could reveal in part why theirs was an advanced culture in the natural sense—for everyone, without exception, gave the utmost in dedication to enhancing and advancing their skills.

But enough of the background of this unique and intriguing people. I venture to say that the imagination now has enough of a foundation to build on as we go along.



“Let us have another dance from the newlyweds!” cried a voice in the audience. This was highly unusual,

considering that things were always done in a methodical manner, and if this celebration were to follow in that manner, dances would be out of the question—for they were done the day before. Jerol and Eryn knew this, and were pleasantly surprised that they were the subjects of a request for a break from tradition. Who could resist such temptation to a tinge of personal pride?

“Well now, I can see that their talent is appreciated by all,” said Father Ordyn. “Only, we are here to entertain them, not them us, and so let us allow them to relax.”

No one would be foolish enough to challenge such a suggestion for a return to order coming from the Father himself. It would only be the place of the subjects of this request to do so. But Jerol and Eryn were wise enough not to drive their welcome into the ground, remembering only too well that they had been the source of disturbance not too long ago.

“Unless, of course, the bride and the groom would not mind to grace us with their gift once again?” the Father added after the silence, looking over at Jerol and Eryn.

Jerol and Eryn looked at each other. Eryn remembered that this gift they had been given had come from the same Spirit they loved and cherished, perhaps to be used as a reminder that they were not merely self-made creatures, and that, likewise, their greater strengths and talents came forth from this Supreme Being that was always with them. But somehow this once, Jerol forgot that, and Eryn was loathe to remind him, she also being enticed by the love of the audience, and perhaps also because they, in an effort to be accepted, had pushed the presence of this same Spirit to the back of their own hearts for a time.

And so their minds struggled inwardly, weighing the seeming innocence of this request against the

notion that, in agreeing, they would be still further accepted into the unspiritual circle from which they had been instructed to remain separate. After what seemed like an hour of looking into each other's eyes, but not being able to see into the hearts of the other (compromise having begun to shut the door to their inner chambers of conviction), they timidly agreed.

"Wonderful!" the Father said in approval, and everyone raised their crystal glasses in a mirthful toast to Jerol and Eryn.

Jerol and Eryn had always loved to dance—ever since they were little children—and so they performed one of their dances from their earlier years. It was a melancholic tune they had done this dance to, and the music proved to make this performance less upbeat and cheery than that of the previous day. But was it only the music? Jerol and Eryn sensed less of a magical blessing on this performance than the last, and their faces registered it. But to the audience, it was only seen as dramatizing the act all the more, and their listless faces seemed but in accordance with this melancholic music. Their smiles picked up at the end when they heard the audience cheer.

"What talent! Not only do they gambol delightfully at cheerful music, but they move well to the less joyful tunes," the Father encouraged. "Who could take up another occupation when this one has seen you well along the road of success already? Everyone finds that magical moment when something makes them a part of the world they live in, and this must be your moment!" the Father confided in them, with a wink such as would communicate that it would be foolish for them to refuse this chance at glory to look for other occupations for any reason.

For indeed it was again customary among the Wylders that, after one was wed, they would together decide the role they would play in their day-to-day lives among the community, and so it was commonly

expected that, with this wedding, Jerol and Eryn would also seek to further integrate themselves into the sphere of existence that made up the town of Ordyn.

The rest of that day had gone by without event—or at least none that would be worth recalling. That was well enough, since Jerol and Eryn had enough to ponder about their future, and whether it was in accordance with their beliefs and convictions to become so integrally involved in the entertainment profession, which was—if there was any—the greatest way to express oneself. And, once the Father had suggested something, one would be unwise to do otherwise—even though there was no punishment or retribution as such, save the omission of respect from the rest of the community; something which no Wylder in their right mind would think of giving up for anything, and which Jerol and Eryn, having so recently acquired, were not eager to let go of.



That was another problem right there, Eryn acknowledged to herself, drawing her mind back to the nursing babe at her breast. No one ever questioned anything, but Jerol and Eryn—why, they questioned everything. To them nothing was just because it always had been. There must be a reason, they always felt, and if there is a reason, we must know it.

The babe now asleep, Eryn thought to rest as well, and this gave her mind wonderful opportunity to continue to reminisce on those events from where she had left off.

That night—it was the night of Apocalypse's prophecy. She recalled to herself with gratefulness that it had finally come true after these many years—years which, it seemed, had dragged on as if they had been centuries. How they had longed to have this child to hold and call their own! They were already on the fringe of society as it was, without having to

be childless as well, when all those around them bore child after child.

Children were highly spoken of in the Wylder world. It was said that they held the hope of the future in their tiny hands, and the Wylders took every opportunity to ensure that the children had a firm grip on what was to be theirs.

The nyght wynds blow upon the playns, the whisper of a vision,  
 The unseen becomes clear to those whose eyes can see.  
 That which is hid in lycht of day, from syght of normal men,  
 (Can be seen) when all recedes, when nyght fully is come.

- 3 -

## AN APPARITION AND A DANCE

Exhausted from the events of the second day of their wedding, Jerol and Eryn fell into a deep sleep. They were tired in spirit from wondering whether to allow themselves to become part of the world—forgetting that coexistence never works; you must choose one way or another eventually.

Nights were cold and windy in that desert of a world, a refreshing break from the heat of the day, which allowed the men and women only scant attire. It was not unusual to hear the night wind howling outside the sturdy stone houses that everyone lived in.

As the wind thus howled on this particular night, Jerol and Eryn were sure that it sounded like a woman's wail. Everyone knows that the wind often gives the impression of howling wolves or a whining person, but this was very distinct. They pulled aside the sheer curtains to get a clearer look out the glassless windows. Their eyesight proved to be even less sane than their hearing. It looked like long,



thin veils—white veils—were flowing horizontally through the wind, undulating and curving as if they were the excess material of a woman’s apparel, the part of her garments that falls loosely about after having dedicated most of itself to clothing her body.

The longer they looked, the more intriguing the apparition. Soon these white veils (for lack of a better description) were twirling and spinning, dancing around randomly to the wailing tune which, coincidentally, had not stopped just yet. Then came the moment which always causes the eyes to blink once or twice just to make sure that what they are seeing is not produced by an eye twitch or hallucination of the mind, but is truly something extraordinary. But the apparition continued unhindered by their own hesitation.

The veils danced together, forming different dresses or gowns (all styles of dress of their day, and with which they were familiar)—first that of a baby, accompanied by a break in the sorrowful wail of a woman, which was filled with the gurgles and giggles of an infant. Then it was back to that wailing again, and the veils rearranged themselves to the shape of a woman’s gown. Then silence. Jerol and Eryn looked at each other in awe, but before either could get a word out, a child’s innocent laugh was heard. They immediately looked out the window to see what visions these veils would present them with next.

True to nature’s progression of growth, the next form the veils created against the sky was the dress of a toddler. The strange thing was that it was as if a transparent body filled the dress. Then again, a woman’s dress—a different style, but nevertheless a woman’s dress—and a terrifying cry. This sequence of events was repeated until the progression of childhood met with adolescence and finally womanhood. Then the alternating visions

were different.

First, the white veils again, forming the dress of a woman. Then the veils changed to a brown, dusty color, forming a loose, less stylish woman’s apparel; then back to the white, angelic veils; then again, the brown dusty veil, giving room for a growing abdomen, or so it looked; then again the white; then the brown, confirming that this shape was that of a woman with child. Back and forth it went through the different stages of a woman’s pending motherhood until the brown veils were split, making one gown of a woman and another of an infant. The wails had continued, getting intensely sad and frightening at one point, then stopping altogether to give way to the delightful cooing of an infant and the motherly expressions of pride in a firstborn. Jerol and Eryn both understood somehow that this child was to be theirs one day.

Last of all, a slight but womanly figure finally filled the shape of the gown. She was of medium height, but neither Jerol nor Eryn could see her face, for her back was turned to them. All they could see were portions of her slender, yet well-built form, whenever the dusty brown hair that covered most of her back and shoulders down to her thighs would yield to the wind for a moment. Slowly, she turned and gave them the profile of her face, when suddenly the apparition was gone, and Jerol and Eryn found themselves squinting at the morning sun that was shining in their window. Had the night passed so quickly?

No words had come with this apparition—though the wailing might have been that of a woman speaking words that could not be understood for the wailing tone and the length of time which each word, even short ones, seemed to stretch over. Regardless of that, Jerol and Eryn knew that a daughter was to be theirs, though neither of them

were sure of when this bundle of joy (and maybe eventually sorrow) was to enter their lives.



The baby's stirring awoke Eryn from her recollection of past events, and she looked down at the precious bundle in her arms. Apocalyne had a great deal of hair for a newborn. Were it not for her very newborn skin and eyes that were obviously taking their time to adjust to such light after the darkness of the womb, she could pass as an older infant.

The events of the last day of their marriage festival were hardly worth recalling, being that they were so greatly overshadowed by the experience of the night before. Or perhaps it was that this same over-shadowing had blinded their minds to the significance of what had taken place that last day.

Shaken as they were by the intensely spiritual experience, Jerol and Eryn had yielded to the cries of the crowd for a final dance. After all, is a dance not merely that—a dance? For the unspiritual mind, yes, it was just that. But for Jerol and Eryn it was entirely different. It was to them a manifestation of holding on to their beliefs with only one hand, and letting the other free to take hold of the call to, as Father Ordyn had put it, make themselves a part of the world they lived in; forgetting again that it is never long before one in such a position is torn between the two, and finally has to make a decision one way or the other lest he be destroyed, at least in spirit.

*But were we not to live in this world without being a part of it?* their eyes seemed to ask each other at any time the dance caused them to meet. They weren't sure anymore if that really meant what it seemed to mean—and that was a problem. Convictions from beyond only became unclear and confusing when the real meaning was questioned

or resisted, because deep down Jerol and Eryn knew that the Spirit they had loved and pursued never teased them with confusing mazes. Its will and path was always a straight one if one looked ahead—and only ahead.

The last day's color for both the bride and groom was a soft, sky blue. The mingling of the white and blue themes of the previous days to a lighter blue shade signaled the blending of their two hearts and souls into one. But for Jerol and Eryn it was more than uniting with each other—they were uniting with the masses of that world, and making themselves a part of it.

Society promises its own great things to those who might do great things for God, in an effort to destroy them with lust for success. The desire to be someone great in the eyes of man confuses their convictions and causes their compromise for this lesser, easier greatness—which proves in the end to be their destruction. It's the classic fall from true greatness, God's greatness, for a promise of cheap, instantaneous fame, rarely delivered except as a deceptive trap to lure potentially great men and women of God to give up their birthright for a mess of pottage, which turns out to be nothing but an empty bowl of the desires of the flesh, and brings leanness to the soul.

And so that final dance of the wedding became their first dance of compromise. Each festivity held the spotlight over Jerol and Eryn's heads. They were heralded as a magically talented young couple—though they were older than half the populace of their village, and younger than the other half. Soon their acclaim brought them into the Wylder's hall of fame. They became not only dancers, but master instructors to the young. It was not long before they were elected to the entertainment committee, making their dancing routines part of the regular

entertainment and life in the city of Ordyn.

Each dance brought them more glory, and with glory, acceptance by their village, and following acceptance, a greater desire to be all the more glorified and accepted. Not only that, but with each dance came a lesser questioning of the ways of their world, a lesser desire for the thrill that comes from partaking of spiritually feeding experiences and joys, settling rather for the temporal ones.

But after all, how could that be wrong? No one else seemed to be struggling with such dilemmas. No one else had questions or challenged the manner in which life was lived in the world of the Wylders.



The tapping of Jerol's foot to the tune he was humming brought Eryn back to the present. *My, what a long way we have come!* she thought to herself, relieved to never have to walk that way again, and yet thankful for the way things had turned out. The door was cracked open just enough for her to see Jerol writing in the next room, which they used as their study. They kept a life log of every major event that happened to them—well, not only the major events, but all events that held significance of any sort to them, whether they would be deemed important or trivial to others. She knew what he must be writing about—the birth of Apocalyne. Many pages had been written before this long-awaited chapter of the start of her life—pages that amounted to the size of a tome or two.

Jerol sensed that Eryn was looking at him, and he wondered why. *Perhaps she needs something.* He got up slowly and took the few steps necessary to bring him to the door of their bedroom.

*How beautiful he is, even as he ages,* Eryn thought to herself as she looked adoringly at Jerol's dusty blond hair that fell nicely to his shoulders.

Jerol, not realizing in the least what she was

thinking, wondered about the silence. "Are you all right, Eryn?"

Eryn nodded.

"And Apocalyne?"

"She sleeps."

Jerol looked puzzled, still wondering why she had looked at him for those few moments before saying anything.—In fact, it was he who had had to begin their brief conversation.

As if she read his thoughts that instant, Eryn said with a smile, "I was just adoring your fine hair and build—it's hardly changed since your youth, except to grow all the more lovely."

"And you've grown all the more radiant, my Eryn," Jerol said as he stepped closer to the bed where his wife lay.

"I'm afraid it only looks so through your loving eyes, Jerol. My hair is already becoming streaked with gray..."

"No, Eryn. With silver," Jerol responded adoringly, as he knelt down beside the bed. "You wear a crown inlaid with silver, one which only signals the prime years, and is given to those who have borne life's burdens bravely and graciously and kept their shoulders straight and tall through it all."

Eryn blushed. "You speak with such love and faith," she answered, stroking Jerol's beard. "I shouldn't stoop to complain further about myself. I should thank our loving Spirit that I have been designed in such a fashion as makes me beautiful to the one I love."

"I give thanks every day," Jerol returned with a kiss on her forehead. "Get some rest now."

"I think my body has slept all it needs."

"Won't you look at her face?" Jerol said, softly stroking Apocalyne's head. "It looks as though it's enjoying its peace before the travail that everyone

faces in life—especially those who are destined for it.” Neither of them were quite sure what was meant by that, but they had gained this perspective from that apparition of long ago which had had an unmistakably sorrowful overtone.

“Have you also been thinking about the apparition of our second wedding night?” Eryn asked while Jerol still stroked the babe’s curls with a pensive look upon his face.

“I have. Sometimes it troubles me, but I know that the Spirit which gives us such visions is filled with love—and love does no harm without bringing it to good. It has not cared for us all this time to forsake us or our newborn.”

Then, almost as a prophecy, Jerol said, “Our time is over, my love. Now our remaining years must be lived for and through this little babe. It is now her time, the birth of another age in this civilization. We must prepare her to be all that she must be. As it is said, and for our little one it could not be more true, she holds the hope of the future in her tiny hand. We must help her to have a strong faith, a conviction unwavering. Each day from now shall be lived for her.”

Eryn sat silently, meditating upon all that Jerol had just said. To other Wylders it would have appeared just another birth, another child. But Jerol and Eryn knew she was more than that—she was their future—and not just Jerol and Eryn’s, but the future of their entire world.



It was but a few days later when Eryn stood in the kitchen, the sun shining on the herbs and spices she was mixing for herself to aid her recovery from the delivery, that she heard that familiar tapping and humming coming from Jerol’s workshop. Little did she know that Jerol’s mind had already drifted back to the days she was just about to reminisce—

the latter part of their dancing days....

“Come now, you have made yourselves quite successful in your skill,” a friend said to Jerol and Eryn one day. “You were wise to take heed to Father Ordyn. He rarely offers personal advice to the people of this village, as you know. And look at you now! I should say you have successfully become one of us—a part of our world, and a good part at that!”

Most people would have taken this as a sincere compliment, for so it was intended. But Jerol and Eryn felt uneasy about it. For days the words “you have successfully become one of us” rang in their ears and pricked their hearts. Was this not a subtle denial of the convictions that had been so much a part of them at one point? Just when they would acknowledge that it was, the voice of reason would speak: *Ah, but it’s just in dance. How can one attribute spiritual wrongdoing or compromise to the graceful movement of the body to music?*

Back and forth went the debate between their hearts and their minds. And there was no one they could turn to and ask for advice—no one at all. Then they both did something that they hadn’t done in a long while. Silently, in the middle of an afternoon, they again sought to communicate with that beautiful Spirit whose name they knew not, but whose essence and strength they had partaken of for so long.

The answer came not in words—and logic would take that as proof that there was no need to question in the first place—but it was as sure and real as if someone had been right before them speaking audible words. They knew what they must do. Still, the youthful idealism that remained within them was not sufficient to prepare them for the difficulty they would face in returning to the fringes of society on account of their loyalty to some Spirit that they could neither specifically see nor hear.

The next gathering of the entertainment committee was to be held the following day. Jerol and Eryn pondered the words they would speak to explain their resignation from the committee, for no one ever resigned from a committee unless ill health or other obligations demanded it. And such obligations always centered around family and home life, which was paramount in their world; never was an obligation to personal feelings or whims reason enough for such a resignation. It had never been done. But now, and at what would incidentally be the committee's year-end meeting, it would have to be.



The people languish, dark they lie in valleys deep.  
The Hand of Darkness reaches out in sleep.  
The eyes are closed, the ears are dim, perceiving, they are blind.  
The Darkness must be felt before the light is made to shine.

- 4 -

## MERYNDA

“Jerol and Eryn,” called out Merynda<sup>1</sup>, the chairwoman of their committee, “what are the points you have brought to discuss?”

Jerol and Eryn looked uneasily at each other.

“Come now, no points could be so grave as to be hesitated over. Speak on. We will listen graciously.” Merynda knew that Jerol and Eryn had been known for their radicalism at some point earlier in their lives, and she was prepared to accommodate that quirk in return for their great skill and their contribution to the village’s entertainment.

Slowly, timidly, Eryn began to build the case for their resignation. Jerol stepped in from time to time to support her, qualify her statements and reinforce points that needed emphasis. The other members of the committee sat dumbfounded at such audacity. The chairwoman, however, looked undaunted. She

---

<sup>1</sup>Merynda: pronounced “Mur-inda”

was, after all, known as a close advisor to Father Ordyn, and knew the way the Father would treat such incidents.

“So let me see now,” she said with a smile, “you feel that being so integrally involved with the entertainment committee, particularly representing the dance department, conflicts with your personal feelings and religious beliefs?”

Relieved that they were understood, Eryn nodded with a hopeful smile. Jerol wasn’t sure.

“I understand,” Merynda continued. “Well, can we not negotiate? I feel it would be quite a loss to the committee were you both to leave us for such wholly inconsequential reasonings. Perhaps if we were to allow for more freedom of expression in your routines, as it were, you could find more productive ways to deal with your feelings. Most of us do not feel the need for such freedom, but we can make adjustments for those who do. Can we not? What if you were to, shall we say, communicate some of your messages through your dancing? You could incorporate them into the routines, like plays or stories, or however you prefer to do it. I’m sure most would find that acceptable.” She looked around at the other committee members, who obediently nodded their heads in agreement.

Eryn’s face broke out into a smile.

“Happy?” Merynda said in a slightly patronizing tone of voice.

Eryn nodded. But Jerol still wasn’t sure. He couldn’t shake the irresistibly strange feeling he had about this whole experience. It was too easy. Her last question seemed to echo as she looked up and into Jerol’s eyes. They locked gazes for a moment, and Jerol was almost stupefied.

Merynda’s olive skin and sharp blue eyes seemed strangely perfect. Her straight black hair looked as flawless as a black silken headdress over her oval

head. Her hair was tied tightly at the back with a lavender veil that flowed down to the floor. Jerol could have sworn he could suddenly see through the few layers of her almost sheer lavender dress. She looked at him, alluringly, for the entire moment he studied her.

Then Jerol looked over at Eryn’s sweet, innocent face, blue eyes and her dark wavy hair braided until its end, which had now grown to her knees. Not quite sure what he was seeing, he looked back at Merynda once more, but she was now looking at Eryn with an expression totally different than the one she had given him—one of understanding and compassion. Eryn was taking it all in.

Beads of sweat seemed to appear out of nowhere and race down Jerol’s forehead. Suddenly Eryn turned and looked at him. “Are you all right, Jerol?” she said with concern.

Jerol looked around in disbelief at what he had just felt and seen, but everything was back to normal now. Merynda was looking down at her notes. Her sheer lavender dress, made of a few layers in a feeble attempt to salute modesty, was no longer transparent. Her black-as-night hair tied in hundreds of little braids wasn’t as perfect as it had seemed a minute ago.

*I must be delirious,* Jerol thought to himself.

“Shall we give this a try?” Eryn looked at Jerol hopefully. He knew how she loved dancing, and if she could continue and still be at rest that she was not turning her back on their beliefs—but had in fact been given a new and acceptable way of proclaiming such beliefs—she would do so without hesitation.

Jerol didn’t feel right, but not having any solid basis for his feelings or time to have thought about them, he reluctantly agreed. “All right. A try.”

Eryn looked as happy as he imagined her to be. She squeezed his hand affectionately. “You’ll have to

get some rest once we get home. You don't look so well."

Jerol nodded. He couldn't believe that they hadn't been able to resign. As they stepped out of the pavilion where the meeting was held, he kicked himself. He knew that they should have resigned instead of negotiating.

"Oh well," he comforted himself, "if things don't go just perfectly, we can resign at next month's gathering."

It became rather clear after a few dance routines were performed that Merynda's expressed intention to compromise was not simply benevolence, as Eryn wanted to think it was. She was in control, and Jerol could sense a tension behind her calm exterior; she was desperately trying to manipulate their routines in an effort to please some command from someone higher than herself.

In response to these hunches, Jerol began to show less enthusiasm for dancing as the days went by, despite Eryn's attempts to encourage him by choreographing dances that told a story with a message. Though at first these "message dances" were approved by Merynda, who was not only the chairwoman but also the main entertainment director, she soon set more and more stipulations and was less approving of the messages Eryn tried to promote.

"Your work is too good," she encouraged Eryn one day after a solo dance. "But you'll have to be careful about promoting too many of your own opinions. People watch dances to relax, not to be engaged in a battle of persuasion of what you think and believe is right. A little is all right; too much cannot be allowed. It's just the way it is."

"I understand," Eryn replied, wanting to be as kind and understanding as she thought Merynda had been to them.

"How's Jerol? I haven't seen him at practices

lately," Merynda asked.

"Oh, he comes sometimes. He's already very good, and I teach the children their dances, so he mostly stays at home, tending our garden and practicing his instruments."

"He plays music as well?"

"Yes."

"He's too good, then!"

"That's what I always tell him."

"I hear you're going to take the children on a two-day dance tour to Phel."

"I am, but Jerol's staying."

"Why?"

"He hasn't been feeling well the last day or two."

"Oh, I'm so sorry. I guess you'll have to go with Rymer<sup>1</sup>, then. He's the only other dancer I know of that would be available. Let me know if there's anything else that can be done, Eryn. You know, you both have been an invaluable asset to the entertainment committee."

"Thank you, Merynda." Eryn said as she walked away. "I'll have to get ready. The tour is leaving this evening."

"Good luck to you, Eryn!" Merynda waved and smiled.

Strange how two totally different people could be mingling in such a friendly fashion, you would have thought when you saw them standing side by side. Merynda was a tall, extremely slender figure with black straight hair that was usually kept in hundreds of little braids all tied together in some kind of scarf just at the nape of her neck. She always wore pastel colors to complement her unusually blue eyes and olive skin. Jewelry was also a constant adornment.

Eryn, on the other hand, was the picture of innocent, simple beauty. She had wavy dark hair that

---

<sup>1</sup>Rymer: pronounced "rhyme-er"



finished at her knees in gentle curls when it was in its natural—and most beautiful—state. She too had blue eyes, but childish joy danced inside them—contrary to Merynda’s clever, almost crafty, look. Eryn’s fair skin was like that of a child, and when her frame (which was on the shorter end of medium) fluttered around, you’d almost think that she was one.

But who was to worry about two very opposite individuals getting along so nicely? All Wylders got along pretty nicely or just kept to themselves. Jerol didn’t take too kindly to Eryn and Merynda’s budding friendship, though. He often wished he could tell Eryn, but he didn’t want to frighten or upset her, so he continued to wait for the perfect time.

When he had first heard about the dance tour, however, he felt as if time was running out on him. The perfect time was now.—But already he’d let so many “nows” slip by. Another monthly meeting had come and gone, and yet another, but the thought Jerol had of again bringing up the question of their resignation remained just that—a thought. Every so often he did hint again at the uncomfortable feelings he had about their place on the entertainment committee, but Eryn didn’t seem to catch on. He began to wonder what had happened to his sensitive wife who was usually so delicately tuned and aware of these things that he was now having to notice on his own. Their spirits weren’t as one anymore.

The tyme wyl come on wyndswept playns, the vision sure shall stand:  
 The Hells of Shadow tyme with fyre along the view of man;  
 Destruction, darkness, lamentation, weeping deep and sore;  
 The Darkness ryzes, lught shall fade, tyll tyme comes nevermore.

- 5 -

## SEDUCEMENT

It was now late in the night. Eryn had left hours earlier to take the children on a dance tour to Phel, the next village and nearest neighbor to Ordyn. Jerol remembered seeing her off, and suddenly realized that his decision to stay back meant she would be going alone with Rymer. He could see Rymer afar off, helping the children onto the camel-like wylderbeasts that were used to commute between Wylder villages. He’d felt tinges of jealousy when he saw Eryn flash a flirtatious smile at Rymer after he helped her up onto the beast. But then, why should he be feeling so distrusting of her? She was probably only being polite, he assured himself.

Jerol wasn’t used to being alone like this, since he and Eryn were hardly ever apart. But it had always put his mind at peace to look up at the stars posing in beautiful formations against the night sky, and so he went to the large window beside his bed and drew aside the glass curtains.

“You never let me down, do you?” Jerol said aloud to the night sky. “Always there, always beautiful. One day, when my body becomes old and decrepit—too much so for my spirit to house in it anymore, I’m going to explore the outer bounds of space.”

“You don’t believe the old legend, that those who die cross over the boundaries of the Great Dunes, do you?” A voice startled Jerol.

“M-Merynda!” He said as he found himself looking at her scantily-clad form standing barefoot on the porch just outside the large window. She had adorned herself in a rather simple way, scarcely any jewelry or make-up—so unlike her and so much more like Eryn. “Do you always take such late night walks?” he stammered.

“Only occasionally,” Merynda said with a sheepish smile.

“Then what brings you all this way to the window of my home? You do live quite a few houses from here, don’t you?”

“I was staying at a friend’s house—you know, Lauryn<sup>1</sup>, Father Ordyn’s daughter.”

Jerol nodded. He knew that Father Ordyn’s daughter only lived several houses away—not too far considering most houses didn’t have large yards to separate them from their neighbors.

“It was getting far too stuffy at her house, so I decided to take a walk. Then I came past your house and wondered if you might be awake still. You know, husbands often have a way of staying up if their wife is gone. It’s like something is missing, isn’t it?”

“Yes—yes, it’s true. It is like something is missing,” Jerol agreed, pleasantly surprised that such a hard-looking woman did have some empathy within her.

“What are you staring at?” Merynda laughed coyly.

Jerol caught himself and then managed to

stammer out, “Oh, uh, I ... well, you’re not dressed very well for an evening walk. It does get cold and very windy in the later hours.”

“Yes, I know. I wasn’t planning to be outdoors all night. I was going to go back for shelter in an hour or so.”

“I see,” Jerol answered, relieved that there was some degree of sense left in Merynda.

Merynda broke the few moments of silence that had ensued by chattering on about Eryn’s dance tour. Jerol just stared up at the stars.

“It’s really quite an opportunity, you know. Not only for Eryn, but also for Rymer. He’s a pleasant, charming fellow with a lot of potential.”

Jerol started to feel a little worried. The words “pleasant and charming fellow” didn’t sit too nicely with him, especially considering Eryn’s naiveté.

Merynda had managed to maneuver herself into a sitting position on the wide sill of the large open window that Jerol was standing on the other side of.

“Oh, my legs,” she moaned as she brought one leg up onto the window sill, then the other, then stretched them both out to cover the length of the sill. “They’re getting all crampy from the cold—and the walking, I suppose.”

Jerol didn’t answer. He didn’t understand her sudden chumminess with him, and his mind was too far away thinking of Eryn and Rymer on their tour to even imagine what Merynda might have been up to.

“Jerol? Jerol?” Merynda said several times before he snapped back to reality.

“Uh, yes?” he said, when she took one of his hands and rubbed her legs with it. “Ah, that’s better,” she said, leaning her head back against the window frame. “Ah, your hands are so warm. Massages always relax the tension I get in my legs, without fail.”

“That’s what they’re supposed to do, aren’t they?” Jerol commented, still looking out at the stars.

<sup>1</sup> Lauryn: pronounced “lauren”

"Of course!" Merynda snapped, slightly aggravated that he wasn't catching on to her advances. Then, realizing he was just spaced out, she smiled to herself, realizing that this was a perfect time to make her move. He was off guard. Things hadn't been going perfectly well between him and Eryn recently, and this had unsettled him a great deal more than it had Eryn.—And that proved further unsettling to him.

Just then a strong gust of wind, and its accompanying howl, pierced the stillness of the evening. Merynda's tiny long braids lashed against her face and her dress clung ever so tightly to her form.

Then, as suddenly as it came, the strong wind left, and stillness returned.

Jerol gently cleared Merynda's face of the long braids that had stung her cheeks, and put them back behind her ear. "That was an unusual gust, wasn't it?" he said softly, feeling sorry that she'd taken the brunt of the wind, with him not having invited her in.

Merynda just nodded. Maybe it was the evening, Jerol thought, or perhaps just the fact that Eryn wasn't here, but Merynda wasn't her usual loud, assertive self. She was successfully playing the role of a helpless dame, instead of that of the assertive woman leader. If she hadn't, Jerol wouldn't have been as friendly. It's a wonder he was as vulnerable as he was, considering the vision he'd had some months ago when they attempted to resign.

"Here, why don't you come inside?" Jerol offered and turned to lead her into the living room.

"Why, thank you, Jerol. You really didn't have to," Merynda answered.

A little groan of pain from Merynda startled Jerol. "Are you all right, Merynda?"

"Yes, it's just that little cramp in my leg," she said, putting on a mock look of bravery that Jerol didn't see for the farce it was.

After a few unsuccessful attempts to help her walk,

Jerol picked her up and carried her to the living room at her request. He gently laid her on the long sofa and then turned to go.

"I'll be retiring for the night, Merynda, since I have an early morning at the dance theater. If your leg is hurt you're welcome to stay the night on the sofa. It's very comfortable."

Merynda was a little disappointed that her efforts to seduce him had been so obviously unsuccessful thus far. Jerol was a very strong and prudent character.

"Oh, Jerol. Won't you stay and talk a little while? We've been working together all this time, you and Eryn and I. Eryn and I have become good friends, yet I've hardly gotten to know you."

Thinking to himself that this was hardly the time, Jerol so much wanted to refuse. But a twinge of compromising thought, the kind that was becoming slowly but strangely familiar to Jerol, reminded him that she was an influential personality, and it wouldn't be to his advantage to refuse.

"All right, I suppose so."

"There now, come sit here beside me. Don't worry. I'm only a girl, nothing nasty," she teased.

Jerol smiled uncomfortably, and sat on the couch next to her.

"You look like you've had a lot on your mind lately, Jerol," Merynda cooed softly. "Your eyes—they look so tense and burdened. Is everything going well for you? It wouldn't be acceptable to have one of the best individuals in the entertainment committee disheartened. Is there anything I can do?"

"Everything's fine, Merynda," Jerol said, his eyes taking on a faraway look.

She reached up and stroked his long hair. "You're so brave. I know something must be wrong, though I fear you think you're strong enough to bear anything that comes your way. You must let others help you

sometimes.”

“Perhaps I should.”

For a few minutes there was total silence, a silence so thick that it became uncomfortable. Then Merynda stood up, and came and knelt in front of Jerol, putting her hands on his knees. She continued conversing as if they had never stopped talking.

Jerol looked puzzled.

“What is it? Are you troubled?”

“Your leg—I thought you were hurt.”

She brought her face closer to his and whispered, “It’s better now. You know, anything is possible when your heart and mind are behind it.” Then their lips touched, though by no movement of Jerol’s. Her answer had only further confused him, but he was too troubled to gather his thoughts and figure out why such strange things were happening.

“Leave it all aside, Jerol—all those burdens and troubles. Let me help you forget it all,” she whispered softly, kissing his chest and putting his arms around her. Just when all that was happening and the stillness of the night started to bother Jerol, another gust of wind came. Merynda clung to him, again in the manner of a helpless dame—something which she was definitely not.

Merynda had just succeeded in laying Jerol down on the couch, and was thoroughly enraptured with his beginning reciprocation of her caresses and kisses. But after several minutes, Jerol sat up. Merynda tried to continue, but he gently took her off his lap and sat her beside him.

Combing back his hair with his fingers he said, “I’m sorry, Merynda. I cannot do this. It’s not you. Eryn would be so hurt. She’s so gentle and I love her dearly.”

“Would she never do such a thing to you, were she in your position?”

Jerol looked surprised, as if the thought had never

occurred to him, “Of course she wouldn’t!”

Merynda raised her eyebrows and looked away, then turning back to him she leaned forward and tried to kiss him once more.

“Please! Don’t make me do this!”

“Oh, Jerol! You miss out so much on the pleasures of life for all your self-imposed righteousness. Eryn doesn’t have to know about this.”

“I’m sorry. I can’t.”

“You can’t or you won’t?”

“I won’t.”

Jerol buried his face in his hands, trying to figure out what to do. He had always been a gentleman and wouldn’t think of putting a woman out of his house, but Merynda was different. Just then there was another huge gust of wind. Only this time it kept going on and on. Jerol looked up to see if Merynda was all right. But she wasn’t there.

Then the wind turned into that wailful tune he and Eryn had heard on the second night of their wedding. Under the circumstances, though, it seemed all the more terrifying. Jerol got up and walked to the large window of his bedroom and saw the strangest thing. It was Merynda against the night sky, dressed in black veils, wailing, and flailing her hands in a hurt and angry manner. She had her back turned to him. Then, a softer wail came from another part of the sky, and there white veils had formed the figure of a woman. Jerol did not know who it was, but he could tell she was good by the heavenly glow around her. Then Merynda and the woman in white disappeared, leaving the veils to fight.

The black veils tried to overcome the white veils. There was a great, albeit (for they were veils) deceivably graceful struggle, and Jerol watched with intense curiosity. Finally the black veils withdrew and faded into the blackness of the night. The white veils lingered, then turned into little stars and everything

was still again.

Jerol heard something in the living room and he rushed back to find Merynda sitting on the floor just as she had been before the gust of wind.

“Where did you go, Jerol?” she said with a frightened look on her face.

“Where did you go?” he asked, confused and also angry that she might be trying to deceive him.

“I’ve been here all along. Poor Jerol, you look like you’ve just had a nightmare. Let me take you to bed.”

Jerol staggered backwards to his room, “No, no. I’ll be fine. Why don’t you either sleep on the sofa or return to your friend’s house.”

Merynda looked sorrowfully at him. Then in the blink of Jerol’s eyes, she was gone. He ran to the front door and looked all around. She was nowhere.

He returned to his room and lay down. Confused and frightened, he dreamt of the apparition all night long. Only, this time the white veils didn’t just form a figure. They covered the form of his loved one, Eryn. And the soft wail was hers.

Frustrated, Jerol tossed and turned in his bed all night. *Was that whole experience a dream? Did Merynda ever come to the house at all? What’s happening?*

In the wee hours of the morning, after scarcely an hour of rest, Jerol moaned in his bed, “Oh please, help me. Please?”

Just then he saw as it were a white veil floating down from the ceiling, held in the beak of a white dove. When the veil descended over Jerol, he felt peace come to his soul.

Where Darkness stands, no Light is seen. The Truth will hidden be.  
 The sons of man forget what was, as time and day go by.  
 The Light is lost, they search no more. Need have they none, they say.  
 And thus in ignorance they live on, in lost, forgetful day.

- 6 -

## DIVISION

A few months passed since the night of the seducement—or rather, the attempted seducement. Merynda acted as though nothing had ever happened, and this gave further cause for Jerol to doubt his own sanity. Eryn noticed a slight difference in Jerol, but she was far too caught up in her compromised life of dance and glory to be alarmed. Every once in awhile she’d ask Jerol if he was all right, and he would mutter that he was—albeit in such an unconvincing manner that anyone who was slightly sensitive would have picked up on it. To add to his troubles, Merynda had become much stricter on the granted freedoms of expression in their entertainment, and strangely enough, Eryn was agreeing with and defending her.

One day the three of them had an argument over a portion of a dance that Jerol had choreographed. It was too “spiritual,” Merynda had argued. Jerol disagreed with her, and at first Eryn said nothing. But as the argument went on, Eryn sided with Merynda.

"It's just a dance!" Eryn snapped. "Get ahold of yourself, Jerol. You've been so ... so sensitive and easily upset lately."

At that Jerol looked at her in disbelief and walked away. *If she's noticed that I've been so sensitive and easily upset lately, why didn't she say anything about it until now? She must not care! She's more in love with her glory than with me and what we had together!*

Eryn looked at Merynda, confused. Had she missed something all these months? She looked over at Jerol, who was now approaching the exit, and then back at Merynda. Merynda nodded her approval and then Eryn ran after Jerol.

"My dear Jerol, I'm so sorry! Whatever has happened between us?"

"You tell me, Eryn!"

"I—I don't understand."

"What happened to us, to our convictions, to our beliefs? What happened to the call we had to 'be separate' and not become a part of this world? Are we just giving in more and more until we're just like one of them? The line has to be drawn somewhere, Eryn—and you're not drawing it!"

"But we have to be careful! We'll lose our place!"

Jerol stopped and was almost dumbstruck for a moment, before taking her by the shoulders and looking into her eyes.

"Eryn! Many months ago we were ready to hand in our resignation because it was taking us away from our beliefs, from our conviction. Now you're saying that we should deny those beliefs because they may cost us our position! What's gotten into you?"

Eryn's eyes fell. "I didn't mean that we should deny our beliefs, Jerol," she said in a quieter tone. "I meant that we just shouldn't push them on the entertainment committee."

With clenched teeth and disbelief at her denseness, Jerol explained, "The condition we gave to

the entertainment committee on that fateful day of the year-end gathering was that we be allowed freedom of expression in our dance and drama, or we quit! Did you so easily forget? If we don't stick to our conviction and make them give in to us, not us to them, our fire will die out! Can't you understand that? Our fire is already dying out!"

Eryn was speechless. She was ashamed, but offended.

"If glory means more to you than what we believe in, I just don't know if I can be in it with you anymore!" Jerol concluded.

"Wait, Jerol!" she called out as he started to walk away. "You haven't even given me a chance! Should we go and try to negotiate again?"

"You still haven't gotten the point, have you? Just go and think about it, Eryn. Come home when you've made up your mind."

That last sentence hit Eryn like a ton of bricks. She felt so alone as she watched him walk away. She knelt down on the sandy ground and started crying bitterly.

"What's happened to me—to us? We had such a tightness, such a togetherness before. Now it's all gone and I have nothing," she sobbed.

She was tempted to rebel against Jerol for making her feel so ashamed. But then, who else did she have to go to? Merynda and the committee? She would have to sell out to the committee completely if she left it up to Jerol alone to stand up for their convictions. In her heart she knew that Merynda and the rest of the committee members weren't with her unto the death—they were only using her talent and trying to get her to follow their plans. But now she felt as if she'd lost Jerol, too, and she didn't know if she'd be able to get him back—and with him, their love and unity.

She walked dejectedly back to the theater to finish the afternoon session. She didn't dare go back home

just yet. She knew she hadn't made a firm decision in her mind; she was still wavering and tossed between a desire for success and fame, and her clear calling to "come out from among them."

"You two all right?" Merynda asked softly, putting her arm around Eryn as she came into the theater. "You know, you can take the afternoon off if you like. Go make up with Jerol, and see if you can work things out."

"No, I'll go home later this evening. I'm sure everything will be all right."

"You sure? We don't want to wear out our two most talented committee members." Caring as those words may have sounded, there was a sly, subtle undertone that could have been noticed by anyone who was even the slightest bit less self-centered than Eryn was at the moment. Blinded by her own desire for glory, Eryn loved the sound of those words, "our two most talented committee members." Even though she had felt convicted by Jerol's prick to her conscience, as the afternoon went on, the conviction wore off.

*Maybe this is what we were meant to do—not be entirely separate, but use our positions,* she thought on the way home. She could point this out to Jerol; maybe he would understand, she reasoned.

But when she arrived, Jerol was gone. He had left a very sweet and endearing note, explaining that he had to get away for a little while, though he was sorry they hadn't parted on the best terms. He said he knew something wasn't right with the way they were giving in more and more to the establishment and losing their conviction, their togetherness, their purpose.

How the tears flowed! Eryn thought she'd felt alone that afternoon, but now she felt totally alone. She struggled between resenting Jerol for being too hard on her, and knowing deep down inside that he was right. They had noticeably strayed from where they'd stood in their beliefs several months ago, and though

they had won much acclaim, they had lost much conviction.

But she couldn't leave—at least she didn't think so. She felt she had a job, a responsibility. *To what? To who?* a little voice in her heart reminded her. She couldn't answer that question, but she knew nonetheless that she had to be ready to make the break. She needed a little more time so that when she made her decision, she would do so without hesitation. She resolved that once she was ready, she would go and join Jerol. She didn't know exactly where he'd gone, but she had a good idea.



A month had passed since Jerol left. Eryn spent each long day at the dance theater, growing weaker in body and spirit. Merynda and others tried their best to revive her will and her enthusiasm. Among themselves they sometimes cursed Jerol for bringing this upon them—the loss of two very illustrious figures in their sector of society. But what could they do? Eryn had to make a choice now; even the committee members knew that.

One day Eryn walked in a few hours late, having overslept. She expected some sort of reprimand for such tardiness, and she was prepared to walk out on them immediately after the lecture. She knew she was just about ready to join Jerol, and anything that happened from now on would be the last straw. Through the days she'd watched the faces of those around her, listened to their comments, and been so sickened by the shallow, aimless way they lived their lives. There was no purpose, no goal, nothing to strive for except acceptance.

She was a lone figure, a misfit in their society, and she knew it. She looked just that way, standing at the entrance, dressed in a cream-colored tunic, the sunlight casting a soft glow all around her tired body. She almost looked like a ghost—especially if

you compared her with those at the other end of the theater, all made-up, dressed in bright, garish colors and chattering away. As she walked towards them, she knew that her spirit and theirs could never mingle well. It would be like oil and water—they could never mix.

Tall Merynda looked over the small groups of people and saw Eryn walking slowly towards them. Sensing the distance of Eryn's spirit, Merynda panicked slightly. But none of that would ever reach the surface. Oh no, that would reveal her true colors. Then all hope would really be lost!

"My darling Eryn!" she announced, arms outstretched. "We were so worried! Are you all right, dear? Come, let's get some refreshments. You look so pale and tired. I have a very handsome prospect for you—in every sense of the word, Eryn!" Merynda chattered. She sounded so empty, like a tin can with a small bead rattling around inside of it.

"Eryn! Eryn!" Merynda called out a few times. Eryn was completely dumbstruck at how terrible everyone and everything looked. It was as if the charming front had been unceremoniously torn off and all that was left were the cold bare facts. There was no real love there, only selfishness; no caring unless it was profitable in some way; no direction, only people milling about aimlessly, following the most attractive voice that spoke.

Finally, Merynda managed to get her attention. "Goodness! I've been worried, so worried! I have something to tell you. I think you'll be excited."

Eryn managed a half-smile.

"You must be so lonely, dear Eryn. So we came up with an idea! You remember Rymer? He was that charming fellow who toured with you not too long ago."

Eryn started having flashbacks of their time together during the tour. He had been almost

uncomfortably nice to her. She remembered the few romantic moments that they'd had together—ones that she'd never told Jerol about for fear that he would worry and think she didn't love him anymore. This didn't seem right to her. What was Merynda up to?

Somehow, through her smooth talk and consistent flattery, Merynda managed to convince Eryn to let Rymer stay with her one night. Merynda said it wasn't good for one who was so weak and almost sickly to be alone. Eryn had already compromised so many of her convictions that it didn't seem a big shock to her to allow Merynda and whoever she was working for to get involved in her private life.

That evening she returned to her home with Rymer. He was his unusually nice self.

"Must be lonely, living here alone all this time, Eryn."

"It's not too bad. I could stand a little peace and quiet after the riotous days at the theater," Eryn snapped, aggravated that everyone was trying to be so nice to her. It was almost patronizing.

"I guess so. I mean, it's pretty loud at the theater..."

"Please! I thought we're just going to try to be new dance partners. I said I appreciated the peace and quiet, and that doesn't mean I want you to start coming in here and making all this racket. Do I ever need time to think!"

Rymer was a little surprised. He hadn't realized she was doing so poorly at keeping herself together. This wasn't the Eryn he had known before—the one with such beauty and poise and delightful graces. What he didn't know was that all those wonderful things had come with the deep conviction, love and sense of purpose that Eryn and Jerol possessed together.

Rymer remembered that Merynda had told him that the committee didn't want to lose Eryn, and they even wanted to get Jerol back if possible. His part



was to try to calm her and bring some balance to all of her extreme behavior of late. They thought that she needed a man, or at least some companionship, and Rymer was a pretty charming fellow—perfect for the job.

“I’m sorry, Eryn,” he said in a humble tone. “I didn’t mean to upset you.”

Eryn clumsily plopped herself on the nearest couch and started to cry. “It’s not you. It’s not anyone. It’s just this terrible place. It’s everything! I don’t think I can live like this another day!”

Rymer, remembering her admonition about noise, walked quietly over and said nothing. He sat beside her and laid her head on his shoulder.

“Oh Rymer, what should I do?” she sobbed. Charming as Rymer was, his charm wasn’t all his natural self. He had been used in a few places to help people “come to their senses” and adopt the society’s role for them, though none had ever been as extreme—or stubborn about it—as Jerol and Eryn. He was just a marionette. He was hardly on Eryn’s side, nor did he sympathize with her in the least. If she hadn’t been as gentle and vulnerable as she was now, and if his orders were not so explicit, he wouldn’t have flinched at just forcing her to do what the society wanted. Only, that wasn’t their way of operating. Attempting to force people only strengthens their resolve—and they were desperate not to lose Eryn. With Jerol she was powerful. The two of them were so strong in spirit when united that it disturbed the committee to think of them being on the fringes of society again like they had been when they were younger.

Bringing his thoughts back to the conversation, Rymer remembered that he would do well in keeping his silence. “Sssssh,” was all he uttered as he stroked her hair and wiped the tears away. He was determined not to mess up this mission that he and Merynda had been given. So far they had done extremely well

in getting them to compromise so much.—That is, except for the sudden loss of Jerol.

Looking down at Eryn’s small, well-toned body, Rymer thought to himself, *If she would only give herself to me at least for this night, everything would be taken care of. If she would want me and choose to have me—and in so doing, become one—she would be ours! She will have bonded with us and then be less bonded with Jerol.* It was a hard call, but Rymer was confident—almost too confident.

Eryn was still wearing the small cream-colored tunic of the morning. The material was such that when the light blended with it, Rymer could see the outline of her beautiful figure. He could also see the wonderful reward that would await him if he could make her part of them. Eryn’s choice would not be irreversible, of course, but she would be so much more a part of them that it would be a greater difficulty for her to leave and follow Jerol. After all, Jerol had already left, and she had stayed on till now.

But then again, tough as he was, deep down in the recesses of his heart, Rymer did wonder about what Jerol and Eryn had between them. It was stronger than anything he’d had or seen anyone else have. It fascinated him. He thought it might be a power that could be gotten with some intimate union—and he wanted to have that union with Eryn partly for his own satisfaction, and partly to see if she could impart to him the strength of spirit she had once had. There must still be some of that power within her. It could not be completely lost, he reasoned. In any case, should he succeed, he would get at least two things: the pleasure and the reward, if not the power as well.

They had been sitting there for quite some time now, Eryn resting fully in Rymer’s strong, comforting embrace. Gingerly, Rymer stroked her leg which was propped up on the couch. Slowly, he worked his way up to her face, lifting it up to his. Once the kiss had

been enacted, passion drove them like a pair of majestic wild horses. They rushed into the bedroom and had just laid down to complete the union and the ecstatic experience when Eryn thought she heard Jerol's voice. It wasn't Jerol, but the words she heard were those he had said the last afternoon he'd seen her, *What's happened to us, to what we had?*

Suddenly the blinders of passion fell from her eyes, and Eryn found herself face to face with reality. She knew she couldn't finish it; it was bad enough that she had started.

"I'm sorry, Rymer. I can't do this," she said quietly, looking down at the rumpled sheets on the bed. "It was a mistake."

"I understand," he said, suppressing the rage that he felt at victory being snatched from his hands when it was so close (and hoping that, by keeping his calm, he would retain the chance to try again).

Pleased that he wasn't upset at her sudden change, she said he could stay the night since it was rather late. It wasn't long before they fell asleep, she in the bedroom, and he on the sofa in the front room.

Eryn woke with a start some hours later. It was that wailing sound again, interspersed with harsh voices speaking words she couldn't understand. Then another cry came—it was that of a man! But as soon as she awoke, the sounds were gone.

She rolled her eyes and snuggled under the covers. *Bad dreams! Oh, help me, sweet Spirit of Truth. I need to get some good hours of sleep,* she whispered like she had many years before, at the height of her and Jerol's passionate religious convictions in that Spirit.

As she dozed, she started to think of Jerol. She wondered if she should just run away and join him. She opened her eyes again. It was those same strange voices. Only this time they didn't fade when she opened her eyes. In fact, they grew louder and clearer.

"My God, what's happening to me?" she whispered,

straining to see if there were any images or visions outside that large bedroom window.

She heard the sounds of an angry old man, shouting at two individuals—a man and a woman. In between the shouting, she heard lashes, then that same familiar wailing sound.

"You let me down!" the angry man's voice shouted. "You failed me, you imbeciles!" Then the lashes came, followed by groans.

Eryn still couldn't understand what was happening, or what the significance might be for her, if there was any. She kept quiet and still, not wanting to miss the rest of this strange experience.

"Those two were almost in our clutches and you muffed it! Both of you muffed it! Do you have any idea what this means to my plans? They'll be thwarted for another great while! It could be another generation—all because of you simpletons not being able to withstand their strength of spirit. Now we've lost one, and we're about to lose the other! If we can't win them, we'll just have to destroy them or their potential influence."

Suddenly a strange sickening feeling came over her. It was someone shouting at Merynda and Rymer! She didn't know who it was that was saying all these things, but she knew who this terrifying man was talking about. It was Jerol and her. They had been duped all this time. Jerol had seen through it, and now she felt so foolish for having waited so long.

She crept out of bed, purposing to leave the room as slowly and quietly as possible so as not to wake Rymer on her way out. She knew she could trust no one; they might try to kill her if she stayed any longer. She knew she had to make away in the stillness of the night and find Jerol. Rymer's robe still lay by her bed, where he had left it. She quickly grabbed it, knowing the little dress she was wearing wouldn't have kept her warm for long in the cold desert nights.

Leaving the house, she immediately ran to the village gate, and then out to the darkened landscape beyond.

It took her nearly two days to reach the favorite hideaway of their youth. Exhausted, she managed to drag herself to the entrance of the cave and fall asleep in its shade. Jerol was not in sight, but she was too tired to even think about whether he had come here or where else he might have gone.

Hardly an hour had passed when Eryn felt someone's presence over her. She hoped it was Jerol, yet feared it might be Rymer, if he had followed her. *But how could he? I walked for so long in desert sands, with hardly a tree or brush for miles round me, and the strong winds have most surely covered my tracks.* She could hardly open her eyes.

Jerol bent down and stroked her sweaty forehead and sand-filled hair. "My sweet love, I wondered if you would ever leave that wretched place. I have prayed for you. How did you find me?"

Eryn smiled to hear that well-loved, familiar voice. "The Spirit led me," she answered.

Beyond the Shadowed Hills there lies the crater, foul and mean;  
 Filled with terror, filled with fright, and unspeakable things.  
 Beyond the Dunes there lies a plain, there souls of days-gone rest;  
 They wait until the day will come, they pray for what is best.

- 7 -

## THE STAND

Though all those experiences had long since passed, Jerol and Eryn could not help but look back on those frightful, yet adventurous days. Now with a babe in their arms and a quiet home to call their own, those days of hiding and standing their ground, of fighting for what they believed and yet trying to make peace with the village that had been their home for many years, now seemed like a dream as distant as the memory itself.

Apocalyne was a healthy baby, and Jerol said that perfection was her name. Eryn couldn't help but chuckle at these occasional outbursts of his always-obvious fatherly pride. And Apocalyne was a fun babe to love. Though very serious when she was serious, her laughter and fun-loving nature brought great joy to Jerol, Eryn and the occasional visitor.

She was now nearing her first birthday and had already taken her first steps, to the great delight of Jerol and Eryn. She toddled around playfully with only a little help from her parents.

One day Apocalyne innocently toddled around and picked up a short, slim piece of wood. Jerol and Eryn laughed. It resembled a miniature staff, one that could only be used by someone Apocalyne's size.

"Are you a little child Tyler?" Eryn playfully asked.

Looking serious as ever, Apocalyne waddled over in her small robe, held the stick high and then brought it to the ground with a thud.

"I think she's telling you that she is!" Jerol said in response to Eryn's earlier comment. They looked at each other and flashed back to that day in their hideaway when they had decided to return to the village of their youth, after having left it almost a year earlier.



"It's not easy living in this kind of place, is it, Eryn?" Jerol had announced out of the blue after preparing the meat for their dinner.

Eryn shook her head. Indeed, it had not been easy, though it had not been entirely unpleasant either. In fact, the remoteness of this secret cave had done much to restore their sense of communion with the Spirit they had so nearly lost in Ordyn. The visions had returned, and returned with greater force than ever in this climate of their aloneness. The increased clarity of their thoughts and these visions had afforded them a more compelling realization of what had gone before, and of what was yet to come. Or perhaps it had come as a result of their experiences in Ordyn.

It was Jerol who had been first to partake of this increased awareness, his time alone in the cave before Eryn joined him having been filled with visions and premonitions of things both wonderful and terrifying, but mostly terrifying. His eyes had been turned towards the Dark Hills on one hand, and towards the Great Dunes on the other—the two large and ancient landmarks at opposing ends of the inhabited plains of Wylder, and for the first time he saw clearly the

unseen struggle taking place on the plains between them.

It was as if the darkness of the shadow had been given tentacles with which it was reaching across the plains, trying desperately to cloud men's eyes from the truth of the unseen realms. And then there was the light which proceeded from beyond the Great Dunes, which even when the sun had sunk below the Wylder horizon seemed—at least from the height of the hideaway—to emanate a certain glow of light from beyond it, as if there were yet another sun perpetually just below its horizon that was struggling to show itself, but was being held back by some unexplainable force.

And somehow these two forces seemed to be in opposition, caught up in some imperceptible struggle to establish their influence over the Wylder people. The Darkness was manifest in those hearts who were but little aware of any truth beyond that which they could perceive with their natural senses, who remained darkened in their understanding, and alienated in their ignorance of the greater truths which were becoming all the more apparent to Jerol and Eryn.

Jerol and Eryn, in turn, came to see that their passionate desires to spread the truth about their beliefs in a Supreme Spirit had been as the hands of light trying to open men's hearts to the clarity of truth those in Ordyn had been unable to see in the darkness that clouded their hearts and minds.

As time had passed, however, and the clarity of these visions settled within Jerol and Eryn's hearts, they had continued to keep to themselves. The memories of what they had left behind were scarcely of the sort that would tempt them in any way to wish to return. Yet, living out here, far removed from any form of civilization, scrounging their daily needs from the land around them, was hardly easy.

"We should probably try to find a village, or ... or go back to the one we came from," Jerol broke the silence that had followed his last question.

At that, Eryn spun around. "Go back to Ordyn?"

Jerol saw the fearful look in Eryn's eyes and walked over to hug her.

"I'm sorry, Eryn. I didn't mean to startle you with that proposition."

"Jerol, I can't ever be a part of that world again. Merynda, Rymer, all those people. I don't want to ever have to live or work with them again."

"My love, I wasn't thinking about us doing all that. I thought we could return to our home, tell those who will hear of the things we have come to know, gather some of our possessions, and start anew in some other village. Or perhaps things have changed, and we can live there, just not be a part of the entertainment committee."

Eryn couldn't believe that she was hearing Jerol say all this.

"Jerol," she said in a hesitant voice, "there's something I never told you. I didn't think it really mattered, but maybe you would understand why I so much don't want to go there. It frightens me to think about them—Merynda, Rymer and the whole lot of them—and that village."

Jerol's eyes took on a faraway look, but he still held Eryn in his embrace. He too remembered that there was something he hadn't told her.

"Speak on, Eryn," he said softly.

With teary eyes she told him of the night with Rymer, and how significant it turned out to be that she did reject him—even though it was halfway through—at least significant according to the vision she had later. She knew if they went back, they would try to kill them in an effort to snuff out any possible influence they might have on others.

She wasn't sure of Jerol's reaction, but he stroked

her hair and said nothing for quite some time.

"I understand, Eryn," he finally said, "they tried to do the same to me. Merynda tried."

Eryn continued leaning her head on his chest. "But you refused, right? Tell me you did."

"I did."

A smile brightened Eryn's face. "We defeated them, Jerol!"

"And now we must defeat them again, Eryn. We must go back and warn the others. They are such an unspiritual people there. We must share with them what we have come to know—about the Darkness that is seeking to battle and overcome the Light, to bind and oppress all that is good and true. They could hardly see the Light while it was among them—all the less do they perceive the deceptive Darkness that has surrounded them. Only we are able to see beyond the charming front that has been put up. Their eyes must be opened to this Truth, as ours have been."

Tears started to fill Eryn's eyes, but she knew that Jerol was right—they had to make their final stand. Reluctantly, she agreed to return and face them. They knew that their only real victory would come in confronting the opposing side, not in running from them.



It was noontime in the village of Ordyn when Jerol and Eryn arrived. The entertainment committee members and the dancers and artists were no doubt in the dance theater. The market, which was just inside the village gate, was bustling with people and cattle. As people noticed Jerol and Eryn, they quieted. The people looked at them in awe. They had once been well-known public figures who had then disappeared and had since never been spoken of. But now here they were, and almost immediately recognizable to all who saw them.

Soon there was hardly any other movement as the

two figures dressed in simple muslin robes, each holding a staff within their hand, walked to the center of the market. It was a smaller version of the city square, yet full of people and infested with gossips who would be sure to spread word of whatever took place. The message did have to be spread, after all, and Jerol and Eryn couldn't be choosy about who spread it. They trusted that since this was what they had been led to do, it would all work out according to the purpose of that wonderful Spirit of Light and Truth whom they had grown to know so much more intimately in their days of retreat.

Just when the last moving thing had stilled, everyone's attention turned to a group of shallow chatterboxes who had just entered this dramatic scene. Merynda, Rymer and their crew had come to the marketplace to practice for a future drama. They were sorely unprepared for the unannounced visit of these two former comrades—more like “reprobates” now in the eyes of the community. They had been left alone so far because they had kept to themselves somewhere out in the wilderness among the plains of Wylder, and had not attempted to “corrupt” their fellow Wylders in Ordyn with their fanaticism.

But now they were back, and they seemed poised for some powerful confrontation. Merynda's jaw dropped, and for a moment it felt to her as if every bone in her body was about to shatter. Rymer too had a look of disbelief at the audacity of these two outcasts. But it wasn't long before they composed themselves, though it was much longer before they knew what to say.

Jerol and Eryn looked like two creatures from another world—and in some ways they were. The simplicity of Eryn's beauty put those “painted with many colors” to shame. Jerol's manliness and the conviction in his eyes made even the most masculine in the crowd, especially those of the entertainment

committee, look weak and sickly. Jerol knew that the awkwardness would last for only so long before drastic action was taken, and so he decided they would state their message now and then be gone before these people gathered their wits.

“We have come today to bring a message to you—a message of glad tidings for some, and of a woeful nature to others,” Jerol announced boldly. “This message has not come from our own hearts or mouths. It is something from a world beyond, a spiritual realm unlike anything you have ever known—for you do not know any spirits, much less the Eternal Ones.”

Some people looked puzzled at the mention of something eternal. Everyone was so focused on the “eternal now” that they had scarcely given thought to any other eternity.

Jerol continued, “So lend me your ears, and ponder the things that we have to tell you.”

Eryn reached into Jerol's sack, a simple cloth bag which contained the few possessions they had kept to themselves, and took out a thin slate of stone upon which a message had been engraved—a message calling all Wylders to open their eyes to the Light of Truth of the unseen spiritual realm, to rise up against the Darkness that would seek to cloud their hearts and minds to the Truth of the Light. As she read, the people were transfixed. It was as if the sword of Truth was piercing their hearts. The message was of such eloquence and strength that many marveled and wondered if it had indeed come from another realm.

“All right, all right!” Merynda snapped, breaking the silence that had captivated everyone in the marketplace when the reading of the message had ended. “You think you're the only ones who can utter spiritual things? You think you're the only ones who understand the unseen spiritual matters and can exercise such power? Well, you're wrong!”

Between clenched teeth Merynda continued, “What about those apparitions, Jerol, on the night that I visited you? Eryn, what about the night Rymer stayed with you? Do you think we don’t know about them?”

Jerol and Eryn looked baffled. “You ... you formed those?”

After a cackling laugh which could only be compared to that of a witch, Merynda’s voice echoed, “No, no. Of course not! I would never give such uncomplimentary visions of myself and my crew!”

Just as she said that, Jerol and Eryn held their breath. Merynda and her “crew” suddenly appeared as hideous demons of all sorts, shapes, sizes and colors!

Merynda walked towards them, “But what does it matter who formed them? I know of them, and we, too, see the same. We, the elite of this land, are a spiritual people too. Only in a different way. Perhaps we belong to that darker, more crafty side you so tediously seek to denounce!” Merynda walked back to her friends and comrades as she laughed again.

Jerol thought, *How strange! I thought that these people were a solely unspiritual and carnally minded people.*

As if reading his thoughts, Merynda answered. “The vast majority of people here are severely unspiritual, which is why it will do you no good trying to convince them of things that they will never comprehend. But those of us with power, with influence, those of us who have created the inner circle, the caretakers of this Wylder civilization, we hold the power of the spirits!”

“Enough of this!” Jerol whispered to Eryn. “We mustn’t be afraid of their declarations of power. Their power does come from the dark side of the planet; I can see it clearly. The dark side has power, but only over those who do not know the Spirit of Light that we know.”

Eryn started to feel bold and strong again. “You hold power over the dark spirits, maybe. But you have no power over us!” she called out to Merynda and her crew. “Today we take our stand. We denounce our relationship with you and any others who follow your darkened and witchlike ways! We cling only to the Spirit of Light, and the power of the Truth that we have come to declare. Begone, you frightful creatures!”

Merynda’s crew turned into small rats before Jerol and Eryn’s eyes—for they saw what the others, in all their carnality, could not see—and fled into the gutters and dark corners. Merynda stood there, looking hideous as ever.

“You too, you deceptive witch of Darkness!” Jerol called out.

To their horror and amazement, they saw the tall regal Merynda transformed into a hog, squealing and running away as fast as she could.

Then just as relief spread across Jerol and Eryn’s faces, they realized that what they had seen was only a deeper look, as if through the eyes of those from another dimension. In the natural, Merynda and her crew continued to stand in their group, all the while fuming at the strength with which Jerol and Eryn had spoken.

Jerol and Eryn looked around. The village folk stood still, wondering at the exchange of wits that they had witnessed between these two clearly different groups. They had never seen such a direct confrontation before. Some had already lost interest, though, failing to see the significance of Jerol and Eryn’s stand, and not being able to make sense of Merynda’s words. These began to go about their business.

“Very well. You have taken your stand. Then begone. Be banished from this place!” Merynda said, and a fierce wind blew across the marketplace, stirring up the sand and dusty roads, causing many regular

folk to cower and crouch down at its strength. Jerol and Eryn stood strong, not flinching in the slightest.

Merynda and her crowd walked away in disgust. They had lost—but more importantly, she had lost. She had been seen for who she really was—a high priestess from the Dark Side of the planet.

After Merynda was out of sight, and the market people had returned to their work as if nothing had ever taken place, Jerol and Eryn slowly walked out of the village gates. They were shocked at the dull village folk, and horrified that they had ever allowed themselves to be duped by Merynda and her frightful companions.



They had been walking for half an hour before they noticed a young woman following them. She was more covered up than was usual for the climate and dress of the Wylders, and was obviously trying to catch up with them. Eryn was worried. Jerol wasn't sure whether to be worried or not.

They stopped and hid behind a large outcropping of rock, deciding to wait and see what this young woman wanted. It was obvious that there was no one following her, for there was no foliage between her and the village, and anyone seeking to follow her would have only been as obvious as she was herself. When she finally came past the rock where they were, Jerol pulled her aside, in the same movement removing the cloak from her face.

“Who are you?” he whispered.

“I'm Lauryn, daughter of Father Ordyn.”

Before they could gasp, she assured them, “Please, don't worry. I've only come to help. I don't show my face much, but I did have to hide it lest any of Merynda's friends would have seen me.”

“But I thought you were Merynda's friend.”

“No, though she likes to think of me as one,” she said, and then hesitated before continuing. “She's a

chief advisor to my father, so I know her. But I'm not a close friend of hers, by any means.”

Jerol heaved a sigh of relief. “I hope what you're saying is true.”

Lauryn's eyes lowered. “Most of it is. Actually, I am somewhat a friend of hers, but by appearance only. You see, Merynda is more than just an advisor to my father, though I pretend not to notice these things. She doesn't know that I am aware of their closeness and the schemes that they orchestrate together. I came to help you. I don't know if you have a place to go, but I know of a village not far from the Great Dunes.”

“You mean near the Circle?”

“Yes, the Circle where the spirits of the Settlyrs are said to rest. But there are friendly folk in this town. They will let you stay with them.”

“Will you come?”

“I'll bring you on your way. But I'll have to be back soon, before my father suspects anything.”

“Thank you!”



The plains lay fair, the skye was warm, when Settler saw his land;  
He built his town, and found a home, upon the desert sands.  
His gift it was, a blessed place, and so he rested there;  
The watchers watched, and pleased were they.  
Their bounty was to share.

- 8 -

## **STARTING ANEW**

It was now late afternoon, and they had been walking for some time. Silence had filled the greater part of the afternoon, except for the occasional sighs and groans uttered in the course of the vigorous journey they had to take on foot.

“Pardon me for asking, Lauryn, but just how did Merynda come to work so closely with your father?” Jerol finally asked. The question had been on his mind ever since their first conversation with Lauryn a few hours earlier.

“Well,” Lauryn began, “my mother used to be my father’s closest advisor, of course. When she died, I was still quite young. But there are many counselors behind each Town Father, and my father desired to find one to take the place my mother had held. Merynda, being a few years older than me, was chosen to work for him. He had taken a liking to her when he met her at a function or council somewhere. She had always been the bright, intelligent one—only in the

last few years has she become corrupt, at least in my opinion. Perhaps she has always had these manipulative tendencies, but finally she was trusted enough by my father to be let in on the politics of the village.”

Jerol looked puzzled. “From all appearances it would look like the village didn’t have any defined politics, until...”

“Until you began to work as an integral part of a committee, right?” Lauryn finished his sentence.

“Yes.”

“To make a long story quite short, Merynda works as my father’s counselor officially—though even that is not well known, because my father’s life and work is not a public thing. She is more commonly known as being the chairwoman of the entertainment committee, as you know.”

“How did she come to hold that position?” Eryn asked.

“She danced for my father at one of his private parties. She demonstrated great talent, and so he, already favoring her, made her chairwoman of entertainment as well,” Lauryn said with a sigh and obvious disapproval of the deed.

“You don’t like her?” Eryn asked.

“She’s only five years older than me, yet she does so much and is so favored. Now, she has become a mistress to my father. He has several, who all cover as maids of the house, but she is quite the favored one, and her counsel influences him greatly. So you see why I might not be so approving of her. She is quite manipulative, even of him. I have never approved of their selfish schemes.”

Jerol and Eryn were quiet, and Lauryn guessed that she’d told a bit more than they’d expected to hear or even imagined was happening. They knew something had been wrong all along, but neither had ever heard it all put into words so casually—nor been

able to pinpoint the source behind Merynda’s ways.

“I’m sorry, you two. It’s just the way of life for the rich and powerful—though these are smart enough to appear as normal people for their brief moments in public. Most people are equal, and that is why, for the most part, they have no problems with the governing of their town. But the rich and powerful always want more riches and power, and when anyone who is not part of their agenda begins to have influence, they try to snatch them. That’s what happened to the two of you.”

“They just play with people as if they were pieces to a game?”

“Something like that.”

“I’m glad we’re leaving.”

“I’m happy for you. I’ve been to other towns; they don’t seem to have digressed quite as far down the path of political evil, as I call it—especially in Kryppa<sup>1</sup>, where I’m leading you. Ordyn is by far the largest village, and the entertainment committee has done much to make our town what it is. It is, if you don’t mind me saying so, perhaps the very hand of Darkness within our town that you spoke of. They keep the eyes and ears of the people filled with garish sights and sounds, so that their minds are kept away from inquiring after greater truths—truths which you sought to open their eyes to, but which they sought to control. And it is only spread further from Ordyn, which is easily the most influential of all cities on the Wylder plains. And that does not make me proud. I wish to have a simple, loving and kind life—like you!”

After a few moments of pondering, she continued, “Perhaps some day, when the time is right—and if neither of you mind—I’d like to run away from all the confusion and corruption of Ordyn and come live with you. At least somewhere near you. I would so much

---

<sup>1</sup>Kryppa: pronounced “crippah”

like to partake of the strength you have. I ... I was watching from behind the corner street. I saw everything that happened. I saw some very strange things too—spiritual things. I've never seen spiritual things before, but I must have been allowed to see them for a reason. I'd leave with you now, only I don't think I'm ready to go just yet."

Looking up, Lauryn smiled and pointed ahead, "Look, there in the distance you can see the buildings that make up the village of Kryppa! It is still a good day's journey off. But I must turn back here, for I must be back in Ordyn before nightfall."

"Of course," Eryn nodded. "Thank you for accompanying us thus far. I'm sure we can follow the path from here."

"I know you'll fit right in," Lauryn assured them. "I have a friend there. He is an older man by the name of Arthis. He has a shop of fruits, and is well known and loved by the people there. Tell him I have sent you, and I am sure he will help you get settled. I would take you myself, but I must be on my way, as I have said. Do think of me and wish me well. I need all the wishes I can get."

"Thank you, Lauryn. So we shall!" Jerol said, as he and Eryn each took one of her hands and squeezed it affectionately.

They turned and watched the young woman walk away. Her long red hair flowed freely behind her for several moments, before it was again hidden under the hood that had hid her features from them at the first. Then they looked at each other again, amazed at how the Spirit, whose name they still did not know, seemed to be leading and guiding them once again.



Their spirits lifted and courage renewed, the two walked up to the village gate. Someone offered to bring them water. Little children smiled and waved. A lady sitting with a child on a curb near the gate welcomed

them.

"How refreshing this is!" Jerol laughed. "These people are so kind and pleasant looking."

It didn't take long before they had found Arthis' shop. It was clean and well lit. He sold an abundance of different fruits, all luscious and perfect in shape.

"Arthis?" Jerol called out, and a tall, husky man with red hair and a beard to match came out. He looked curiously at them.

"How did you know me?"

"We were directed here by a young woman named Lauryn, who spoke kindly of you."

The man's face lit up. "Aah, Lauryn, you said? I haven't seen her for so long. A beautiful and kind young woman, she is."

"You look quite young yourself, Arthis," Eryn piped in.

"My spirit maybe, but I'm in my prime. The perfect age really, but still not the same as the years of youth. So tell me, what brings you here?"

As Jerol and Eryn told him their story, Arthis listened with great interest, only interrupting them occasionally to ask if they were comfortable or wanted any fruit. Jerol and Eryn felt comfortable with such a pleasant stranger.

"So I see you need a place to stay," he said, wiping his face. "My, it is rather hot these days! I think I have the perfect place for you. It's just on the outskirts of the town. It's small, but pretty, and you'll be quite comfortable, I should think."

"Thank you for your kindness. Once we are able to build our own house, we shall return yours to you."

"Ah, don't worry about that just yet! Make yourselves comfortable. I have no use of that house. My parents lived in it when they were here. But now their blessed spirits have gone on to the Circle. And your parents?"

"We don't really know who our parents are—either

of us. We have few memories of them, and even those are quite hazy. They must have been friends, because Eryn and I have been together ever since we can remember,” Jerol responded without hesitation. Eryn looked a little worried. She was surprised at how frank Jerol was now being with Arthis, suspicious and cautious as he’d been before.

“Don’t worry. I think you’ll find this village pleasant and the people kind,” Arthis replied with a wink. “They become like your family after awhile. Though I don’t imagine you’ll have too many visitors, the house being a quiet one, and somewhat removed from the center of activity. My parents preferred it that way, you know.”

“We’ll be happy just to have a house after all that time spent in a cave,” Jerol laughed.

Arthis responded with a hearty chuckle. “Of course, of course. Are you ready? I’ll take you there now.”

The books read of the tales no more,  
 And few can now recall  
 Or remember whence the tales have come,  
 Lost are they - they all.

- 9 -

## THE WRITINGS

Reality struck them once again as Apocalyne reminded them it was almost suppertime. She had been quietly busying herself with toddler games while Jerol and Eryn reminisced on those days of long ago. It had been over three years ago that they were led to live among these generous and kindhearted people of Kryppa—time that had passed all the more swiftly after Apocalyne had been born. Today was her first birthday and, though age seemed to come slowly for most Wylders, her young features were already distinctly defined, and her alertness such that, had one not known, they would have guessed her older than she was.

Jerol and Eryn hadn’t seen Arthis for quite some time, though he was due to visit any time soon. He always brought gifts on both Jerol’s and Eryn’s birthdays, and had promised to do the same with Apocalyne.

They thought correctly, for they soon heard Arthis’ familiar voice humming a self-composed tune as he

walked up the few steps to their house.

“Enough supper for me?” joked a pleasant voice as the front door was opened.

“Arthis, what a wonderful surprise! We were just thinking of you!” Eryn said warmly, greeting him with a friendly hug and kiss.

“Surprise? You two are always aware of such attempted surprises. It’s the gift of you Tylers, I know! I don’t know if I’ve ever tried to take you by surprise without you having at least thought of me moments before! Well, I brought a gift for the little Apocalyne. Where is she?”

Jerol lifted her up to greet Arthis. It was quite a ways up for the little tot, Arthis being so tall. Most of her fear of height, however, left her when she saw the friendly smile on Arthis’ face.

“A wooden doll for you, Apocalyne,” Arthis said, holding the present in her direction.

Her shy smile (for she was still a little nervous at the sight of this tall, bearded man) told him that she was indeed pleased with his gift.

“You remember Arthis, don’t you?” Eryn said. “He’s a friend of Mamma and Papa. Give him a big hug, Apocalyne.”

She obeyed, and then returned to her father’s secure embrace while she eyed Arthis’ every move.

“You don’t visit around much these days, do you, Jerol?” Arthis continued the conversation.

“No.”

“You should. A new family moved in not too long ago, with a couple of young children about the same age as Apocalyne—a boy and a girl, I think, and they live not too far from here. I met the little boy on my way here, cute as anything. He said his name was Evangelyst. Strange name, isn’t it? Not as different as ‘Apocalyne,’ though. And then there’s the girl. She looks somewhat like Apocalyne—serious, deep eyes. Oh, what was her name? Let me see... Oh yes,

Celestyne<sup>1</sup>, it was. Another word I haven’t heard for a long time.”

“Word?”

“Well, it’s a name, but...” Arthis sighed and scratched his head. “I’ve never told you about them, have I?”

“No.”

“I do try to keep this to myself. At least it’s not something I speak to everyone about, for honor’s sake, I guess. Because it’s about my grandparents, and they ... well, you know they’re not around anymore. They were Settlyrs, right, but I’m a Wylder, just like any other man born here. But besides being some of the original Settlyrs, they were also what we today call ‘Tylers,’ or people like you.”

Jerol and Eryn grew curious at this sentence.

“It ... it’s been so long since I’ve known them—or spoken of them. Their spirits passed beyond the Circle when I was only a young boy. But I remember that they used to tell me stories—stories about these beings called Celestynes, spiritual beings that were said to inhabit the plains beyond the Circle, where no living Wylder has ever been, at least that is known. Oh, there was much more they told me of. There was a Master ... yes, some sort of Supreme Lord over these Celestynes. Oh, but I don’t exactly remember. I was young—too young, perhaps, to understand. And as I grew older, well, I suppose I forgot about these stories. Perhaps because I deemed them of little relevance to my Wylder life. But now that my memory has been sparked, I’ll have to look it up. I have this trunk of things that my parents left behind, but I’ve never really looked at them.”

“But Arthis, what if these ... these ‘Celestynes’ are the same manifestation of the spirits that speak to our hearts?” Jerol said with excitement. “What if your

---

<sup>1</sup>Celestyne: pronounced “seles-teen”

grandparents knew about the same truth that we profess? What if this ‘Celestyne Lord’ is the same Supreme Spirit whose presence we have come to feel within our lives? We know It—I mean, if you say ‘Lord’ then I suppose it is a He—is the Spirit of Truth.”

“And of Love,” Eryn added. “The Spirit was always there with us, always caring for us and watching over us—we could feel It ... or Him.”

“And also that there was something He wanted us to do.”

“What was that?” Arthis asked, himself now curious.

“It’s often been hard for us to determine that ourselves. There were many things, though I’m not sure if we have done them all. We were finally led to come here, because the corruption of Ordyn didn’t agree with the way we felt this Spirit was asking us to live. We have, admittedly, not been as zealous about our beliefs here as we had been in Ordyn. We do believe very much in them, but are not young enough to preach with such passion as we used to.”

Eryn’s eyes lowered a bit as she added, “I suppose we let our fire die out.”

Jerol continued, “We believe, though, that Apocalyne might yet be our greatest assignment by this Spirit, that there is something we are meant to prepare her for, and we mean to teach her well.”

Scratching his head at this sudden deep turn in the conversation, which was obviously a little over his head, Arthis replied, “Well, if my grandparents did leave anything behind, it would be in that trunk my parents left me. I’ll have to look. Perhaps they’ll help you find the missing pieces to your puzzle.”

“Do you want some supper?”

“I should really be on my way now. I have become most curious about this matter myself now. I’ll find that trunk tonight.”

But Eryn insisted he take something, so he did,

then hurried out the door. The conversation with Jerol and Eryn was very deep for his simple mind and heart, and he was sorely intrigued that all that his grandparents believed and had spoken of might yet be true on this planet, though he suddenly wondered why his own parents had never mentioned such matters. And here were two people who had never heard about the Celestynes, and yet they so ardently believed in what perhaps was this very same Spirit his grandparents had known and loved those untold memories ago.

Jerol and Eryn looked out the window as Arthis hurried off in the direction of his home. “What a curious development!” Eryn commented.

“I wonder why we had not heard of such stories before—the Celestynes,” Jerol wondered aloud.

“I wonder too,” Eryn answered softly. “Yet it might be just as well that it happened the way it has, for we have all the while believed in something we did not know or fully understand. We went by faith, and perhaps now it will become clear.”

Jerol stood behind Eryn and kissed her neck. “You’re right. Now whatever new truths we might discover will be treasured even more than if we had known about them from the beginning!”

“Better yet, perhaps we shall be able to instruct Apocalyne more clearly in all the ways of the Spirit. Perhaps that is the reason why we were led here in the first place—not for our own sake, but for hers—and that of the destiny which she shall be called upon to follow in times to come.”



The next morning Arthis pounded excitedly on Jerol and Eryn’s door.

“Arthis, why so early?”

“Eryn, as I walked back home last night, memories of my grandparents and their lives flooded my mind. The memories brought back such feelings of peace

and love, and I instantly knew that, had they been here, they would have been most eager to share all that they knew with you. Anyway, I found the trunk which contained mostly writings and manuscripts that had belonged to my grandparents. So, here they are," he said as he handed the huge pile of books and papers to Jerol, who had now come to the door as well.

"Some of the documents are hardly legible anymore, so be gentle. They're very old, some probably having come from the Old World itself—if that's indeed where the Settlyrs came from. There are more, but I'm afraid this was all I could carry. That old trunk is too heavy for me. But these should last you a while, I should think. I looked over some of these manuscripts last night. Some are like diaries. Then there are collections of stories, and others seem to be messages of some sort, though I did not take much time to read them. But I'm sure you'll be able to find things that would be of great interest to you."

"Why, thank you, Arthis. I'm sure we will," Eryn said gratefully.

"I'd better be on my way now," Arthis suddenly said with a friendly smile. "People love to buy fruits at this time of year more than any other time. You should bring Apocalyne along for a visit some time. It seems like years since you two have been into town!"

"Thank you, Arthis. We will."

The three exchanged hugs and Arthis went on his way.

"Eryn, this is amazing!" Jerol said, looking at the huge stack of papers and books that Arthis had brought. "I can hardly wait to begin looking through them."

"Let's have our meal first, and then we can begin the studies afterwards," Eryn suggested.

"You're right. Food for the body so that we can feast on food for the soul without distraction," Jerol

agreed as he tickled Apocalyne and carried her over to the meal table. "We shall have to read these things and share them with Apocalyne, so that she can grow with us into the greater knowledge of these beliefs that we've had these many years," he added.

"That will be a joy to do."

"So it will."

And so, as time passed, they studied and taught Apocalyne all they discovered in these manuscripts. Histories that had been unspoken among Wylders were recorded among their pages, and the stories which it seemed had given rise to the legends of this day were set forth in greater detail, to where Jerol and Eryn wondered how it was that such treasures and truths had been kept from the minds of the people all this time. And then it was that they knew why the committee of entertainment had been such a central theme of Wylder life—at least in Ordyn, the only Wylder life they had known before this one. These were the "greater truths" Lauryn had spoken of which such committees deliberately attempted to keep the people from seeking after—and they had evidently fulfilled this task well.

Apocalyne grew, and her soul was fed from the stories and messages written and recorded by these earliest of the Tylers—things about the Supreme Spirit of Truth, Light and above all, Love—a Spirit Apocalyne came to love and respect as she grew older, despite the teasing she received from the other village children who thought her stories mere fantasy, and this Spirit a mere figment of what they took to be her active imagination.

Even in this town, which as Lauryn had observed was not yet far down that path of political evil, emptiness still seemed to fill the hearts of many by reason of the ignorance within them. Light, as these writings spoke of, was born out of knowledge—the knowledge of the divine and spiritual Truth. Darkness

festered in ignorance, but Truth had the power to dispel such Darkness, as a lamp drives away the shadows.

Yet Jerol and Eryn knew this task was not to be theirs—at least not at this time. Their commission, as they now clearly saw it, was to raise their child—the hope of their future—to be such a lamp in time of greater darkness that they felt and knew was yet to come.

To learn, to grow, to know the Truth, and be raised in the Light—  
 Such are the foundation stones of Knowledge.  
 Those unseen shall speak forth the words of Light  
 To minds not turned to thoughts of Darkness.

- 10 -

## A DIFFERENT LIFE

“Apocalyne, come inside! It’s time!” Eryn called out to Apocalyne, who was playing with some other children who lived, not too far away. She did not quite share her parents’ more reclusive nature, and found great pleasure seeking out the company and friendship of those nearer her own age. At ten years old, she seemed to be ahead of her time, though she laughed and played with the other children—when they weren’t laughing at her.

“Apocalyne, where do you come up with all these stories that you tell us every day?” one of the kids asked, before she was about to dart back to her house.

“My mother reads them to me. They come from old books, even some from the Old World...”

“Books from the Old World? Apocalyne, that’s so silly,” one of the older children, a rather rowdy boy named Sean, interjected.

“Why? If you don’t believe me, you should come listen when my mother reads sometime!”

“Those spirit stories you keep telling us?”



“Yes, exactly.”

“Ha! Those come straight from your imagination, Apocalyne. Spirits don’t exist!”

Apocalyne looked at them, hardly fazed by Sean’s irreverence towards something that so intrigued her. Finally, as she turned to walk away, she said, “They do—if you believe.”



Once inside, Eryn asked, “Apocalyne, What’s the matter? You look a little sad.”

“The other children were laughing at me. They don’t believe the stories, and make fun of me for telling them. They think I’m making them up,” Apocalyne responded sadly.

“I’m sorry. Sometimes others do have a hard time accepting things they can’t see or understand, and that can be difficult, especially when they’re your friends.”

“But when they start laughing at me, they don’t feel like friends. Some of them are friendly, but then when the other kids start laughing, they don’t know what to do, so they pretend they’re not my friends. Like this one girl. It seems we’re only friends when we’re alone. She says she’s too shy or scared of the others laughing at her. Sometimes I just feel like not telling them anything anymore, but then I get these feelings inside, and I can’t help myself.”

“Don’t be afraid of sharing these stories. It’s what the Spirit wants.”

“Is it?”

“Yes. We are meant to share this wealth. But don’t tell them when they are all together. Tell them when you are alone with them, when what you say can reach past their idle fronts, and deep into their hearts.”

“The others maybe—but not Sean,” she said with half a grin. “I don’t think he has a heart—and even if he did, he’s obviously not interested.”

“Well, sometimes it takes awhile for people’s eyes

to get opened to the workings of the Spirit. But there are none so blind as those who will not see.”

“Do you speak to others about these things, Mother?”

“When we were younger we often did.”

“And now?”

Eryn’s eyes lowered. “Now we are old, and our strength isn’t what it used to be. We should be doing more, but it’s even harder for us than it is for you. It’s your day, sweet girl. We shall do all we can to teach you what we know. You’re young and strong, and have many years ahead of you, Apocalyne. You will have to finish the work that we have begun.”

“And these things we read together will help me to do that? It seems we have read so much—and there is always more.”

“These writings feed us, child. We have learned much from the papers Arthis gave us those many years ago. Through them we have learned to speak with the Spirit of Light, and to listen. And in those moments and times of listening, we have been shown many things—things about the past, things about the present, and even things about the future.”

“But how did you know of the Spirit before you met Arthis?”

“From dreams and visions.”

“Tell me about them.”

Apocalyne listened attentively to every word that her mother used to describe the visions and messages they had received in their youth.

“You were given to us for a special purpose,” Eryn finished their discourse. “Perhaps someday, when we have taught you all we can, the Spirit will use some other way to instruct you. Perhaps your lessons will come in visions, as they once did for us. Who knows? But no matter how hard it is, we must always follow what we know the Spirit wants us to do. Always, always listen for the good voices—the voices of the

Celestynes that inhabit those realms we cannot see. There is a special destiny you are meant to fulfill—what this is, we do not know—but someday you shall find out.”

As if Apocalypse didn't have enough depth of spirit and understanding, this thought served to deepen her all the more. A sense of purpose and determination to find that destiny filled her mind and heart each day. There was a strong force that seemed to be drawing Apocalypse a certain direction, and she would take care not to falter or miss any steps of advancement towards that goal.



In the years to follow, Apocalypse took those manuscripts, sometimes copying portions by hand, and showed them to her childhood playmates when they were alone, as her mother had instructed her. They listened to varying degrees, yet as each one along with Apocalypse grew older, the notion of the unseen struggle between the force of Light and the shadow of Darkness became a part—even if a small and distant part—of their inner consciousness. For those who had been less than sympathetic towards her views and beliefs, she was a little more creative.

Sean gasped as he awoke from a deep sleep. “By the dunes!”

A small glass with reddened water had been placed in the hands of his favorite statue—an image to the Goddess of Ordyn—that stood at the edge of his bed as a symbol of his dream and passion in life: to wine, dine and dance in what was now the famous city of Ordyn. But if that wasn't enough, the prankster had carved something on the bosoms of his goddess as well, which he instantly jumped out of bed to examine:

Choose some other object for your fancy,  
Sean. Ordyn's glory is only as solid as the  
dunes you swear by—unexpectedly shifting  
with every gust of wind and sandstorm. Its

sandstorm is coming, Sean, and with it will perish your little statue.— A.

“What hellion has written this?” Sean shouted. “I'm not rich or famous; I deserve to live in peace! My only sin is disbelief—and what is wrong with that when there is nothing to believe?”

He dashed out the door, barely dressed—which meant he wore hardly anything, considering the scant clothing that was the custom of this desert-world. He looked around and saw no one there.

He turned his head to the right and to the left. He thought surely he had heard a cackle. Then he saw her—a barefoot girl a little less than his age, or close to eighteen years by the Wylder sun, whose back was turned to him. She was walking away, toward the Great Dunes that formed the Circle. He couldn't tell who she was by the typical long, light brown hair that cascaded over her shoulders, nor by the simple muslin dress that fell clumsily over her pretty frame. She glanced over her shoulder at him, eyes deep and intriguing. She reminded him of someone in his childhood.

“Apocalypse!” he shouted once his mind was as awake as his body, and his memory was successfully jogged, and then ran after her. Surprisingly she kept her slow pace, as if she knew he would never catch up. But just when he thought he was in reach of her, she vanished. Sean now found himself about 60 paces from his home, with no one in sight and desert all around except for the houses in the distance.

He kicked the sand and started walking back to his house. Usually he was happy that his dwelling was a good walking distance from the other houses. But when strange things would happen, such as just had, the isolation didn't give him more security.

“By the dunes!” he murmured. “People right in front of me turning out to be hallucinations. Perhaps my goddess hasn't been defiled either. I'll see. Otherwise I'm going to find out who did this and they'll

pay!"

"Will a few Grenyrs do?" A voice startled him just as he stepped up to the porch of his house.

He looked up and saw Apocalypse sitting on the bench on his porch.

"Oh no! No more hallucinations for me, please. You aren't here, you're just my imagination—a bad dream plaguing me." He rubbed his eyes, slapped his face a few times and then looked again. She was still there. He went to the small water fountain at the side of his house, splashed his face vigorously and then returned. She was still there. He lunged at her, thinking perhaps she'd disappear like she had minutes before. She remained seated, with an increasingly amused expression.

"When did you come?" he asked.

"I've been here all along," came the calm reply.

"You have not! You're driving me insane! Don't do this to me! Or, by the dunes, I'll..."

"You really should swear by something a little more constant than sand dunes, don't you think, Sean?"

Recovering from his moment of anger, Sean shook his head and then sat beside her. "This, Apocalypse, is not the type of introduction that should occur after almost eight years of silence."

"What introduction? I've only been sitting here, with you swearing at me."

"Didn't you put the red water in the hands of my goddess, and write on her ... her chest?"

Apocalypse looked at him with a curious face.

"Come, come, I'll show you." He took her by the hand into the house and showed her what had been the cause of his rage. "Whoever did this will pay!" he shouted.

"I have a few Grenyrs..."

"So it was you!"

"I'm afraid so."

Taking her by her shoulders he pushed her down

onto his bed, shaking her a couple of times. To his frustration, she only laughed.

"Sean, you mustn't allow yourself to be so enraged by what has occurred to your stone doll. What was written on it is truth, and that's more valuable than a piece of rock."

"It's a goddess, you irreverent soul!—And an expensive piece of craftsmanship besides!" Sean said between clenched teeth.

"Also, Sean, it's not proper to throw a young woman onto your bed without first informing her parents of your intentions. Once I'm twenty, then you won't have to notify my parents—but you will have to notify me beforehand."

Frustrated at this girlish behavior, Sean let go of her shoulders and she sat up. "How did you know I swear by the dunes? You haven't visited me in eight years."

"I watch you. You may live a ways from my place, but I've seen you swear, and tell everyone your dreams of grandeur—visiting Ordyn and becoming rich and famous. It's such a cheap dream, Sean. Ordyn will mean nothing in a few years. Plus, in such places of man-worship one can be certain there is corruption and all sorts of evil."

"Now I remember why I haven't seen you in eight years," he said, rubbing his eyes. "You are an irritating soul. That's why. A soul that haunts my conscience and teases my patience. If your long hair didn't make you as pleasing to my eyes as it does, I would send you away without it."

"Thank you, Sean. I take that as a compliment. I should go now. I think my mother will begin to wonder where I am—and I certainly have not told her."

"With intentions such as you had when you left your house this morning, I'm not at all surprised."

"Oh well, see you some time."

"I'd rather not."

“Goodbye then. Do think about the inscription, Sean. And remember, the truth is of greater value.”

*A cheeky thing she is!* Sean chuckled to himself. Then suddenly, a thought overtook him, and he ran out to catch her before she left.

“Apocalyne!” He called out.

She turned around, surprised.

“Wait! I have a question.”

“It will have to be brief.”

“It will be. I won’t risk you torturing me with your presence for too long.”

She rolled her eyes and smiled, then walked over, curious as to what it was.

He looked this way and that, hemmed and hawed a bit, started and restarted his sentence, then finally blurted out, “Are you a spirit or are you real? Or is it some kind of trick you do?”

Apocalyne laughed aloud. “What do you mean?”

“This morning, I saw you walking towards the dunes. I ran to catch you, but you vanished. Then you were sitting here, on my porch.”

Apocalyne grew serious for a moment before she raised one eyebrow in a saucy way. “I did wonder what you were running towards this morning when you dashed out of your house, still in your night garments.”

“You were there then?”

“I was on the porch—where I had been sitting all along.”

“Then why did I see you walking toward the dunes, in the same clothing as you have on now—this frumpy, distasteful muslin dress.”

“I don’t know, Sean,” she answered slowly. “I really don’t know.” Then, dismissing her obvious curiosity and intrigue about what he had just told her, she said, “Well, I really should go. Ellys<sup>1</sup> is waiting up in a tree for me to read with her.”

“Up in a what?”

“A tree.”

“I thought you said you were going to see your mother.”

“Oh. I’ll pass my home before getting to the tree that Ellys is sitting in. She doesn’t want the others to know she’s been reading the ancient writings with me, but since you’re a bit of a loner, I trust you’ll keep that piece of information to yourself.”

“After what you’ve done?”

“Pain me all you like, but this morning has nothing to do with Ellys.”

“All right, I won’t say anything.”

“Thank you, Sean. And the writing on your goddess ... it’s the truth.”



“Thank you, Apocalyne,” Ellys said, once they were finished reading. There weren’t many trees around, just a few scattered throughout the town, the one of their choice happening to be located in sight of Apocalyne’s home. No one looked in the trees, so Apocalyne, Ellys, and a few others had chosen the leafiest one and made it their private study.

“I don’t mind at all, Ellys. You go down first.”

Ellys took a step down onto a lower branch, and began her descent. “Apocalyne!” Ellys said in an alarmed whisper, after looking out through some leaves on her way down.

“What?”

“We’ll have to wait. I just saw my mother standing at the door of your home!”

“Why, I wonder?”

“Perhaps she’s wondering where I am. I did tell her I went to see some friends, and you are my friend. Ohhh, I hope she doesn’t stay long,” Ellys sighed, balancing herself between a couple of branches and trying to stay as still as possible.

---

<sup>1</sup>Ellys: pronounced “ellis”

“Oh, Spirit of Light,” Apocalyne spoke without hesitation, “help her not to be long if it is not Your purpose.”

Ellys’ eyes lowered. “I should speak with the Light more, Apocalyne. I did well for some days, when you stars told me about it, but now I forget.”

“It’s nothing to worry about. Just keep trying. The Spirit of Light is a Spirit of Love. So long as there are stars sparkling in the sky, He loves us and forgives us, and longs above all to be near us.”

“I love stars.”

“He dances with them, I like to think. After all, He is a Spirit, and spirits can do anything.”

“That’s so pretty! I’ll remember that each time I look out of my window at night. Maybe that will help me to speak with Him more.”

“It’s not that hard, you know. Just think of it as talking to someone who loves you more than anyone else does.”

“All right. Apocalyne, I like you. Thank you for reading with me.”

Apocalyne smiled. “Look, your mother’s leaving. Our request was answered!”

Ellys returned the smile. In a few moments the two girls had helped each other down the tree, and Apocalyne went into her home.

“Apocalyne, are you all right?”

“Yes. I’m sorry I forgot to come and see you before I went to read with Ellys.”

“You’re so diligent with spreading the tidings; your father and I are proud of you.”

“Who was that lady that came into the house only moments ago?” Jerol’s voice came from the study, his presence soon following.

“Oh, it was Ellys’ mother, Alya,” Eryn responded.

“What did she want?” Jerol asked.

Eryn looked at Apocalyne, and then hesitantly back at Jerol.

“It’s all right, Eryn,” he assured her, “I’m sure Apocalyne will understand.”

“She has heard that sometimes Apocalyne reads books with the other children,” Eryn explained, “material that isn’t widespread and common to each family—the writings Arthis gave us. She said that Apocalyne should rather study the books that all the other children study, and that she should choose her books to read with the other children from that selection.”

Jerol’s eyes rolled. “People are as they always were—trying to pour everyone into the same mold. Unfortunately, or rather, fortunately, some of us don’t fit. You keep reading those writings, Apocalyne. It’s better for you. The other knowledge you learn with your mother, life skills, those are the next important things. The rest is irrelevant.”

“Yes, Father.”

“And Apocalyne,” Jerol added after a moment.

“Yes, Father?”

“You’re a brave girl. Keep spreading the tidings.”

Apocalyne smiled. Appreciation from her father—a man of few words—always made her heart full of joy. She was different, she knew. But she was proud of her heritage.



Those who speak forth, those who tell, are given  
To each age, each generation. To the Settlers  
They were the beings divine.  
Now messengers shall speak, and who shall heed?  
They shall be wise.

- 11 -  
**DECISIONS**

As time moves along, no one questions what will become of it. It is constant, ever passing us by. Not so with people. Though we may assume we know the direction a person's life will take, it is never certain whether or not they will take their chosen path, or if they do, what this path may hold for them.

"Do you think you'll grow up to be just like your parents?" Sean asked Apocalyne out of the blue. They had begun to talk together often, if for no other reason than to allow Apocalyne to exercise her evangelistic tendencies, all the while satisfying Sean's perverse desire to argue with someone who seemed to have convictions and desires that ran deeper than his own.

We must remember here what Sean's "deep" desires were, and that was that he had it within him to become a celebrity in the city of Ordyn, perhaps to work for Father Ordyn, or to hold some glorious position. Nothing could have been deemed more

shallow and superficial. The only reason that made him different was that no one else in their town even had any desire to do anything other than what they were doing. In fact, it was only in Ordyn that he had heard some people's positions in life were considered more glamorous than others. And this was a new development.

People had always been taught that whatever their lot was, they ought to be happy with it, and so you would not see, for instance, Mr. and Mrs. Flyle proclaiming their dreams of wanting to become someone famous, if they were not someone famous to begin with. Ambition was certainly a rare attribute, and so rare that it was hardly deemed a virtue. But Sean had it, and he was drawn to Apocalypse's idealistic nature. It wasn't the same as ambition to him, but it was close enough.

"Well," she responded, "I've always been rather individualistic. I don't fancy being exactly like anyone else, though I should like to have the best of what everyone else possesses—in qualities or wealth," she chuckled.

"Seriously, now. Answer my question," Sean demanded, disturbed that she was sidestepping what he really meant.

"You mean will I be an outcast in your eyes and in the eyes of others?" she said quietly and soberly.

"No, I did not say that."

In defense of her parents, Apocalypse continued, "Sean, every age has their prophets, so I've read—and our Tylers, as we often call them—and my parents were the prophets of their day. One must stand out in order to be heard."

"So, you are the Tyler for our day?" he taunted.

Apocalypse ignored the question.

"I can't imagine a young woman—especially one like you—being any Tyler to me. Visions of old women in tents are what come to me when I hear the word

Tylers." Sean shivered, as Apocalypse stared up at the stars.

Suddenly she turned to Sean, "Did you hear that?" "What?" he responded casually.

"A lady moaning. Oh, it was terrible!"

Sean raised his eyebrows. Now she was hearing things? "You're not feeling well. Let me take you back to your house. I'll be a gentleman for once."

"No, I'm fine. You, of all people, should understand. You've seen things you thought were real, but that ended up not being there, remember?" she reminded him, alluding to that one embarrassing day that she visited him.

"You're seeing things, too?" Sean asked, a sarcastic grin building on his face.

Pulling her wild hair behind her ears, she was obviously shaken, "I—I must go now, Sean."

"Shall I walk you home?" he offered, suddenly realizing he was about to lose his pleasant company.

"No. I'll be fine," she said as she quickly picked up speed and began running in the direction of her house.

Puzzled, Sean followed her, as quietly and slowly as possible, since there were no buildings or foliage to hide behind in case she looked back. Only small houses were interspersed in the big open spaces of sand on this side of the village. A couple of times he stopped when she would suddenly stop dead in her tracks and look around. He imagined she was hearing the wail again, and she was.

Finally she reached the door of her home, and Sean headed back to his. He lived alone in a small house, and after the death of his father's sister, who had been his guardian in his younger years, he had no one to go home to. He had grown accustomed to the lonesome nights, and there was nothing to fear. Or was there?

On his way back he heard the same cackle that

he'd heard the morning he thought he saw Apocalyne walking towards the dunes. "Pleasant!" He said to himself. "She hears a woman wailing, and I hear one cackling! How odd. Perhaps it has something to do with our personalities—she's the more sober type and I'm the more lighthearted." Nothing seemed to shake this very jovial and carefree fellow unless he was enraged, which he was that morning Apocalyne came to visit him. Now he was just feeling melancholy.

"A nice meal would do. Too bad I have no one to fix it for me. Well, everyone has their burden and this is mine. Not too bad a burden, especially if I one day manage to fulfill my dreams."

As he stepped onto the porch of his little home, he thought he heard music and partying going on.

"What hellions have presumed to..." he began as he opened the door. He felt a little foolish when he looked around and saw no one there, and nothing to suggest the presence of a party.

"By the dunes, I should think that I may be going mad. But who wouldn't, in this strange world we live in. In fact, everyone is probably going insane, I just haven't noticed yet. I did notice that Myra who sells the meat at the market did look a little beside herself. But perhaps that's because one of the customers had been giving her trouble. That could be it. Oh, so much for my poor analyzing skills." He scurried around, looking for something to eat. Finally, managing to get something halfway edible together, he sat down at the small dining table to eat.

He had just sunk his teeth into the first bite when he heard that cackle again. He had no expression that would do the subject justice, so he settled for simply rolling his eyes. He heard the door open and shut and figured it wouldn't do him any good to look back, as probably no one was there.

"No one's there, I bet. Just the wind."

"Wrong!" came a woman's voice and a cackle.

"Goodness, did I fall asleep or something and now I'm having a bad dream?" he said, before taking another bite of food.

"Wrong again!"

"Well, are you here to plague me?"

"And he's wrong again!"

He finally spun around, perhaps to make sure he was talking to someone and not to himself. When he saw the strangely attractive figure of unusually small stature standing by the door, he almost wished that he had been talking to himself.

"I can't believe this is happening to me on the great planet, the world of the Wylders," he said, derisively. "I thought there was nothing to be afraid of."

"And there isn't."

"I just want to eat in peace."

"And so you shall."

"Not with you watching me."

"And why not?"

"Because I'd rather not. That's why not."

"Come now, rude fellow, you haven't even asked why I'm here."

"Oh, is this how it's supposed to go?" he answered sarcastically. "Why are you here?"

"Come now, Sean, it's really not such a bad thing that I've come."

"No, you're right. It's just the timing, the unannounced visit, and my not knowing who you are," he snapped. "Well, now you're here, so get to the point."

"Not so rude, Sean. I've come to help your dreams come true."

"Aha! So it's a prank!" Sean laughed and slapped the table with his hand.

"I thought you believed in your dreams," the woman continued.

"Oh yes, I believed that they'd continue to be just that—dreams. And I was pretty content to go on



dreaming, till you attempted to wake me.”

“You can be someone in Ordyn.”

“Who says?”

“I say.”

“And who are you?”

“The Goddess of Ordyn. Ordyna<sup>1</sup> is my name.”

Sean stopped cold. “You are what?”

“The Goddess of Ordyn.”

“Wait, then I have a statue of you, if that is who you are. Come stand beside it.”

“A statue is a statue. She’s only stone. I’m real. How can you compare?”

“I just can. Now come.”

Ordyna reluctantly followed him to his small bedroom and stood beside his prized statue.

“Long hair; yes. Yours is black, but I guess the stone doesn’t show the color of hair.”

“Nor the eyes.”

“I guess not.”

“Nor the skin.”

“I guess not, but it does show the features. Now stand still!”

She rolled her eyes.

“Be nice to me! You’re in my house. You don’t have such a pleasant or kind personality for a goddess, do you?”

“Well, perhaps I’m the wrong one. I am the Goddess of Ordyn, after all. Perhaps you should try another goddess.”

“Perhaps. But you’ll do for now,” he answered, still visually comparing the two. “Well, the form is quite the same. The long hair too—oh, I said that already. You have striking blue eyes; does that match with such black hair? I guess it does. The face is pretty close. You have darker skin, but that doesn’t show up on the statue—I remember.”

Finally, frustrated with this superficiality—as if she had any depth herself—Ordyna took him by the shoulders.

“Sean, I’ve come to fulfill your dreams. Don’t you understand? Doesn’t that mean anything to you?” she asked softly.

Having such an attractive little beauty cooing only inches away from his face made everything seem quite different. She didn’t seem as irritating, and he didn’t seem as in control.

“Oh—of course it does. Uh, thank you.”

“That’s better. Now, Sean. Let me tell you what you must do to make this dream come true.”

“I’m listening,” Sean responded glibly, not wanting to let her know of his excitement. Deep down he was all too eager to hear what would help his fanciful daydreams become reality.

“First of all, you must steal away in the quiet of the night, without telling anyone—not even that chestnut-haired girlfriend of yours.”

“I have no girlfriend!” Sean interrupted, but the goddess ignored him and carried on.

“You must walk to the city of Ordyn. It will take you a good day, and when you are there, I’ll appear to you again and tell you what you must do.”

“Ohhh, this is so unlike me, going all the way off to Ordyn on account of some dream.”

“It’s not a dream, Sean. It’s your only chance.”

“But wait, there must be some type of catch, something I must do!” he said, alarmed that her voice was beginning to echo and she was fast disappearing.

“All will be shown you when you get to Ordyn,” the goddess smiled, and then threw her head back and cackled as if she’d just tricked her simple-minded prey into walking into a trap for her.

“That laugh didn’t sound so good,” Sean told himself. “Maybe I better ask Apocalyne...”

“No!” The voice came back quickly, though there

---

<sup>1</sup>Ordyna: pronounced “ordeena”

was no apparition to go along with it.

“Okay, okay, okay!” Sean put his hands up in surrender. “Whatever you say, you just haven’t given me much information.”

“You have your dream—what further information could you want?” came the reply.

“Hmmm, perhaps you’re right,” Sean concluded pensively. “I suppose there’s not much hope of sleeping tonight, then, if I’ve got to go to Ordyn.”

As if the goddess was satisfied that Sean had been sufficiently persuaded (for he had), her voice was heard no more, and there was no further sign or feeling of her presence.

Strangely enough, as he came to his senses, Sean knew that only a moment had passed since that whole ordeal. “So time stops dead for me to have an intelligent conversation with an inhuman being—inhumane, I’d like to add for her. Oh, well, no use trying to figure it out. I’ve always spoken of going, so why shouldn’t I?”

Not coming up with any answer to his own question, he quickly finished his meal, and began packing a few belongings.



Meanwhile, Apocalypse had entered her parents’ home, quite obviously shaken.

“What’s the matter, Apocalypse?” her mother asked, coming up to her and feeling her forehead, which was beaded with cold sweat. “You’re shivering and look white as a moon!”

“I—I was out with Sean, just talking, and I heard... You’ll think I’m silly!”

“Tell us, child. Many strange things have befallen us in our lifetime, as you know.”

“I heard a moanful call, like a woman’s voice, wailing and crying. I was terrified!”

Jerol and Eryn looked at each other. They had never told Apocalypse of the wailing apparitions. Those having to do with her own birth seemed almost of too personal a nature to share, and those having to do with Merynda, and the struggle they faced in Ordyn, seemed too distant and evil a memory to be worth recalling.

“Come over here, child,” Eryn said to Apocalypse, sitting her down on a chair. “Is that all you heard? Did you see anything?”

“I...” she began, then stopped and looked at her mother, then back at her father. “You ... you know what I’m talking about, don’t you?”

“Yes, child. Please, tell us everything. Tell us, and perhaps we can explain.”

“I saw nothing, but all the while when I was running home, I felt someone following me. Then I’d hear a cry again. I would stop and look around, but the sound was too powerful to be coming from anywhere else but...”

“The heavens?”

“Yes! It seemed like it was filling the whole sky!”

Jerol and Eryn looked at each other once more. The time had come to tell Apocalypse the rest of their story in more detail. The apparitions of the veils, the temptations, what had made them come to this small town, and the things they had come to know concerning Apocalypse—and about raising her till she was old enough and strong enough to perform whatever her mission would be.

She sat spellbound as they each pieced together their past experiences and then, with hesitant voices, made their speculations of what Apocalypse had been sent here to do. Apocalypse was stunned—so stunned that she wasn’t sure how to react or even how she felt. She was humbled, frightened, confused and overwhelmed all at once.

“I—I don’t know what to think or say,” she said in

---

<sup>1</sup>**Moons:** The Wylder planet had three

a shaky, serious tone of voice. “I should go to sleep now. It’s rather late.” She got up slowly, and then kissed each of her parents goodnight.

Once she was gone to her room, there was a long silence before Jerol and Eryn both began their sentences simultaneously. They laughed a little, and then Jerol motioned for Eryn to speak first.

“Do you think she’s ready, Jerol?”

“I don’t know. She must be, for the visions to begin calling her.”

“But she seems so frail and weak in some ways.”

“To us, yes. Remember, we’re her parents. Children never grow up while they are still under their parents’ wings.”

“Oh, but Jerol, I could never let her go! She’s our only child!”

Jerol’s eyes took on a faraway look. “We must be prepared to let her go. She’s got to discover her purpose—the destiny for which we have been preparing her—for herself. There is much growing up for her to do, and if they have already begun calling her, perhaps there isn’t much more time.”

“Let us pray, Jerol. I am so frightened and feel a sense of loss already.”

They both bowed their heads and prayed silently for some time before Jerol looked up and began to speak, as if he was seeing these things before his very eyes, “I see a young woman standing with her back turned to me, against the black of the night. The wind is blowing fiercely and her hair is dancing wildly in the gusts. She’s looking up at a being of Light. She looks as if she has been running from something. Behind her is the frightful thing she has been running from—a fierce beast, ready to pounce. But she reaches up towards the glowing being and is suddenly enveloped in this aura of Light. She turns toward the beast and he perishes, and then she’s drawn up into the Light.”

They both turned and looked at each other and the word came, simultaneously: “Apocalyne?”

On one hand lies the Darkness, the Dark Hells of the Shadow  
 Casting blackness over sand.  
 The wynds do clash, the storm does rise  
 To battle the unseen hand.

- 12 -

## THE CITY OF TEMPTATION

Sean felt seriously uneasy about this whole adventure. He had walked for a long time, it seemed, and his laziness was threatening to overcome his desire—or curiosity, rather—to do as the Goddess of Ordyn had told him. The night winds blew as they always did, and Sean clutched his garments about him tightly as he made his way across the sandy and rock-studded Wylder plains. He remembered passing by Apocalyne's window only moments before he left the village of Kryppa behind him, thinking that perhaps he could tell her what he was doing. But his memory had suddenly been jogged, and he remembered how she had defiled the statue of his goddess those many days ago with her scribbled message—with what she had said was the truth.

*I still can't get that terrible little inscription off of my statue, he was now thinking. It's there forever, and it's all her fault. Surely if I had told her that I was going to Ordyn, she would have done everything to try to stop me. I don't know how spontaneous she is, but*

*some of her tricks and persuasive tactics could do me great harm. No, it was better just to steal away in the quiet of the night as I did. I hate this awful feeling, though. I feel jumpy, like someone's following me, or something could happen at any moment.*

He was suddenly startled by a glimpse of a white gown from the corner of his eye. *By the dunes, is it Apocalyne again? But it couldn't be! She would never have followed me all this way in these howling winds—or would she?*

He stopped, turned around and rolled his eyes. Her stature looked like Apocalyne's, the hair, the build, everything. Only the face was blurred by the light that shone around it. The wind suddenly ceased its howling. Sean's concentration, however, was momentarily transfixed by this obviously female figure, so that he took no note of the sudden change around him that had accompanied her appearance.

Casually he took a few steps toward the figure and said, "Either it's you, Apocalyne, or it's that presence I keep sensing—and neither one sounds too good to me."

Suddenly he stopped. "Wait a moment. Why am I taking steps back towards you? I'm on my way to Ordyn, and if you want to speak to me, you'll have to come and take a few steps my direction."

His frivolity left him the instant he could see the hazy outline of the now nearing woman's eyes. There was some strange drawing power, almost tantalizing, though obviously not playful. Whatever it was she wanted, there was going to be nothing halfhearted about it. It seemed like she wanted a decision, some type of commitment. She didn't look like she wanted just anyone and he happened to be the first she saw. She wanted him. Not knowing whether she had walked or floated, Sean suddenly found himself face to face with this being, though for a moment that seemed to him an awkward eternity, she spoke no

words.

"Oh, please speak, won't you?" he finally uttered in his perplexed frustration. "This dull, solemn, speechless communication is too much for me."

"Very well, then," came her soft, clear voice. "You're going to your death, Sean."

"Death? No, I'm going to Ordyn. ... Why would you think I'm going to my death?"

"The spirits are fighting for your soul, Sean. Life and Death are fighting for your soul. Life wants to use it, and Death wants to destroy it before Life can make any use of it."

"And that's supposed to be significant to me? Who am I to these ... these 'spirits' anyway? I'm just a man seeking to find a name for himself—and have a little fun on the side. I don't even think I'm a man yet—a boy, perhaps."

"Don't belittle your importance, Sean."

"My ... what? I didn't think I had any, at least not yet. This adventure is just beginning."

"Sean, you're not going on an adventure. You're going to your death."

"Oh, well. Maybe I shouldn't go then," he answered, his voice reflecting the fact that he didn't really grasp the depth of what was happening.

"You don't understand," the unwylderly being continued. "This journey you've been enticed to make is a trap. They're using your dreams to enslave you. Please, listen to me. Come back to the simplicity of the village and the life you've grown up with."

Still not understanding, Sean looked around and thought about it for but a few seconds before he decided, "All right. I tell you what, seeing as I've come all this way already. I'll just go to Ordyn for a day and see what it's like, and then I'll come back. No commitments. I'll just go and come back. Simple?"

The being seemed to grow sad and full of pain.

"Oh, please don't weep. Spirits aren't supposed to

be sad. Or are they? I suppose you know better than I. I'll come back in a day, though." He waved and then merrily continued his way towards Ordyn. Every few seconds he would look back, and find that the being was still there—this being that kept reminding him of Apocalyne—and his eyes would meet with ones that showed a heart full of pain for the decision he was making.

Finally she was out of sight—or perhaps she had vanished, Sean wasn't sure which. But at the same moment, the winds returned in full force, and Sean suddenly shuddered at the thought that all this being had said might be true.

"I'll be really careful," he finally told himself, shrugging his shoulders that carried the little sack of belongings he'd taken with him.



Dawn was fast approaching, and not feeling any sense of urgency, Sean decided to rest, sitting up against a rock just outside the gates of Ordyn. It did not strike him as odd that his voyage had only taken him one night on foot. In truth, he had been speeded on his way by the same unseen forces that sought to lure him to Ordyn. Under ordinary circumstances, and on foot as he was, the journey would have taken nearly twice that long, but being unaware of this fact (since few ever left their home village for any purpose, and thus to most folks as little was known about the distance between the Wylder towns as was known about the history of them), Sean thought little of it. He soon fell fast asleep.

Before long, the sun began to coat his cheeks and shoulders with its first shades of pink. His skin would soon have reddened had some men not come and awoken him. These three were dressed in loose-fitting pants, capes and some fancy gear on their heads to protect them from the blazing sun.

"Get up, young fellow!" they said, poking him.

"W-what? W-here am I?"

"In the city of Ordyn, you fool! Don't you know this city?" The three men laughed.

"Of course I know this city."

"Well, why did you stop short of it, then? Do you people from other cities not have enough strength to walk even a few steps?" one of them cracked, and the others followed him with bellowing laughter.

"You all need to improve your wits. I find that rather unhumorous," Sean said cockily, as he attempted to get up from the rock he'd used as a headrest.

One of the men pushed him back down. Sean fell, not used to any physical force being imposed on him.

"Listen. Here we don't work on wits. Wits are for the feeble-minded. Here we glorify each other in the dance! Our god is the flesh!" the apparent ringleader of the three men stated, and the other two laughed.

"Huh! You have a god of flesh? I thought gods and goddesses were spirits."

At this, the man who appeared to be ringleader grew noticeably angry. Sean, eager to put a brake on the man's obviously loose temper, quickly added, "It was your own goddess who invited me here..."

As if such a thought were one of utter blasphemy, the man appeared ready to take a swing at him, but at just that moment, a lovely young lady called out, and came walking towards them. At the sound of her voice, the men stepped back. They seemed in awe of her, and had no lack of respect.

"Who's this handsome young fellow?"

"Er, we didn't ask his name just yet."

"I should have known you would strike an unnamed fellow."

"I'm sorry, we..."

"No need to explain. Just don't ever treat visitors like that again!" The mysteriously beautiful young woman said, turning a fierce glance towards the men.

She then looked over at Sean with a smile. “Your name?”

“Sean,” he answered, sheepishly.

“Come, Sean,” she said, taking him by the arm. “You’ve never been to Ordyn before, have you? Come into the city and let me show you the sights.”

*Refreshing!* Sean thought to himself. *I thought this city was vile, but perhaps that is because any other visitors were scared off by such men before getting any further. This girl, by contrast, is beautiful—almost more beautiful than that goddess of Ordyn woman!* He looked around, almost expecting a reaction from that sprite who’d made him take such a drastic change of direction in his life. *More friendly, anyway,* he added, relieved that, whoever the goddess was that had appeared to him before, she hadn’t now scared him out of his wits by appearing or doing something strange.

“Well, what do you think?” The girl he was with, who by now had introduced herself as Malysse<sup>1</sup>, asked as she showed him the great Theater of Ordyn. It took him a few moments to answer; he was busy marveling at such innocent beauty, and the blonde curls that fell down her back and shoulders.

“M-magnificent!” Sean finally managed to stutter. “I’ve never seen anything like it!” Anyone overhearing would not have known, by the look in his eyes, whether he was talking about the city’s great theater or about his newfound friend, Malysse.

“It was built only a few years ago to replace the old, smaller theater. For its humble beginnings, the city of Ordyn has done well. We are now a great center of culture and entertainment!”

“Does that make the people of your city proud to be part of it?”

“Need you ask?” she said, with an obvious “of

course!” in her eyes.

She continued, “Of course, we don’t get many visitors from other villages yet, except for the Fathers of each city, who normally keep to themselves. Here is where they all come out and show themselves these days. And a delightful place it is to show oneself! The glamour and glory do something for these normally hermitlike men. Father Ordyn has been a great example!”

“I see. And may I ask who you are? I notice that you seem to be a fairly well-known personality here yourself.”

“Oh, of course! I’m the daughter of Merynda, and secretly, my father is Father Ordyn! It’s unspoken, but most people know it. I suppose you could say that if there were a princess in each city, I would be the princess of this one!”

“You tell me such secrets of your personal life freely? You do not try to hide your personal pride either, I see,” Sean observed, half-sarcastically.

“And why should I? Pride is a great thing, is it not?”

“Not such a virtue to me, but I suppose if it makes you happy.”

“Ohhhh! You are such an upstanding man! I could tell, and being the stranger and moral man that you are, this is how I knew that you wouldn’t betray my trust in discussing my secret—about my father, that is.”

“Though if it were a real secret you would not have told me. You are proud of your little secret, are you not?”

“Yes! It is scandalous, though.”

“I see,” Sean said, looking away, and not feeling quite right about discussing the topic any further.

“Tonight will be a great feast! Many of the cities’ Fathers will be here. You should come!”

“Oh?”

<sup>1</sup>Malysse: pronounced “ma-leese”

"Please? Be my guest!" Malysse pleaded.

"I only came for a day. I must be on my way again before the sun sets."

"Oh, but that is much too soon. You can stay longer, can you not? Please? You can't turn a pretty young woman down, can you?"

Sean looked around, and then feeling a sudden burst of determination at what he perceived as a challenge said, "In fact, I can. I really should go back tonight. Besides, I have no suitable clothing for such an occasion. I only brought a small sack of things, and few Grenyrs."

"I can get you clothes!"

Remembering the vision of the spirit that looked like Apocalyne, Sean refused once more. Then Malysse took his face in her hands and kissed him. She stepped back and looked him straight in the eyes.

"You temptress!" Sean mocked. "Will you stop at nothing to persuade me?"

"You can't say no, can you?"

"I can, but I'll see as the day goes by if I'll stay. And if I do, it will be because I decided to."

"All right. If it makes you feel better to think of it that way."

It wasn't long before Malysse had taken Sean to find the best of clothes, and had transformed his handsome young self into quite the charming, rich-looking fellow—a perfect combination of qualities for the shallow young women of Ordyn.

After they came out of the tailor's, Malysse took him back to the Theater of Ordyn.

"There's an afternoon show. Why don't you go to it? You don't have to pay anything, and if anyone asks, just say that Malysse sent you on ahead and will be joining you later."

"W-where are you going?"

"I have some matters to attend to—for my mother."

"Okay," Sean answered, puzzled at the seeming

suddenness of her need to be elsewhere at that moment. But not wishing to appear entirely helpless without her, he nodded understandingly, and turned to enter the large theater.



"Ah, my daughter! You've come," Merynda said, putting her arm around Malysse, who had just entered their house. "Your father is very ill. You know he's been quite sickly and weak over the past months. He's lived a very long, full life, but still I don't want him to leave us just yet. I feel that there is more to be done on our part, and that today is just the beginning of it. We'll need his wisdom. He is more in touch with the spirits we need than I am."

"Yes?" Malysse asked, wondering what exactly her mother was talking about. Once she was securely under the shade of their palatial home, a transformation took place. The blonde curls and innocent eyes that had only moments earlier been hers disappeared, and Malysse looked like an exact replica of Merynda, only younger. She had that same silky black hair in hundreds of braids, the same olive skin—only more youthful—the same bewitching eyes, only emerald instead of clear blue.—A bewitching sort of beauty.

"I'll speak to you about that later. That boy, did you find him?" Merynda asked, her back turned to Malysse.

"Yes, I've been with him all along. That's why I came—to tell you."

"Nothing has gone wrong, has it?"

"No. He's at the theater now. He said he was only going to stay one day."

Merynda turned to Malysse. Her eyes showed great alarm. "He must not return!"

"All right. He agreed to consider staying for the feast."

"He must agree to stay longer, and we must see



that he does not return!”

“I will try,” came the nonchalant response.

“Child!” Merynda began, her voice almost raised, then she gathered herself and continued in a more soothing tone. “Daughter, this young man is dangerous!”

“He looks stupid and indifferent to me,” Malysse responded, with a shrug of her shoulders.

“He is not stupid, and the only reason he looks indifferent and directionless is because he has not made his decision in life yet. And his decision, if not for our side, will mean disaster. He is undecided, and every undecided person who sees and then decides to follow the Light means disaster to us! Do you understand me, Malysse?”

“Yes. I will try my best.”

“You will do your best. Daughter, this is no game. The spirit of Ordyna herself sent him our way, and he was almost stopped by the Goddess of Light! He agreed to give it one day, so he’s weak. If he can agree to one day, he can be convinced of another, and then another, and then forever. That doesn’t mean he will be, but it’s more possible. But if he sticks to his resolve and leaves, he will be that much closer to becoming an emissary of the Light. Now, if the beings of Light get him, the Darkness—and us with it—is a step closer to being destroyed! Does this make things clear to you?”

“Somewhat.”

“Do whatever you must do. Lure him. Seduce him. Plead. Do not argue face to face with him; it will make him come to his senses, and he still has a voice in his heart telling him to leave tonight. Entice him, all right?”

“All right.”

“You do not sound convinced.”

“I am convinced.”

“I don’t think so. We are talking about the very

fate of our future! If this boy begins to escape your grasp, kill him! I’d rather see this young man of such potential die than be turned over to the forces of Light!”

“I know.”

It was not the deed or the intentions that Malysse had difficulty with—although such crimes had up till now been nonexistent on the planet of Ordyn; it was just that her rebellious nature found it hard to submit to her mother, who, Malysse thought, had her glory behind her and was now an antique, but fading treasure. Still, she was determined to preserve this city of feasting and fame, so she complied.



Having finished attending the afternoon show at the theater, and hardly being impressed with the very superficial performance he had witnessed, Sean had started feeling more and more that he should leave Ordyn. It was late in the afternoon and he thought he should slip away, lest Malysse once again find him and terrorize him into staying, or beg him to—either way it would be just as difficult to refuse her. In fact, when she was there he was quite flattered that such a beautiful and obviously influential girl had taken notice of him—and not only notice, but also made great pains to have him stay with her.

He made his way to the exit of the theater. He had to squeeze through a crowd of people who were absorbed in the spirit of celebration. They found it odd that he should be trying to leave, but he didn’t let that deter him.

“Death! I remember that spirit saying something about this being my death. Malysse is too beautiful to be true, so there must be something evil about her. Perhaps she could be a spirit too. I know now that I can see them.”

Malysse was just about to enter the theater when she caught a glimpse of Sean out of the corner of her

eye. He was walking towards the city gates! Her of heart nearly skipped a beat and she went running after him.

“Sean! Sean!” she called. “You’re leaving?”

“Yes, I must go,” he said calmly, not turning around.

“Sean, please turn around.”

“Why?” he said, standing still, yet still facing the direction he was walking.

“Oh, please? You cannot stop being the gentleman you are for your nervousness at being in such a great city.”

Sean turned around to answer her, then drew in his breath at what he saw. Malysse noticed.

“Do I look beautiful?”

“Y-yes,” he answered, seeing his admired blonde in a light pink gossamer gown and glittering jewelry to complement it.

“Then you won’t stay even to see me in this?”

Sean rolled his eyes. “Must you be so conceited?”

“If it would please you for me to be humble, I could do that as well.”

Sean laughed at her outward desire for him to stay, and her willingness to do anything to make that happen. His voice took on a tender tone.

“You really want me to stay, don’t you?”

She nodded affirmatively.

“All right then,” he agreed, stroking her cheek affectionately.

Malysse’s eyes lowered, with a pretense of bashfulness so effective that Sean could not tell it was put on.

“Come, Sean. Shall we go back to the theater? We wouldn’t want to miss the twilight show!”

“All right,” he agreed, more at the prospect of being with her than attending another show such as the one he had seen, and still wondering how she ever managed to be there at just the right time and so

easily convince him against his better judgment.

*I’ve got to work on those manly convictions—that “I said it once and I’m not going to say it again” that my father used to always use. Oh well, there could be worse things happening. I’ll look on the good side of this: a beautiful girl, the city of my dreams, new clothes. Could be worse!*

Once they had entered the theater, Sean was enthralled with what somehow seemed a better show than the last one. Perhaps it was the reaction Malysse had to it that gave him the illusion he was enjoying it as much as she. Absorbed as he thus was in the performance, and with his blonde companion, he hadn’t noticed the goddess of Ordyn appearing in the seat on the other side of him. She put a firm hand on the back of his neck to get his attention.

“Aarggh!” Sean gasped. He looked to see if others had heard him, but everyone—Malysse included—was too fascinated by the entertainment provided, and none had taken any notice.

He turned to see the goddess who had appeared to him at his home the night before.

“Must you be so morbid?” he snapped, rubbing his neck after she loosened her grasp. “Anyway, you told me you would appear to me once I got here and you didn’t.”

“Oh, but I did!” the goddess said, and she waved her wand in the direction of Malysse, whose guise was momentarily uncovered for Sean. “That’s me! A pretty little darling I can become, huh?” she continued, poking him with her wand.

Before Sean’s eyes, Malysse suddenly took on her inner appearance—the one she had when in the presence of her mother—her real appearance. The blonde vanished, and in her stead was an exact replica of the goddess Ordyna, or Merynda her mother—whichever you had met first.

Sean was puzzled. “Too many strange things for

me!”

Once Malysse had recovered her own innocent appearance, Ordyna continued. “Sean, you cannot keep the promise you made to the fair-looking Goddess of Light the other night!”

“Promise? Goddess of Light? Ah yes, I remember now. Is that who she was?”

“What? You did not know? You are an awfully dull creature!” the goddess snapped, disgusted. “I can hardly believe you can see me! And you didn’t even ask her who she was, did you?”

“No. Well, she looked just like a friend of mine, Apocalyne.”

“Ugh! That name sickens me! Apocalyne is almost the embodiment of the Goddess of Light, just like Malysse is of me. We are one and the same, Malysse and I. She is truly her own soul, but her mind is such that I can possess her at any time, only Malysse barely understands that now. She thinks she is herself—an evil self to be sure. Just the same, this Goddess of Light influences Apocalyne, and when Apocalyne’s spirit is attuned to the forces of Light, they become as one.”

Sean was fascinated. “W-why did I not understand all of this? Why can you appear so easily to me and I know who you are, yet this ... this Goddess of Light as you call her, is easily shied away?”

“I don’t know why I’m telling you this—perhaps because you are so obviously dull to the workings of the unseen forces around you. But anyway, the Goddess of Light only comes where she is wanted—the frightful creature. Through the years you’ve managed to shoo her away. She has tried to manifest herself, but you mocked and scoffed her presence, and resisted her power over you, and instead turned to me. I’ve been around in your house for some time now, just waiting for the moment I could get you to notice me. When Apocalyne sought to open your heart

to the truth around you, it was also opened to my presence, and so I was able to appear to you.”

“You ... you’ve been watching me all along? Whatever for? Why do all you spirits seem so interested in me?”

“It is not we who are interested in you—it is you who are interested in us. It was your dream that revealed me to you, and your interest was manifested the moment you took into your home that image of my likeness, though it is a poor one, I must say.”

“It was just a piece of art to me,” Sean tried to defend himself.

“Ah, but nonetheless a form you revered, in that it stood for the dream you held dear. And that reverence has now earned you the chance to make your dream come true—here, with us. And by making this journey, you have proven that you belong to me.”

“Are these things irreversible?”

“Oh, but why would you want to reverse your good fortune now? Malysse has prepared something special for you after this twilight show. I assure you it is not something you’d want to miss for all the fame in Wylder!”

“But the ... the Goddess of Light told me this town would be my death!”

“And is that not what the end of one life and the beginning of another is?”

“What do you mean?”

“Stay, Sean! Let her kill you with enjoyment and pleasure—death to that old hardworking, bare life that was formerly yours,” Ordyna answered, throwing her head back in cackling laughter.

“I liked my life,” Sean mumbled under his breath, feeling more than a twinge uncomfortable at the disdainful notes he was sure he had heard in her laugh.

“But try this one,” she said, more softly and calmly now, having regained her composure. “Enjoy the

pleasures of sin for a season.”

“And then what?”

“Who cares?” With that, the vision of Ordyna was gone. But her words echoed through his mind as he meditated on all she had said. It was true. Sean had indeed become increasingly dull over the last few years. He had even resisted the little truth that Apocalyne had tried to share with him a few days ago. He always felt that he had to find things out for himself. And he was just about to.

Between the mountains lies the vale. Between the hills, the sand.  
 Upon these plains is battle fought. Upon these, forces rage.  
 They seek the high, they seek the low, each to his own rank-  
 Inhabit they, influence they, dominion over all.

- 13 -

## LIFE OR DEATH?

This whole experience had left Sean in a cold sweat. As the evening desert wind began to race through the city, pushing everything in its path, Sean began to shiver. It wasn't the regular cold night air that all inhabitants of the Wylder planet had grown up with; this was a ghostlike evil chill that caused the hairs on the back of his neck to rise involuntarily as the wind howled.

Dancers in white had begun the show, dancing freely to a melodious tune while waving white veils artistically through the air. The music had now taken on a deeper, more frenzied beat—the type that reverberates in your bones. Then dancers clothed in black began to move about them, making stilted martial gestures to the beat of the drums in what could be best described as something between a march and a war dance.

Then the music changed. The drumbeats became even deeper and lower, interspersed by the occasional wailing cry of a woman singing. Her barely dis-

tinguishable words obviously sought to tell some sort of story, but Sean, in his rather awed and absent state of mind, had already missed too much of it to grasp what it spoke of. Yet even so, each time her voice rang in his ears, he felt increasingly uncomfortable.

The dancers in black began leaping and doing acrobatics all around the large stage floor, while the ones in white retreated in a soft, fluttery step, shoulder to shoulder, in a circle. It wasn't long before the black dancers made their way back, via a large number of flips, somersaults, leaps and jumps, to the little circle. The black dancers leapt and the white ones covered gracefully low. The crowds were silent. It was the middle of the dance—the dance of the war of the worlds.

Next time the woman sang her moanful piece, Sean started shaking. He remembered the night Apocalyne had run from his company and back to her home. Pictures started flashing furiously through his mind—all the times they'd had together, brief snatches of their conversations, and the last glimpse he had of her (or at least someone that looked just like her, for dull as he was, he didn't entirely grasp the explanation given by Ordyna) the night before, when he had fled to Ordyn.

Feeling cold, shaky, and as if the wind had wrapped its unseen fingers about him and had begun to suffocate him, he got up and ran out of the theater. "Is there any way out? I need a way out! Oh, please!" he gasped, recovering his breath.

Once Malysse turned to see her partner gone, she jumped up and ran out of the theater as well. She found him just at the entrance, gasping for air.

"My dear friend, you are ill! Let me take you back to my home."

"No. No, I'll stay here."

"You'll die here. It's so cold and the air is full of

sand. Come under the shelter of my home."

"I've braved the sand and the winds before. They seem kinder than whatever it is about this place that almost suffocates me. I want to go back to my home!"

"That you will, darling. But you are in no shape to return just yet. It is your very trip through the night winds that has caused this illness. I assure you you'll feel better after a good night's rest. Come with me. I know where you can stay."

Not having enough strength to answer, and realizing she was probably right, Sean let her help him up and take him to a small, luxurious one-bedroom house not too far from the theater. The lights were soft, and the somewhat unpolished classiness with which the little house had been decorated appealed to Sean.

"This is how I had always imagined my home in Ordyn would be," he said with a feeble smile after she had gotten him something to drink.

"Perhaps one day, if you live here, this could be your home. I have a few of them," Malysse said, careful not to come across too adamant about his need to stay, lest she fire up a contrary reaction in him.

"Perhaps one day," he answered.

Malysse kept on jabbering about nothing while she prepared some herbal remedies for short breath, dizziness and shivering—all things that were ailing poor Sean. He knew the remedies too—in fact, everyone was supposed to know them. The first generation of Wylders had discovered these things and faithfully passed them on to their young.

He watched somewhat carefully as she put the familiar spices and herbs in the mixture. He derived some comfort from the fact that maybe this place wasn't all that different from the home he left after all. There was one plant she put in, however, that he could not quite see from where he was lying, but it looked unfamiliar, and that worried him.

“What is that you’re putting in there?” Sean asked.

“Oh, different spices and herbs to make up a little creamy paste. Didn’t you learn about these medicines when you were young?”

“Of course. Everyone knows the cures for the common ails of our Wylder planet.”

“Well, then.”

“But I did not recognize one of the plants you were putting in.”

“Oh, that’s something new. I forgot the name of it. It was discovered by the physicians here, and gives the paste a more agreeable flavor.”

“And I take it you’re privy to all their newest findings?”

“I have connections,” Malysse replied, with a saucy raise of an eyebrow. *And so I do!* She thought to herself.

Carefully bringing the mixture over to Sean, Malysse said softly, “You look much better, but you could use some of this still. You really should try this new flavor.”

“Wait. Not just yet,” he said, pushing the small stone bowl gently to the side. “Let’s talk.”

“Talk? What is there to talk about?”

Sean looked puzzled at this sudden snappy response Malysse gave him. She was normally—well, at least for the day he’d known her—much more friendly and charming.

Malysse read his face and realized she was losing him. “Darling Sean, what is there to talk about when there is so much else we can do?”

“What else are you talking about?”

“There is pleasure to be had,” she said, kissing his chest.

“I’m afraid it won’t be with me,” Sean replied, getting up from his reclining position. Malysse thought it strange that a young man with such a yearning for glitter and glamour should refuse a touch

of pleasure. But Sean had an odd mixture of great longing for worldly pleasure and an equally great fear and nervousness of having it.

“I’m sorry,” Malysse replied modestly. “Perhaps I was just too carried away with the elation of the moment.”

Sean looked at her in a puzzled way, as if to say, *Whatever do you mean? Were you carried away by me?*

She continued, unflinching. “You know, you, a handsome young man with no obligations except to grace our world with your presence, sitting here beside me. The wind flying freely through the house, making your hair dance to its tune, my pretty attire which I chose especially for the feast tonight; it would all be so perfect, had you not gotten so ill.”

Sean chuckled within himself. That was not at all how he saw things. To him it was a rather shivering sort of wind that chilled his spine. True, she was pretty, but he did not find that he matched the descriptions of a—well, he was definitely young, and he should like to think he was handsome—but not with no obligations; he was sure he had some, he just didn’t know what they were. Her pretty attire, though she and it had well earned the description, made the evening all a little too enchanting and perfect. There was some strange feeling that Sean had about all this. Needless to say, he greatly questioned the “elation” part of the moment.

“Ah, Sean, our world is too complicated,” she said with a girlish frustration at their world’s politics. “I’m not sure if I’ll be able to live through all this happily.—At least not while I’m still alone.”

She had now appealed to his sense of protectiveness—that manly desire to be what we on Earth might describe as a “knight in shining armor,” giving his life to rescue some poor maiden from her distress and from the evil monsters—whatever they might be—that

threaten her. The attempt was not lost, even on Sean's more self-centered personality.

He put his arm around her and snuggled up to her. She closed her eyes.

"Sean, darling, you need some of the medicine," she said with a tone of concern. "I'm afraid your voyage here has left you quite weakened, and you do not look so well."

Sean cringed.

"Here, how about something more enjoyable!" she said suddenly. "I'll put some of this delightful mixture on my tongue and then I'll kiss you with it."

"Kiss me with it?" Sean asked, half-wondering about this strange idea, and half-amused and intrigued by such an offer.

She put a sizeable portion of the pasty mixture in her mouth and then looked deep into his eyes; the sparkles in hers turned into stars for Sean and he leaned over slowly, gently, to kiss her. Just as their lips were about to meet, he heard that moanful cry that Apocalyne had described to him. He jerked away.

His jerk startled Malysse, who involuntarily swallowed the mixture. Just as she had finished gulping, Sean apologized.

"I'm sorry," he said, noting her surprise and disappointment. "I'm just not sure about this new mixture. I might be allergic to it or something." Sean was hesitant. He knew that the wailful call was a sign of warning to him—but if it was, Sean figured it was only concerning the strange medicine. Indeed it was, but the medicine was only part of it, as Sean was to discover.

"I don't think so," she said, dreamily, "but why don't we do it without the medicine."

That sounded good to lonely little Sean, whose pride all these years gave way to desperation in this one tempting moment. In the more recent days that he had known her, Apocalyne had often made what

he thought were advances, only he was too proud to respond to them. He respected her and wanted her to respect him also—and that meant his very odd perspective of things as well, what we might describe as a "love me, love my dog" attitude. He wasn't sure how he would feel about himself afterwards if he allowed himself such intimacy with one who believed so differently from himself. But that was then. Now things seemed entirely different, and he hardly gave the moment any further thought. After all, what was the use of thinking about what might be, when there were things that could be had right there and then?

And so, before Sean had a chance to think, or even respond, Malysse had let the gossamer gown slip gracefully off her shoulders and onto the floor. Among other things, Sean found himself slightly short of breath again—but for a different reason. *She is lovely!* he thought to himself.

Clothed in nothing now except for her fine jewelry, Malysse undressed Sean and pressed her warm body on his. On the brink of rapture, Sean felt a twinge awkward. He had never done this before—though now he wondered why—and wasn't too confident about his moves, much less the choice he was making to be so intimate with this stranger whom he had felt quite strangely about most of the day.

Malysse noticed his awkwardness and sought to put him at ease. She kissed his chest and slowly, gently moved on up to his neck, where she took a slight detour and whispered in his ear, "It's all right, Sean. Just let me make you feel incredibly good! Don't worry about anything. Tonight, we're going to become one, you and me. It's going to be a union of the worlds—you in me; we'll be one."

Then, as if anything should surprise him now, Malysse transformed into the Goddess Ordyna, her voice echoing, "Tonight, we're going to become one, you and me. A union of the worlds!" Then she added,

“It’s your choice, your rapturous moment of decision. Let me make of you a god, Sean. You’ll be a god—the god of Ordyn one day!” It seemed as if only a moment had passed, and he’d seen a bad vision, for when he blinked, it was Malysse that was passionately caressing and embracing him, not Ordyna.

In that decisive moment when they were about to be united as one, Sean heard it again. It was that cry! Now he knew what it sounded like—a woman in travail. From within the cry he suddenly heard the words, “Don’t, Sean! It’s the beginning of your death!”

Sean stopped Malysse. “I can’t do this. I have to make my decision first.”

“Decision? But I thought you had. Oh please?” Malysse pleaded. Her eyes looked drowsy, as if she was struggling not to awaken from a pleasant dream. “It was so good, we were both about to be enraptured!”

“Does evil always have such a fascinatingly beautiful appearance?” Sean asked bravely, not knowing what was coming over him; he wasn’t normally that courageous—much less insightful.

Malysse’s dreamy eyes suddenly filled with looks of horror. *I’ve lost him!* she thought. *I thought I would win this victory with pleasure; now it must be with pain!* She was angry for herself, for she had anticipated much pleasure with Sean, but she couldn’t go back on her word to her mother. Her will had been given to Ordyna, and there was no turning back. She had but to deceive him once more!

Throwing a fit like a little child, Malysse cried, pouted and pled, even though she knew he would not yield. The Power of Light had overcome them once again; but she wanted to steal the victory out of its hands before it could raise them up in triumph.

At long last she sobbed, “I thought you cared! I care, but you’re turning your back on me! Do you know how much you’re hurting me?” She looked suddenly drowsy, as the medicine she had swallowed

was now beginning to take effect.

“I’m sorry. It just wasn’t meant to be,” Sean replied, suddenly fearing for his life if he yielded to her.

“Get out of my home, then!” she cried.

“All right. Please, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to hurt you!”

She said nothing, but eyed a knife sitting on the dining table a few steps away from the door. Sean could not see it, for she was between him and the table. But it was close enough to the door that she could grab it on her way to see him out. It was her last chance at semi-victory.

“I’ll walk you to the door,” she muttered, wiping her tears, and slowly moving in that direction, still trying to maintain her act of a slighted lover.

*Denial happens often to normal people. She’s been too spoiled.* Sean thought to himself, oblivious to the fact that Malysse had now picked up the knife and was holding it behind her back as he approached her—and the door.

Just as Sean opened the door to the dark night outside, he turned around to say goodbye and apologize once more, when...

“Malysse!” He barely had enough time to gasp and jump back when he saw her, eyes full of hate and tears, and her hands raised high above her head, holding the knife. She lunged forward just as Sean jumped back, thrusting the knife downward—unaware that Sean was no longer standing in front of her. Losing her balance in the dazed thrust, and tripping over the threshold of her own door, she stumbled awkwardly onto the ground in front of Sean.

Shocked at what he had just seen, yet concerned at Malysse’s hard fall, he knelt down to help her up. She continued to lay motionless in front of him, her face in the sand. He grabbed her with both arms to turn her over, but the moment he had, he again jumped back in horror. The knife had imbedded itself



deeply into her own chest in the fall, and her glazed eyes were filled with terror at being found the victim of the death she'd planned for Sean.

Sean was wide-eyed. He hardly knew what to think as he stared at her lifeless form. Up until the night before he had just been a jovial young fellow with silly dreams and a shallow sense of reality. He had never been face to face with such intense evil.

Suddenly Sean heard a woman's cry, only this one was more bitter and hateful than the sorrowful one he'd heard earlier. Then he saw who it was. Ordyna flew towards him, her arms stretched forward as if to strangle him.

Just then another figure appeared, one who Sean now knew as the Goddess of Light. She held her hand in front of Sean and said to Ordyna, "He's mine now. Get you out of here!"

Ordyna put her hands on either side of her head and shrieked fiendishly until she finally disappeared.

Sean looked back at the door where Malysse had been lying. But, strangely enough, she was no longer there. The only movement in the house that he could see through the open door was the wind blowing the sheer curtains and hanging cacti.

He turned to the Goddess of Light who was still standing there.

"Thank you!" he managed to say.

"You made the right choice, Sean," she answered. The sadness he had once seen in her eyes had this time been replaced with a glimmer of hope. "We, the forces of Light, have great need of you in the times to come, as we have need of all those whose eyes have been opened to the spiritual struggle. You must nevermore give in to the Powers of Darkness, ever. Once you give in but a little, it becomes all the more difficult not to take the next step down their path of compromise."

"What is your name?" Sean meekly asked. "I ... I

know you are a Goddess, and a fair one too. But ... but if I could know your name..."

"Ayleen<sup>1</sup>," the vision whispered.

"Ayleen," Sean repeated softly. "So, what must I do next?"

"You are starting over, Sean. All those things have passed now," she explained, speaking of the entire day at Ordyn. "The path of Truth that lies before you will be revealed to you one step at a time."

"Do I leave here?"

"Not just yet. There is someone whom you must see."

"Who? Where can I find them?"

"They will come to you. Keep your eyes open, Sean—open to the Truth, open to the Light!"

"I will," Sean said, feeling comfort in the warmth and soft glow that Ayleen's aura provided him with.

---

<sup>1</sup>Ayleen: pronounced "ai-leen"

The words of light as seeds lay  
In dark places. From there shall they grow.  
From there shall light spring forth when Darkness knows it not,  
And Darkness overcome shall be.

-14 -

## THE GENTLE SHADOW

Ayleen and her aura disappeared. Sean found himself out in the cold of the night, with only the lightweight clothes that Malysse had gotten for him covering his near-frozen body. He suddenly wished he had kept his own garments, but knew it would be futile to search for them now.

“I hope they come to me soon, this person,” Sean said between chattering teeth. “Much longer and I’ll faint.”

Sean decided to start walking, just to keep his body warm. He did not have to walk long before he was in the center of the city. It looked deserted, like a ghost town. He went to sit against the wall of the open theater that he had been in earlier.

*At least this has a little shelter over it*, he thought to himself. Exhausted and cold, Sean soon fell asleep. Every now and then he’d wake up and look around, mostly to see if dawn had come. It hadn’t.

Each time he’d also see the shadow of a figure against the walls of the other small buildings that

surrounded the theater. It was the figure of a woman, though he never saw the woman herself, only her shadow—of all the strange things, running back and forth. Perhaps she was fetching things, or seeking something. He wasn't sure. Or perhaps, the simplest of all things to think, he was having a strange dream. That was the easiest thing to believe, and he could hardly be blamed for having such strange dreams, considering the awful night he'd had.

He might have been scared to sleep alone in the middle of the city had he stopped to think that Malysse couldn't possibly have been the only one who wanted him dead. Or had he thought further, he might have been suspicious of the fact that her body had disappeared from the door after she died—and no dead body picks itself up, no matter how long it's lain there. But no such thoughts came to him. Rather, the events of that night had all had one thing in common—their unusual strangeness. That seemed to tie them all together and make them singly acceptable. Under normal circumstances, crime did not exist in this world—or if it did, it was limited merely to matters of deception, but never violence. Thus, Sean reasoned (even after all that had befallen him) that there was no reason to fear for his safety.

Besides, then there was this shadow. It made him feel warm whenever it passed him—warm and peaceful. Perhaps that was why he woke up so much—it scurried back and forth, bringing warmth and then taking the warmth with it. Ah, never mind all that now. He was happy to be alive and sleeping under some sort of shelter.

The modest dawn finally agreed to show its lovely face, and Sean was debating whether or not to open his eyes when darkness covered his face again. Poor Sean—he felt so confused.

*No, that couldn't be. It can be dark and then get darker, but nature does not lend itself to getting light*

*and then suddenly dark. ... Unless ...* A gentle touch proved his not-yet-thought-out feelings to be true.

He opened his eyes and saw a lady bending over him, pulling his dark hair out of his face and stroking his head. The curious but comforting warmth he felt in her shadow reminded him of his visions in the night. She gasped a little when her eyes met with his. She looked like she was in her prime, though her face was weary and worn, like she hadn't slept for half a lifetime perhaps—or if she had, her sleep had been restless. More realistically, though, she looked like she'd suffered many disappointments and heartaches.

"I'm Sean," he said politely.

The lady cracked a half-smile and then turned to her meager supply of water that she had in some beast-skin on a strap around her shoulder. The beast-skin was just a cover, though, to protect the glass-like container that actually held the water.

She poured some water over a cloth and then gave the rest to him to drink. Once he had finished drinking, she took the cloth and wiped the sand off of his face.

"Thank you," Sean smiled.

Again came the lady's feeble half-smile.

Once she had finished wiping his face and offering him one more drink, she took her water and her cloth, put it in the small satchel she carried, and then got up to go.

"Good-bye," he said, rolling over on to his stomach so that he could look at her before she left.

She cast a puzzled look over her shoulder, and then cocked her head as if to tell him to come along.

"Me?" Sean whispered.

She nodded, so he scrambled up and walked to where she was. She put her finger to her mouth, and he understood that he was meant to be quiet.

*She sure doesn't talk much!* Sean thought to

himself, recalling that she hadn't said one word the whole time she'd been with him.

Obediently and quietly he followed her through the city, taking all sorts of turns, going down little alleyways and paths that made him wonder whether this village was perhaps larger than it had at first glance appeared to be. It was nothing short of intriguing for Sean.

She finally led him through a small passageway at the edge of the city, at the end of which was a little room. She pulled a tiny key from her satchel, and let Sean into the dimly-lit room. She must have sensed he was about to ask something or make some sort of exclamation, so she looked at him and put her finger against her mouth once more.

*One thing I've gotten straight—she doesn't like much conversation*, Sean thought, trying to assure his own sanity by conversing with himself during these mysterious happenings.

Once she had locked the door, she motioned for Sean to come over to a desk in the corner of the room. She lit a tall candle that sat at the corner of the desk closest to the wall, and its tiny rays lit up the room a good deal. It was a small room, after all. It was just big enough to have a desk, a stool and a bed. The cupboards were built into the stone walls, a common architectural design for most houses. There was a door that began just where the bed ended; Sean supposed it was a bathroom.

Still full of curiosity and its accompanying list of questions, yet knowing that this lady obviously did not like to talk much, Sean managed to catch her gaze and beam a friendly smile her way.

She smiled back—a full smile this time—and shook her head in an I-know-this-silence-must-be-killing-you-poor-boy way, before she turned to a stack of papers that she began flipping through.

It was almost time for her to speak; Sean could

sense it. And he was right. The lady motioned to Sean that he could sit on the bed, which was only about a foot away from the desk, and she pushed the stool she was sitting on back against the wall for something to lean against. She sighed, taking off the headdress that had covered her reddish hair.

Since, so far, conversation seemed to be out of the question as far as a way to amuse oneself, Sean busied himself with silly little observations—the crooked bedspread, the large cactus in the corner that was blocking the sunlight coming through the only small window, how this lady of such small stature ever managed to get herself such a tall stool which could not afford her the luxury of sitting on a chair with her feet on the ground, and so on.

So absorbed was he in these observations that he nearly jumped when he finally heard her speak.

"Tell me again, boy, what is your name?"

"Sean."

"Sean..." she repeated, perhaps to confirm that she was pronouncing this unfamiliar name right.

He nodded and wondered if he dared ask her name, since she hadn't offered it.

"You must be wondering what my name is."

Sean nodded, a little surprised that she had guessed his thoughts as he was thinking them.

"My name is Lauryn."

"Lauryn?"

"Yes," she said with a little chuckle. "I used to be the daughter of Father Ordyn. He's..."

"I know," Sean replied, not feeling like being informed again of who was who in Ordyn.

"I say 'used to be' because he disowned me some time ago. At least that's what Merynda told me. You know Merynda too?"

"I've heard of her."

"You're a bright man with ears," she chuckled, knowing that this stranger could not have been here

long at all, yet he already knew of the political figures that normally only the people of each individual village were aware of—traveling still being a most uncommon occupation among ordinary Wylders. “You must tell me some time how long you’ve been here and whatever brought you here. For I can tell you are not from this city.”

“That shouldn’t take too long—I’ve been here only a day,” Sean answered. “But what about you?”

“Mine is a long, long story that I won’t tell you all of now,” Lauryn continued, “but Merynda is my father’s second wife. She is just about my age, though. One day Father was displeased with me, and then Merynda told me he had disowned me.”

“Perhaps I shouldn’t ask, but whatever for?”

“For defying and attempting to expose their dark schemes.”

Sean grew still and serious. Someone else knew about the evil that was festering in this town—and in greater detail!

“You might be disappointed—anyone probably would be who knows—that it seems that I have done nothing to expose them.”

Sean shook his head.

“I have tried. I have done the little I could. I think if I had stayed with them...” she wiped a tear from her eye and smiled graciously. “I think if I had stayed with them, things would have been much better for me.”

“Stayed with your Father and Merynda?”

“No, not them!”

“Who?”

“You wouldn’t know them.”

“Perhaps I might.”

“Never mind that, Sean. It was not meant to be. I should forget that. Now tell me your story, short though it may be, for I sense there is some reason for how you came to be here.”

“I come from another city...” Sean began, and slowly unfolded the happenings of the past two days to Lauryn. He didn’t know why he was telling such a woeful tale as the last two days had been, but he felt almost as if he was supposed to.

Lauryn didn’t look shocked or astonished. She just listened, and wept.

“My stepsister, Malysse. How very sad! I wanted so much for her to defy her mother and the system that has unwittingly been imposed upon our people, and do something to change it. You know, she used to be a bright and cheerful girl, until just recently when she became strangely superficial and so materialistic. Her mother influenced her greatly! Though I’m sad for her death, somehow it relieves me to know that now she won’t be able to get into too much more evil—though what she did last night was nothing short of that. She is already accountable enough, but what a price Merynda and my father will have to pay one day!”

“What do you mean?”

“My father and Merynda, like the rest of us Wylders, have never killed anyone like Malysse tried to do, but oh, the lives they’ve ruined, the hearts they’ve deceived and emptied of all goodness with their darkened ways! But ... it is sad how the people of Wylder are so accepting of all things. They walk around as if their heads are empty. They were taught to be a peace-loving people; that’s what they’ve grown up with all their lives. But peace-loving is one thing, and complacent is another. Now evil enters the scene, and they can’t even see it, much less know how to react.”

She stopped for a moment, wiping the tears that were beginning to fill her eyes, and meditating on the thoughts that had provoked her words.

“It’s very sad. But now, look at me. I haven’t done much. There is not a lot I can do. The city itself is so

highly organized, and I am considered an outcast. There is no way I can repair the damage. So I spend most of my time in here, writing.”

“Writing what?”

“The story of my life, the history of this city as I have seen it—the developments within the walls of those who rule it. And...”

“And, what else?” Sean, asked, his curiosity aroused by her hesitancy to tell him the rest of it.

“Have you ever heard of such a thing as spirit writing?”

“I have heard of the spirits, and met my share of them,” Sean said with a sigh. “And I have a friend—she has read me some things from ancient writings—writings from the Old World. I vaguely recall hearing something about spirit writing, though I can’t exactly remember what it is.”

“It is, to the best of my knowledge, or at least in my experience, the foresight of things to come, or the insight into things hidden from others whose eyes and hearts are only attuned to the things they can see and feel.”

“And these are written down?”

“Yes. I take note of them—these feelings, visions and premonitions—as they come to me.”

“Does this have anything to do with what I saw in the night? Your shadow scurrying back and forth whilst I slept under the shelter. I thought I was dreaming.”

Lauryn looked slightly alarmed.

“What is it? Please forgive my rudeness; I meant no harm by it,” Sean quickly assured her, after seeing the look his question had brought upon her.

After a moment’s silence, Lauryn said, “Sean, I trust you with this because I believe that, after what you have seen and experienced in these last two days, you would never tell anyone. The evil that you saw in Malysse came from the same forces that seek to keep

the people of Ordyn under their subjection. It is as if the people sit in darkness, and this darkness is only fostered by their ignorance of the very real but unseen forces that are at work around them at every moment of their days and nights. Those like Merynda seek to keep them in that ignorance, lest the Light of the Truth shine into their souls, and cause them to reject the influence of Darkness.”

Sean was beginning to understand, if ever so slowly, that there was indeed more to his life—and to all he had seen in Ordyn—than met the eye. He thought again of Apocalyne, and how she always spoke mysterious sayings about Light and Truth. He earnestly longed to understand, all the more so for the very real and close encounter he had had with the force of Darkness. As he listened and thought, Lauryn continued her explanation of what Sean had seen the night before.

“The visions and premonitions—indeed, the very words that come to me, and which I write down—are but humble manifestations of the Light, seeking to pierce through the people’s clouded minds and illumine them to the truth of what is really happening. And so, at night, while Ordyn lies under its blanket of sleep, I deliver such writings to others in the city who desire to know. It is very dangerous for me, but even more so for them. I am an outcast, and it satisfies my father and Merynda that I keep to myself, but if they were to ever hear of this, I cannot imagine what evil they would unleash on this city to counteract the influence of these writings. But it is not yet time. That time will undoubtedly be soon, but it is not yet.”

“What is the time now, Lauryn?”

Lauryn closed her eyes for a moment. “It is the hour of twilight. There are yet darker hours to come, and then, as with all days and nights, it will be followed by the dawn to come. But we have just

entered the hour of twilight. The days and numbers of days or years is not known—only the symbolism of that twilight of the evening has been revealed. Twilight slowly creeps upon us each evening, and so it has been with this twilight of our world. As darkness falls, the eyes will be closed, and few will know what lurks in these shadows of Darkness as the world sleeps around them. Yet there are still some things that must happen before night falls completely.”

And then she stopped. But only for a moment. It was as if something had suddenly been revealed to her.

“Sean,” she continued, looking directly at him, “these things ... they have something to do with you—with your city. And even now the time has come, and they are happening!”

Snapping out of her reverie, Lauryn leaned towards Sean, still sitting on that high stool with her feet still barely touching the ground. It was almost symbolic of how her spiritual feet were just barely on the ground. “Where did you say you came from?”

“Kryppa.”

Lauryn gasped and put her hands on her face.

“That ... that is the very city to where I took these friends of mine, a long, long time ago. It is a city of light and goodness, as if it has always been sheltered from the dark influences that have hung over Ordyn for a long time.”

“It has?” Sean pondered. It was true that he had come across some most unusual encounters within this city, but by all other appearances, it had not seemed too different to him from the home he had left behind.

“You spoke of writings from the Old World, and of a girl who read them. What is her name?”

“Apocalyne,” Sean answered somewhat nonchalantly. It seemed but a trivial question.

It was hardly trivial to Lauryn, however, who

suddenly fell silent, and seemed in most distant thought. It was only after a long silence, which Sean somehow knew he was not to break, that she spoke again.

“I have heard this name spoken in my visions—the name Apocalyna. It is close enough. There are things happening to her now, Sean. Some beautiful things, some frightening things. She will be one lone star this twilight, though as the night deepens, more shall come to be seen. But what a fearsome thing it shall be to be alone at that hour. You must take me to her, Sean, and to your village.”



The hour of day, the hour of night,  
The passing sun and moons,  
The time will tell, in days, in years  
The ages of man.  
The seasons of time and eternity.

- 15 -  
**TWILIGHT  
AND THE CELESTIAL ZONE**

Apocalyne hadn't seen Sean for almost three days, and she was worried. She burst into her home early in the afternoon.

"Where have you been, Apocalyne?" Eryn asked.

"Looking for Sean."

"Still? It is an odd thing that he's just disappeared for no reason, and without saying anything."

"I hope he's all right," Apocalyne said, putting some strands of hair behind her ear, something she always did when she was nervous.

"Why are you so worried about Sean? You don't normally see him every day."

"I just had this dream—a dream that he was walking alone, and that someone was lurking in the rocks that were along the path with a knife. They were going to kill him."

"Apocalyne! How could you say such things? No one would dream of something so evil."



“I know. I never would have either. I mean, I would never have thought up such a thing. I don’t know what happened after that. That was all I saw in the dream,” Apocalypse said haltingly, almost frightened by her own words.

As Eryn looked at her daughter, it struck her how Apocalypse looked so much more like a grown woman the last few days. She wondered if the time was indeed nigh for her to discover and fulfill her mission.

Their conversation having ended, Apocalypse slowly walked to her room and closed the door behind her. Something did not feel right and she did not know what it was, and that only accentuated the feeling of uneasiness.



Apocalypse fell asleep early that evening. It was just as well. She would need the rest, for there was much ahead of her that night. When Jerol and Eryn were fast asleep, the cold desert night became filled with a wind that howled more fiercely than normal. The sheer curtains were almost torn from their hooks, blown forcefully by the severe storm that raged outside. Apocalypse, however, slept soundly through the first part of the storm.

Then she awoke with a start. Propping herself up on her elbows, she looked around. It was that moaning cry again. Only this time it didn’t seem to fill the entire sky as it had the times before. It seemed as though it was coming from a particular direction.

Undaunted by the freezing cold and the fierce wind outside, Apocalypse got up and began walking towards the door. It was as if she was being drawn by an incredible force, and she trusted it completely.

She opened the door, and strangely enough, the wind didn’t burst into the house, smashing everything in its way, as reality would suggest. It passed right around the door and continued undeterred on its destructive path. Apocalypse did not even question

this strange occurrence. Her eyes were fixed ahead—upon what, she did not know, but she knew they were directed at something that would be made clear to her in time. That was fine. What needed to get her to the revelation was the faith that it existed.

She stepped out the door, barefooted, dressed only in slight night apparel. The wind blew her wild chestnut hair, but refused to chill her body. She kept walking straight ahead until she found herself at the edge of the village. She looked around, but the force that had drawn her was straight ahead. Obediently, she took step after step, determined to find out what the purpose of this call might be.

When the ranges of rock and dunes were becoming larger to her sight, she knew that she was nearing her destination. It was somewhere near the Circle—the spiritual haven where the departed spirits were said to rest. And there, at the foot of the first dune, she stopped.

The wailing sound stopped also, and she heard laughter and partying—not the drunken kind, but the merry and joy-filled kind, the kind that warms your heart and comforts your spirit. Strange as it might have been, a being appeared at her side and extended its hand. I say “its,” because Apocalypse could not tell for certain if it was a human Wylder or an alien, and of those two, if it was male or female.

Apocalypse reached out and joined hands with the very small being with a very large aura. The being’s head was covered by a helmet made of material she had never seen before, but which appeared to be some unusual, smooth opaque gem or stone. The only part of its face that was revealed was its eyes. They were beautiful crystal eyes—shaped like a human’s, only three or four times as large, and full of expression.

The being, who was three or four feet tall, had a sort of armor on, which Apocalypse did not recognize as armor, since there was no such thing on the planet

of Wylder. There was a breastplate of sorts, and the same material covered the arms and hands. After the breastplate, Apocalyne looked down and saw a long skirt, so she took it that this being was female. A cape began at the nape of this unusual being's neck, flowing behind its body. Apocalyne could detect no feet, but imagined it must have some sort of device that enabled it to move.

*I wonder where we are going?* Apocalyne thought, looking straight ahead as they walked.

*To the Celestial Zone,* came the reply in her mind.

Apocalyne looked at the being, puzzled at how it transmitted the answer into her mind though it had not uttered a word.

*Look straight ahead.*

Apocalyne obediently turned her face straight ahead.

*I am one of many Celestynes in what you call "The Circle," but what we know as the Celestial Zone. We make the contact between our unseen world and certain individuals of your seen world—individuals that we choose.*

*I am honored,* Apocalyne thought, directing her thought to the being. There was no facial indication or gesture to show that the being had expressed any satisfaction with her reply, but Apocalyne knew it was pleased.

It seemed like they had been walking forever, though no proof of that was noticeable in the progression of night. It was just as black as it was when she had first awoken, with just as many stars to dot the deep night. Apocalyne looked back. They had crossed three ridges of the Great Dunes and were standing on a fourth. There were three more visible after that.

At the top of the fourth dune, the being stopped.

*Wait here,* came the telepathic order, and the being began to walk on, fading and shrinking steadily as

she went.

"Apocalyne!" a voice called out.

Apocalyne looked out.

"Child, you cannot see me with your eyes. Close your eyes and open your heart. Then I will open the eyes of your heart."

Apocalyne closed her eyes. She saw a tiny flicker of light appear in the blackness. Slowly it grew and grew, until it had an obvious shape. It was a similar being to the one who had led her thus far, only much taller, wearing only a long flowing garment and veil, with a sword hanging in a sheath. Without the armor, Apocalyne was able to make more distinct observations. Then once the aura of light that surrounded—and almost veiled—the being's form, faded slightly, all was clear.

The eyes were the same, and so was the body—similar to the human build of the Wylders, only everything was either very miniature and unrealistically thin and slight, or, in a few features, larger than normal. The head, for example, was very large in comparison to the body, with enormous, yet beautiful round eyes, sparkling like a gem of some sort, and tiny nose and lips. The skin was white and pale, almost translucent (though it did not seem to reveal any of the body's internal functions), and this one's eyes looked as though the pupils were made of sapphire. The thick white hair was braided and brought over the being's shoulder, reaching down to her shins. Apocalyne could tell this being was female.

Once the being had given enough time for Apocalyne to study her—and had watched her with an undetected amusement as she did so—the aura of light intensified once again. Though Apocalyne's eyes remained closed, her consciousness now found itself standing in front of this being, as if they had both been transported into a different time and place altogether—one where the world around them had

receded, leaving only the two of them standing in what Apocalyne imagined to be the Celestial Zone her first guide had spoken of.

“I am Kristyana<sup>1</sup>,” the being began, “a Celestyne Guard of Truth. You have up till now known of two things—the people and forces of Light, and the people and forces of Darkness, the latter mostly concentrated in Ordyn, and in the legendary pit you Wylders are afraid of going near—for good reason.

“Then there are the masses—the undecided, the unaware, the unperceiving—and it is these people that the next Celestyne will speak to you about. But I precede him. I am here to define those things that you believe, the precepts that have been imparted to you by your parents, and the things you have adopted as beliefs from listening to the voices that speak to your heart. Those things that you have read and seen and thought about, believe—and we will always be with you. Let this Truth sink deeply into every fiber of your being, and it will emanate from your spirit. To give anything to others, you must have these things within you.

“Strengthen yourself, Apocalyne. Study the writings of the early Tylers, the ancient sayings of the Celestynes. Yes, they were given by us to your people long ago, and the truths and mysteries contained within them hold the key to overcoming the forces of Darkness that are broadening their influence over all the inhabited plains of the Wylder people. Most important of all shall be an intense love and yearning for the Truth, which you have, and a desire to please the Spirit of Light.”

Apocalyne wasn't disturbed by the commanding voice that spoke to her. She drank in the meaning, which was what was important. It was as if this was happening because of all the little choices she had

made during her life to pursue the Truth in its rawest form—choices that had begun even as a little girl, sitting upon her father's knee and listening to the tales and words he told her.

The being continued speaking. “My presence will shortly be followed by another Celestyne Guard named Apostle. Listen to him as you have to me. Anytime you grow weary of the pure Truth that is being spoken, the mere thought will carry you back to the comfort of your bed—that the vision might return when you are again ready, though you will only remember it as a vague dream. But if you choose to stay, there are things that must be shown you, so that you might fully understand the mission for which we have been preparing you, even all this time.”

Apocalyne bowed her head reverently. “I am in love with Truth—and no matter what rough paths it makes me tread, I will tread those paths with Truth as my guide. Fear not, Kristyana, I won't leave here. I want it all!”

Kristyana drew near, and cupped her hands around Apocalyne's face. “If you are in love with Truth, then this will be your honeymoon!” When Apocalyne looked up, it was not Kristyana's face she saw, but that of a male Celestyne.

*Apostle?* her thoughts questioned within herself.

The being nodded, as if even within this realm of her inner consciousness, he could read the thoughts she was thinking. He was of the same stature as Kristyana—slight, yet tall. His head was hairless. He had a sword in a sheath, as Kristyana did, and a shield, which Apocalyne did not know as such. Still, no feet could be seen as yet. But oh, yes, there they finally were! Feet that were maybe five or six inches long, covered in boots made of the same material as the shield and the first Celestyne being's armor were made from.

“What Truth do you have to reveal to me?” Apo-

---

<sup>1</sup>Kristyana: pronounced “christy-ahna”

calyne asked after several moments.

“All that Kristyana revealed to you, you must in turn reveal to others,” Apostle answered. “These spiritual luxuries are not meant to be kept to oneself. They are meant to be spread abroad—to the unperceiving masses—those who scarcely know the meaning of the word ‘spiritual,’ and they must be taught. You, Apocalyne, must teach them. And those who love the Truth most will in turn teach others. There will be young and old, Wylders of all remaining generations that exist on this world, who will be nearly as in love with the Truth as you are. But you must love it most, for it will bring you to your destiny.”

“But what is my destiny?” Apocalyne asked.

“To proclaim the Truth to your neighbors, and to all those with whom you shall speak. Fear not, for the Celestyne Guard will be always before you, and behind you, speaking to you, guiding you, and guarding your life in this twilight hour of your planet’s history.”

“The twilight hour?” Apocalyne repeated.

Apostle nodded and slowly faded. The aura of light, however, stayed, and in its place came another woman Celestyne figure.

“Who are you?” Apocalyne asked.

“I am Charity, the Guardian of Limitless Love,” she replied.

Apocalyne looked puzzled. Perhaps she wondered why she was being visited by an emissary of Limitless Love; it didn’t seem to have anything to do with her mission as it had been unfolded to her thus far. But Charity read her thoughts and soon all became clear.

“There will be many that you will reach out to in this twilight hour. The masses are made up of individuals as confused and frightened as you are, yet without hope, without answers, without Truth. It is, as Apostle declared, your mission to guide them to it. And I must entreat you to have no boundaries.

You must be our representative, Apocalyne. You represent Kristyana when you stand for the Truth. You represent Apostle when you spread these tidings to all around you. You must represent me by manifesting limitless love in the carrying out of all these tasks, and of taking these unguided ones into your heart, that you might be filled with an undying concern to love them, and bring them to a knowledge of the Truth. In all that you will be called upon to do, we shall be with you to help you, and show you the way.”

“How will I know what it is I must do?”

“I will whisper it to you,” replied Charity, as she slowly started turning away to leave.

“Oh, but Charity! Wait!”

“Some things we cannot know right away, lest the burden of complete Truth become too heavy to bear and too overwhelming to know. But even this is part of your mission, and with time all will be made clear. Let nothing stop you—neither mockery or scoffing, nor personal hesitation—nothing. Let nothing stop you from fulfilling your mission. Four more Celestynes will visit you, but not at this time. This is only the twilight hour. When night falls on your world, our Light will need to burn more brightly in you; then you will receive strength and comfort from another Celestyne. And when the darkest hour comes, which precedes the dawn, it is only then that the last three Celestynes will come to you, all in their own turn and time as you shall need them.”

The aura of light seemed to burn all too brightly for a second, and Apocalyne closed her eyes to shield them. When she opened them, she found herself safely within the four walls of her room. The night had passed.

Speak forth the words heard in the night,  
Sing forth the songs of yore,  
The tales of love, the tales of woe-  
Though less, yet still of more

- 16 -

## THE WITNESS

Apocalyne was still lying in her bed, mesmerized as she reviewed the events of the last night in her mind over and over again. She could not tell whether she had ever actually left her room during the entire experience, yet there was no doubt in her mind that all that she had seen and witnessed was real. She was jolted out of her reverie by a distant pounding that she soon realized came from the front door. She sat up slowly, stretched and yawned.

*Why doesn't Father or Mother answer the door? They always do when I'm so late in rising. Where could they be?*

As she yawned, she gave her mouth a few gentle taps with her palm and then jumped up to answer the door.

Her eyes still sleepy and her mind still foggy, it took a few seconds for the hazy figures in front of her to register in her brain.

"Sean!" she burst out. "I've been looking for you everywhere!"

"In your dreams, Apocalypse?" he laughed in his good-humored way. "You look like you just woke up."

Apocalypse cracked a feeble smile—a sign she was still as sleepy as she looked—and then looked over at Lauryn.

"This is..." Sean began.

"I'm Lauryn."

"Hello, Lauryn. Oh, come in! I'm so sorry. I'm afraid Sean's right about the sleepy part. I had quite some strange night last night."

Sean and Lauryn looked at each other. Sean remembered what Lauryn had said the evening before about Apocalypse: *Some things are happening to her right now—some beautiful things, some frightening things.* It looked like Lauryn had been right!

After a few moments of awkward silence, Apocalypse mumbled, "I'm sorry it took me so long to answer the door. Usually Father and Mother are here. They must have gone to the market early today."

At that same moment Apocalypse turned towards the door. There stood Jerol and Eryn. Lauryn followed Apocalypse's gaze and suddenly met the eyes of her two old friends—not friends in that they had known each other for so long, but that their spirits had bonded in the short amount of time they spent together those many years ago.

"Jerol and Eryn?" she said in disbelief.

"Lauryn?" came their surprised response.

When reality had confirmed itself, the three rushed forward and embraced each other. That gave Sean and Apocalypse a moment alone, which they also appreciated, no doubt.

"Sean, I was so worried for you! After you had left, I almost felt sure that something dreadful was going to happen and I wouldn't see you again!"

Sean looked at her, puzzled, wondering if this girl he had become reacquainted with a few months ago was indeed going to be the appointed prophetess of

their day, and was already cultivating her psychic abilities. There was no way she could have known what had happened to him in those two fateful days.

"What do you mean?" he asked, wanting a little more proof to back up not only the "prophetess for the age" statement Apocalypse had made so long ago, but also the words Lauryn had spoken of her.

Looking around to make sure the others wouldn't hear them, Apocalypse whispered, "I kept having these dreams. You were walking near some rocks, and it was the evening or twilight hour. A shadow was lurking in the rocks, with a knife! It looked as though someone was trying to do away with your life!" For a moment she looked as fearful as she must have felt when having those dreams, but then a look of relief swept across her face. "But I'm so happy you're here now, Sean!" she said, throwing her arms around him.

Sean was totally taken aback at what had been revealed to Apocalypse. He awkwardly returned the affection that he still wasn't used to receiving from Apocalypse.

"Apocalypse?"

"Yes?" Apocalypse broke away from his grasp so she could look into his eyes. Sean always felt awkward looking into people's eyes, so he quickly diverted his gaze in the direction of the nearest window.

"You said you had 'quite some strange night' last night. Could you tell me what happened?"

"Why?"

Looking over at Lauryn, who was busy talking to Jerol and Eryn, he answered, "I'm just interested."

"Does it have anything to do with her? Who is she anyway?" Apocalypse asked, noticing that he was looking at Lauryn.

"I'm not entirely sure, but it looks like she knows your parents quite well. She ... she's kind of like you, Apocalypse, talking about truth and light and all. I ... I saw some strange things in Ordyn," Sean looked

down at the ground, “but she somehow made some sense out of them all.”

Apocalyne’s eyes registered her interest when he mentioned the city of Ordyn, but another question was on her mind. “So, what does she have to do with your interest in my eventful night last night?”

“She spoke of having heard your name whispered to her in some kind of visions or something—at least, it was close enough, she said. Apocalyna, yes, that’s what it was. Anyway, she knew something about you. It was like she could feel something was happening to you, though she didn’t know who you were, or even where you were.”

Ignoring the last sentence, and only remembering the “she knew something about you” part, Apocalyne said, “I want to talk to her. I have so many questions.” Apocalyne spoke slowly and deliberately, as if she’d temporarily been transported into a different realm.

Sean took hold of her. “Not now, Apocalyne. Let her get reacquainted with your parents first.”

“You’re right, Sean.”

“Now, tell me about your night.”

“I went to the Great Dunes.”

“You what? There is no way you could have walked there and been back here this morning.”

“But that’s what I did.”

Sean was skeptical. However, he did not want to risk missing what could still be an interesting story. “All right. I’ll accept that for now. So, what did you do there?”

Apocalyne’s eyes took on a faraway look as she began to tell the story of her venture into the Celestial Zone. Sean was transfixed. It wasn’t just how she recounted the events, but that she did so with such infinite detail, as if she was reliving the entire experience—and most of all, as if she believed all that was told her with such intensity. The rays that shone down from a little skylight above where she was

standing cast a glow around her that seemed to shout that these things she was saying were true, and not something she could have ever made up.

Normally Sean would have tried to find holes in the story, or mocked Apocalyne for a pretense of spirituality. But not this time. Sean was beginning to believe.

By the time Apocalyne was finished, the three adults stood behind Sean. They, too, had been listening. Tears filled the eyes of Jerol, Eryn and Lauryn. Jerol and Eryn had witnessed their daughter step onto the threshold of her mission, and Lauryn had seen the fulfillment of her own visions.

It took some time before everyone came back to reality. For a few moments it seemed as though everyone had been transported into the Celestial Zone with Apocalyne, and no one wanted to come back. But they had to. After all, there was the doing of the messages given on the dunes. And they were going to be the first to join Apocalyne in the enacting of them.

They gathered around the table for lunch. “Let us ask the Spirit of Light’s blessing on our food,” Eryn suggested, her eyes still misty from Apocalyne’s testimony.

Everyone nodded and Eryn prayed, “Thank You, dear Spirit Father, for how You have led us through many dark nights and have always given us a glimmer of hope and faith to go by. As we set foot into this twilight hour, may You not only be with us—for that is always a certainty—but may we be ever with You in all our doing. And we ask Your blessing also on this humble meal.”

It was a quiet meal for the most part. There was no light chatter to be had. Everyone was deep in thought.

Sean wondered how he had become involved with such an unwylderlike mission. Lauryn silently thanked the same Spirit of Light for bringing her all

this way, and reuniting her with these old friends after so many years. Jerol and Eryn wondered what their place in all this was, and how much longer they would live—indeed, if they would ever see the fulfillment of their daughter's mission.



Apocalyne was out hanging their simple tunics that her mother had just washed when she saw a figure approaching. She turned slowly to see who it was, and Lauryn pulled aside one of the tunics to show her face.

“Lauryn,” Apocalyne acknowledged.

“Dear Apocalyne, it is so wonderful to see you at last!”

“Did you know of me before?”

Lauryn nodded.

“How? Did my father and mother tell you?”

“I haven't seen your father and mother for over twenty years—and I knew your name before I knew that my old friends were your parents, though had I taken the time to think about it, I might have easily guessed.”

“Then how did you know of me?”

“I heard whispers, many years ago. When my father—that is, Father Ordyn—disowned me, I lay many nights in my small room, crying. I did not know what I was to do with my life, and if there was any hope for our planet. You have seen how things have grown worse and worse, have you not?”

“I have seen visions of things I dare not speak of. But here in our village...”

“Yes, your village is blessed. It is hallowed about by a certain Light and peace. But one day, even this place will be threatened by the same Darkness that now seeks to envelop our people.”

As Apocalyne listened, her memory was suddenly jogged at something that had been on her mind for some time. She had not thought of it at the time she

visited the Celestynes, but in light of all she had seen and heard in the past days, she wondered if perhaps Lauryn would be able to shed some light on it. “The Planetyrs speak of a time of great calamity that will come upon our world—strange phenomena such as we've never known. They said they cannot tell when it will happen, only that it will—and that there will be much darkness.”

“Ah, but that will only be the natural manifestation, Apocalyne. The time to come is going to be much more dreadful in the realm of the spirit!”

“How do you know?”

“Apocalyne, I told you. It was the whispers. When I lay those many days in my room, crying, destitute, I heard voices—voices about our history, voices about this present day, and voices about our future.”

“Then when will these things happen?”

“I don't know. You, however, will be the chosen Tyler of our day, child, the forth-teller of all that is to come. You must follow the instructions you have been given by the Celestyne angels, and then I am sure that they will show you more. We also must spread these truths to all whom we can. Sean and I can help, and I'm sure your mother and father will help.”

“For a time, perhaps. But I know that they will not be with us much longer.”

“Did you learn of this while in the Celestial Zone?” Lauryn's face registered her concern.

“No. But I can feel it. I can feel it as strongly as I feel the desert wind at night, rushing through the open windows. The feelings and premonitions are always there. I don't understand why more people can't feel them. They just need to have an open window—an open heart.”

“And we must give them the chance—and the answer.”

“Yes.” Putting the now empty laundry basket down, Apocalyne added, “Come to the house. I will call my



father and mother and Sean. We must discuss a way to spread these Celestial tidings of Truth to as many as we can before this day of Darkness overwhelms us all.”

Soon the five of them were sitting around the supper table.

“But Apocalyne, how will we do this?” Jerol asked. “There is no speedy means of communication here. Everyone keeps mostly to themselves. I don’t oppose this at all; I am simply curious.”

“I don’t know how we are meant to spread these tidings, but I do know that whatever plan we are led to follow, the Spirit will help us.”

Sean spoke up, “There don’t seem to be many other options besides going to these towns and telling the people. From what I have heard, it would appear that most towns have city squares for their marketplaces. Even if there is no scheduled speech or announcement—which, if other towns are like ours, there would hardly ever be anyway—there are always people buying and selling, and any unusual occurrence would quickly spread through the city like the desert wind at night, leaving nothing secret. Whatever is spoken you can be sure will be repeated.”

“We can also write,” Lauryn was quick to suggest. “That is how I did what I could in Ordyn, at least. That way, the message can stay with the people, and likely be spread further than even word of mouth could take it. We can collect paper. I’m sure Arthis would know where we could find such supplies. In fact, Arthis can help us! I’m sure he would be more than happy to. That is, if his health still permits. He could at least write for us!”

“Yes,” Jerol added. “If we wrote these things onto pamphlets, we could put them beneath as many doors as we can get to in each town. Then we can post a large one in each village square, as well as proclaim the message by word of mouth!”

Now they were getting excited.

“We could split up into teams,” Apocalyne suggested. “That way we could cover more villages in less time. Sean and I could go together!”

“Eryn, would you like to be my partner?” Jerol offered. “It will be like the days of our youth.”

“Of course, Jerol.”

“Then Arthis and I, if he agrees, could stay here and write out the pamphlets for you to take on your missions,” Lauryn added excitedly. “When you need more, you can return and we will have them prepared for you.”

“This is splendid!” Apocalyne exclaimed, clasping her hands together excitedly. “The Truth will sweep the plains of Wylder like a great sandstorm! They won’t be able to stop it, and we will have performed our mission—or at least part of it!”



They had spent a week planning which towns to start with, consulting maps they acquired from traveling merchants, the only ones possessing such items, as few other Wylders ever needed them. The two teams readied their small amounts of supplies, hired several wylderbeasts to travel on, and wrote messages of Truth on as many pieces of paper as they could come by in time for this first venture. The day was now upon them when the teams would set out for their first mission.

Arthis and Lauryn waved as the two teams set off at daybreak. Nothing like this had ever been attempted in the Wylders’ world before—to reach all people with a single message: a message of warning, and a message of hope; a message of impending disaster, and a message of divine deliverance; a message of Truth, and a message of Light!

As they walked on, the words of Charity, the Celestyne of Limitless Love, echoed in Apocalyne’s mind: *In all that you will be called upon to do, we shall*

*be with you to help you, and show you the way.* Soon she found the words whispering from her own lips.

“Huh?” Sean asked, wondering whether he had heard her right, or if she had even been speaking to him.

This was all new to him, the largely shallow individual that he had always been. But the depth of life that lay ahead with his newfound “family” fascinated him. He felt a bit awkward, but he knew he was in good hands. He knew one thing for sure.— He would have no more of those spirits of fear and horror that had shown themselves to him in Ordyn.

The people languish in ignorance. Their minds are turned away.  
 They sit in the streets, beholding every man his brother,  
 And every wife her neighbor.  
 None utters things the eyes cannot see, the ears cannot hear,  
 The hands cannot touch, the mind cannot perceive.

- 17 -

## THE GREAT MISSION

Days had gone by. The nearer towns were not spaced too far apart, and could be swiftly reached, especially with the help of the wylderbeasts who were well adapted to traveling the dusty and rock-marked plains. They were not by nature fast-moving creatures, though they could be if something threatened their safety. But for the most part, like the Wylder people, these beasts seemed content to not exert any undue effort or expend any more energy than was absolutely necessary. But they could carry a person faster and more efficiently than traveling by foot afforded, and thus they had found their own niche among this civilization—at least to the small handful of Wylders that did travel.

And so the two teams would set out each morning for some nearby town, and each evening return to Kryppa to settle down for a good night's rest and prepare for their next day's journey. Lauryn and Arthis would have another pile of leaflets written out by then.

But now, the nearby villages had all been visited. The journeys would become increasingly longer to reach the rest of the villages and their inhabitants. The city of Ordyn, however, was not to be visited just yet. For what reason the Celestynes had given this instruction was not known, but there were plenty of other villages and towns to attend to in the meantime.

Not all of Wylder planet was inhabited. The population was concentrated within a small section of the planet, commonly called the plains of Wylder. After all, they'd only been there for two full generations; there was no need or even desire to expand into the further and unknown regions of the planet just yet. The Circle—which our little group of Children of Light now knew as the Celestial Zone—formed a natural boundary of sorts on one side of the plains. Then there were the Hills of Shadow, or the Dark Hills, on the other side, lying east of the plains and on the other side of No Man's Sand, which sheltered the crater supposedly filled with hideous monsters and beasts. That was the planet's darker quarter, and again a natural boundary into or beyond which no Wylder had ever ventured (at least, that was known).

The two teams would now have to lengthen their journeys to several days before returning to their "base"—Jerol and Eryn's home in Kryppa. It was decided that the four of them—Jerol, Eryn, Apocalyne and Sean—would head north, one team northeast, and one team northwest, and meet at a halfway point after four days to further determine their plans.

They were all excited, but there had been some sacrifices. The sun had treated them harshly, as was evidenced by their reddened skin and bleached hair, which quickly taught them the wisdom of using protective clothes and headcoverings during their long rides. No Wylder save the traders and merchants ever spent so much time out in the sun. Afternoon siestas

were long, sparing everyone from the cruel rays that threatened to shorten one's life if the elements were not respected by making outdoor activities brief or conducting them in the evening.

The travelers were happy souls, nonetheless. A part of the great mission was being accomplished, and they were doing something that no other Wylder had ever done before.

And so Apocalyne and Sean headed north—to the village of Garss, and then on to Rilmur. Jerol and Eryn went past Ordyn to its small neighbors Phel and Lornis, and then on to Kurs, the halfway point where both teams would meet. Carrying sacks over their shoulders, mostly filled with leaflets and a few basic necessities, they went forth with eager expectation. Interesting and enjoyable as their previous expeditions had been, none of them anticipated what was to come on this one.



Beginning their journey long before dawn, Apocalyne and Sean reached the city of Garss by late afternoon—a good deal longer than it had taken them to reach earlier cities. Roads were scarce, and more sparsely marked, but by noting the direction of the sun, and the markings on their maps, they had not found it too difficult to navigate their way across the windswept plains. But now they were exhausted, and in need of shelter before the desert wind attempted to give anyone out in its range some due punishment for past sins. The cold, sandy wind was nasty enough for those indoors.

They decided to go to the city square's market first, to get some food and see what opportunity for shelter might present itself. This could have been rather embarrassing were it not for the fact that Apocalyne and Sean felt honored to be emissaries on such a great mission. No one on this planet ever dreamed of approaching a stranger and asking them for shelter.

This was not because they didn't trust each other, but because everyone was meant to fend for themselves and be upstanding members of their society by making their lives respectable. And asking for shelter from a stranger was certainly not respectable—even more so because travelers, if they were not traders or entertainers (which these obviously were not) were more than often assumed to be outcasts from their own village.

Thankfully, the two young people were oblivious to this embarrassment. They glanced confidently around the marketplace, eyeing it for prospective "hosts" for the night. Sean kept eyeing the pretty women who were walking by picking up foodstuffs for their homes, wondering whether—and sometimes suggesting—one of these women might be the "host." Apocalypse was becoming slightly annoyed at his overt gestures towards them.

"She looks like she might give us a pleasure-filled evening!" Sean said with a sly smile.

"Sean! Our mission!"

"Right. How about that older lady over there..." Sean teased. He felt that Apocalypse was a tad bit sober for his liking today. But he did like her fiery eyes.

"More fruit, young lady?" the old shopkeeper asked Apocalypse. He thought he had finished filling her bag, but since she continued to hold it out, whilst looking in the other direction, he thought he should check.

"Oh, uh, I'm sorry," she smiled, slightly abashed, slapping her forehead gently in a how-could-I-be-so-silly manner.

"It's all right," the old man said softly. "Lots of things happening around here."

"Really?"

"You know, the Planetyrs have been predicting some astrological phenomena for some time now. That's not the fear, though; it's the imbalances that might disturb our peaceful living."

"It's not too far away," Apocalypse said, somewhat absently.

"Yes. It's not close enough for people to worry just yet, the Planetyrs say, but folks are nonetheless a little more frantic because of it."

"I understand."

"Young lady, may I ask what you and your friend are doing here in this city? I've never seen either of you before, and cities are small, so I assume you came to visit."

Apocalypse smiled affirmatively.

"Whatever for? This isn't such an amusing town," he chuckled as he packed some fruit for another customer. Once he had finished he added, "Well, don't bother with my questions. Do you have a place to stay?"

Apocalypse beamed. "Oh no, not yet. We were just going to go and look for somewhere to stay."

"You need not look any further!" The man smiled happily. "I think you've found yourself a host for the evening!"

"Thank you, sir."

"No need to call me sir," he said in a friendly manner. "I'm just an old shopkeeper. But, if I'm sir to you, well that's fine, little lady. And you are...?"

"Apocalypse."

"That is an interesting name. I've heard something similar to that before... But my old brain can't think of it now. Who's your friend?"

Apocalypse turned to Sean, who was still busy looking out for prospective and more beautiful prospects.

"No need to look any further. We've found the perfect one!" she whispered. Sean's eyes lit up at the word "perfect." His face fell a tiny bit when he turned around and saw the old man. Visions of buxom beauties hosting them for the evening faded quickly.

"My name is Sean," he said with a smile, once he'd

recovered.

*Has Apocalyne got taste!* Sean joked within himself. *He's kind enough, though. I suppose we'll manage.*

The old man left his shop and took them down some alleyways and little back streets till finally he reached his humble but well-furnished little home.

"There you are! I'll have to return to my shop now. I'm sure the lady Brina next to my shop is watching it; she always does when I leave. But I should still be on my way so I can earn a few more Grenyrs before the sun sets. Be happy here. Eat whatever you like. The room to the right will be yours. Suppose you don't mind staying on that one bed, do you? I'm sorry. I don't have anything else."

Apocalyne and Sean looked at each other dubiously.

"We'll manage."

"Wonderful, then. I'll see you later on this evening after I close my shop," the old man said as he walked towards the door. Then he stopped as if he had forgotten something, and turned to the both of them.

"I can't believe I haven't told you yet. My name is Terrance. A strange name, I know. It is my name, nonetheless. I must be going. Enjoy yourself. The home is yours for now." He left with a pleasant smile.

"Terrance..." Sean muttered. "He's right. That is a strange name."

"Hmmm, I'd like to see our room."

"It's only a few steps away, why not take a look?" Sean answered, busy gobbling up a few pieces of dried fruit that had been left on the table.

Apocalyne came back to the dining table after a few seconds.

"And how is it?" Sean asked.

"It's cozy."

"Oh! And how's the bed?" Sean asked, raising one eyebrow.

"It's small."

"Small, huh?"

"Don't look at me like that!" Apocalyne laughed.

"Like what?" Sean said, trying his hardest not to laugh too.

"Like you're hesitant about sleeping in the same bed as me!"

By now Sean couldn't hide the big grin he had struggled to keep off his face.

"You're right. I'm a little embarrassed. I always thought of us as friends—by chance, that is. But never sleeping partners!"

She stopped chewing the dried fruits that she had been eating and looked at Sean with a disbelieving look.

"You never thought of sleeping with me?" she taunted.

"Never."

"How disappointing."

"All right. I admit I have ... but not very often." He emphasized the latter part for his pride's sake. "Okay, come on. We still have a mission to fulfill, don't we?" Sean added, breaking the awkward silence—at least it was awkward to him.

"Of course," Apocalyne replied with a friendly smile.

"What should we do?"

"We don't have much time. It's almost dusk, and most people have finished their shopping, I would imagine. So let's take a sack of leaflets and put them on the lampposts throughout the city, and maybe some in the little lamp holders by people's doors."

"All right. We can take my sack of leaflets. Then I suppose you were thinking of getting a good start in the morning at the marketplace?"

"Yes. We'll talk to people in the morning, then there will be the long early afternoon period where we can rest and pray, since everyone will be in their houses. By the late afternoon word should have spread and

more people will come to the city square or marketplace to see us there. Then we'll leave early the next morning for Rilmur, so we can reach it before noon, and finish our mission there before heading for our meeting point at Kurs."

"Good reasoning, Apocalyne."

Sean smiled. He was starting to become attached to this new way of life. Thinking of his old one disgusted him, so he preferred not to dwell on it. As Eryn had once told Apocalyne, it takes an awful lot to get through to some individuals, and Sean was indeed one of those people. But once the change is made, it can often be most profound, as it was in Sean's case. The experience at Ordyn had deepened him a great deal. He now valued life much more, and wanted to do his best to preserve his and others'. And though he did not yet understand everything fully, this was the best way he knew to accomplish that purpose.

They left a note on the door, letting Terrance know that if he returned before they did, they planned to be back by the time the first bright star could be seen in the sky, and before the evening winds began to howl.

Excitedly they ran from lamppost to lamppost, tying the rolled-up leaflets onto them, so that anyone who was interested could unroll the messages and see what they said, and then leave them for others to see as well. Then they moved on to the doors of people's homes, for no one really had yards or gardens as such, and found some handy little nook to stick the rolled-up leaflets in.

By the time the first star appeared, Apocalyne and Sean had covered most of the small village and made their way back to Terrance's home. Apocalyne squeezed Sean's hand affectionately as they reached the door.

"We did it again, Sean! The message—the Truth—

has begun its journey into people's hearts!"

"You're right. It has."

"I love this work!"

"I can't exactly say I share your passionate sentiments, but I am enjoying myself—at least I feel as if I am accomplishing something worthwhile with my life."

They'd hardly closed the door behind them when they saw Terrance coming from a room on the left—his room, they imagined.

"I saw your note, young ones. Very kind of you to inform me of your goings-about. I was just preparing dinner. Come and join me."

They both thanked him and sat down to a delicious meal.

"Mmmm, I most certainly like this stew. Not to be too conceited by any means ... but it is a good recipe," Terrance laughed.

The two young people smiled. Terrance was a jolly fellow. He didn't possess the stoutness that is often packaged with jolliness, but he was nonetheless jolly and kindhearted.

"It is rather quiet here, I must say. It seems quieter with the two of you here than it is when I eat alone! Ha! Must be because one assumes that company must always be accompanied by conversation. I'm sure I must have something to say, something to ask. Aha! Now I remember. Truly, I wondered what brought you to our city. You know that visitors are always rare in any city. Not much of a traveling people we are, I suppose. Only those dancers and entertainers or Fathers and their people ever make trips. Most people never go anywhere at all. Well, I suppose you all know that. So, what is it that made you want to be different from the rest of us, huh?" Terrance asked, in between spoonfuls of stew.

Apocalyne and Sean looked at each other, and then Apocalyne nodded that she would tell him.

“We have come with a message that we are to deliver to as many cities we can.”

The old man’s eyes seemed to pop right out of his head for a second, but he recovered his regular facial expression speedily, so speedily that Apocalyne and Sean wondered if they’d actually seen anything after all.

“A message, huh? What sort of message might that be?”

“Well,” Apocalyne continued, “you may find this rather strange. Many people do. But we have been given a message by some beings from beyond the Circle. They came to us, asking us to spread this message far and wide. It has to do, at least in part, with these imbalances the Planetyrs have been speaking of, only there is much more to be said...” Apocalyne stopped as she noticed that the old man put his finger to his lips.

“No more just now, little girl. Finish up and we’ll talk some more—in another room.”

Apocalyne felt a twinge of apprehension. Sean, on the other hand, was quite alarmed. There’s something to be said for having been raised with the knowledge of a Supreme Being that guides the force of one’s destiny, even while the steps of that destiny are left to each one to make on their own; you receive a certain type of peace that passes all understanding.

Needless to say, they finished their dinner quickly. Not another word was uttered until Terrance brought the two of them into that little room on the left that they had seen him come out of earlier. It was a tiny room with stone walls and no windows. Terrance sat on the only stool there and lit a large candle that was nearly in need of replacing. Then he moved a stack of papers to the side to make room for his elbow.

“Excuse me, I’ve just got to get comfortable before we can continue this conversation. The night hour has never been my best hour. I am the early riser,

you know. Anyway, on to the subject of what you were speaking of.

“The reason I stopped you is because I know what you are talking about. Strange that I know? Yes, maybe. But I do believe there are even others scattered here and there that know of these beings from beyond the Circle. They are the guardians of the resting spirits, and beings of purest Light. They were well known to the earliest Settlyrs as the Celestynes, but as time went on, and the next generation grew older, the knowledge and memory of them faded from the minds of most Wylders. But not from mine. I myself am a Settlyr, yes, one of the last few there are. In fact, I’m nearly 120 years old, but a healthy lifestyle has helped my body think itself quite a few years younger. But yes, I came to this planet as a Settlyr, though I was too young to remember for myself, and my parents told me little of the voyage as I grew older. But they did often speak of the Celestynes.”

“So, why the secrecy?” Sean asked, more curious to discover the reason they had withdrawn to this inner room than to hear tales of ancient history<sup>1</sup>.

“Well, let me begin first by saying that not all will love this message you speak of. Though the powers of Light, such as you have come to see them, are manifesting themselves in yet greater ways, the powers of Darkness are also intensifying. This is how I have come to see it, anyway. Perhaps it was on account of my parents having instilled a knowledge of these Celestynes within me that I have become aware of these things, but aware I have become. And we who know must be watchful. In spreading this Truth, you must watch and be aware of all that is around you, lest the forces of Darkness find some

---

<sup>1</sup> As one might imagine, history was of little interest to most Wylders, which greatly contributed to the fact that only the most sparse knowledge of their past had survived to this generation.

way to bring your mission to an abrupt end.”

Apocalyne and Sean were bewildered. Aside from Lauryn, they had never met anyone who knew about these things already.

“What more do you know?” Apocalyne asked, ever curious to hear of any doings and sayings of the Celestynes.

“It has been revealed to me that sometime soon our world will come to its end—perhaps not the planet, but at least the end of Wylder life as we have come to know it. This, however, did not greatly disturb or concern me, for whatever happens, I will most certainly come to my end very shortly. But for you—for you young ones aware of the Truth, such matters bear greater significance, and so I will tell you all. Before these days of Darkness, there is to arise a great and special one called the Mediator. Special, for she shall be a woman of young birth, and the last Tyler to our people. And Mediator, for she shall stand between the eternal realm of the Celestynes and the mortal realm of us Wylders, that in the binding of these two realms as one, the power of Darkness may be overcome.” Here Terrance suddenly paused, and his eyes took on a faraway and dreamy look, as if he was remembering these visions of days past. Then just as suddenly, he was his jovial self again.

“I should let you both retire to your room, as I too will retire. But I am pleased to have met those whose hearts believe the same as mine does. Now together we can anticipate the coming of this last Tyler! And I would join you on your great mission, but that is not my task. My task, I have been told, is to write those things that I hear, that I may reveal to this Mediator those things they’ve told me...”

Sean interrupted, “That who has told you?”

“Th-the ... I don’t know who exactly. I just hear them. They’re like whispers. They come to me early, early in the morning before the day begins for everyone

else. I don’t know who exactly they are—perhaps the Celestyne beings. But the whispers are too clear, and speak things so unlike anything I’ve ever known, that they cannot be ignored. I believe them, and will follow all they tell me to do.”

The man’s sincerity convinced Sean. He had come a long way in even choosing to be part of these missions, but still, such firm beliefs remained a somewhat foreign concept to his consciousness.

There was another long pause before Terrance wrapped things up. “We all should be going to bed now. I especially should, for I am but an old man, and the whispers will no doubt awaken me early as always, that I may listen to them.”

“But how do you hear them?” Sean asked. He was curious. Although he knew Apocalyne was well acquainted with such unwylderly matters, she had always seemed so far beyond life as he knew it anyway. But here was a man who seemed regular enough in Sean’s eyes, and yet he, too, spoke of spirits, whispers, apparitions and beings of Light.

“I’m sure, if you took time to listen, you would hear them too, Sean. Just open your heart to them. Try it sometime—sometime soon. There isn’t much of it left, you know—time, that is.”

Sean nodded. There was so much more of this beauty of Truth and belief that he wanted to experience for himself. He still had a few reservations, but they were fading swiftly as the days went by. He wanted to be as passionate about his beliefs as Apocalyne was. It wasn’t that she said anything much. Whenever she spoke to others of her visions on the dunes, or of the message she had been told to impart, her words almost pierced him as deeply as they did those to whom she happened to be speaking. She had no reservations—and Sean wanted that too. He just wanted to let go of those few strings—pride perhaps—that still restricted him somewhat.



Sean excused himself and went to the room. Apocalypse went to the front door, and stood outside on the doorstep for as long as the weather would let her. She knew soon the wind would really start to howl and then she'd have to retire too. Being outside in the peace and quiet, alone with no one else—no one except that beautiful Presence she was growing to love and adore—recharged her spirit like nothing else. And so she liked to do it often. But soon the wind began to howl again, and she got up and went inside.

She tiptoed into the room. Sean appeared to be already asleep, and she took care not to wake him. Once she undressed, her bare frame stood on its tiptoes to look out the window near the ceiling. The stars were so beautiful, but her purpose for going to the window was to send up a little prayer.

"Precious Spirit of Light and Love," she whispered, "I thank You for how You have brought Sean along. I don't know what happened while he was in Ordyn, but he is so different now. I feel as if You must have great plans for him. Please wipe away the confusion and difficulty that he must be experiencing, and prepare him for all that might be ahead for both of us."

Sean heard her whispered prayer, and it touched him deep down inside as nothing else had in a long time. He didn't know how she sensed he was having a difficult time with all that had happened recently (which he hadn't told her about), and that he was struggling inside. He opened his eyes for a second, and blinked a couple of times to see if he was really seeing what he thought he was.

Aside from the beauty that was standing a few feet away from him, covered only slightly by her long light-brown hair, Sean began to hear what he thought were explosions and screams of terror way off in the distance. He almost thought he could see fire, and

people running in different directions, trying to escape it. Then there were some terrible pictures of people with illnesses, dying and sorrowful. He saw their eyes begging for deliverance. It was so vivid, yet he couldn't remember any details once each scene had passed. The experience so startled and nearly terrified him that he shook his head several times, trying to make it disappear.

Suddenly he found himself covered in cold sweat, shaking. The room was dark, and Apocalypse was beside him, not at the window as he'd just seen her a moment ago.

"Are you all right, Sean? Are you ill? Was it the long journey here today?"

"No. I'm fine."

"You were sleeping so soundly."

"Sleeping? I never went to sleep."

Apocalypse cracked an amused smile. "It's been hours, Sean."

"No, it hasn't. Only a few minutes."

"All right, tell me what it was, Sean. What happened?"

"Why must I tell you everything?"

Sean felt a little bad when he saw her look of concern. He knew she was sincere. Then he remembered her prayer. He knew she really did care.

"I'm sorry," Apocalypse whispered. "Sometimes I just feel so alone, like my destiny is too great for me. I wish you'd just share a little more of yourself with me. Then the burden would be so much lighter ... I think."

*Oh ... Spirit of Light and Love that Apocalypse speaks to, I know You care for her. Do You care for me too? I don't think I've ever really spoken much to You. I feel strange. I ... I like her, and wish to experience things as she does. But, please, is Apocalypse for real? Does she mean all this? I have to know.*

His thoughts were interrupted when Apocalypse

reached over and took her headpiece from the edge of the bed. She wiped the beads of sweat off of Sean's forehead, neck and chest. She was so gentle and affectionate, Sean wondered if this was the same fiery soul he'd known all these years.

"We've been friends for a long time, haven't we, Sean?" Apocalypse whispered.

"Close friends, I would say."

"Close?"

"Well, in comparison to my other acquaintances, you're the only one I could ever classify as a close friend." They both laughed. Apocalypse knew Sean didn't really have any friends, just acquaintances who had perhaps been friends in childhood, but had hardly been as close since.

"Not really close enough, though," Apocalypse whispered, gently kissing him.

Though surprised, Sean managed to respond calmly at first, all the while wondering if somehow she had read his thoughts, and was now answering his unspoken question.

"Not close enough, yet," Sean answered with a pleased smile, returning the kisses.

A little while later, after all was said and done—at least for this night—Sean finally told Apocalypse those things he had up till now withheld from her. He told her all about the Goddess Ordyna coming to his home, and his experiences in Ordyn. He did not speak much of his conversations with Ordyna, for much of what she had said had indeed been above his understanding, and he remembered little of it. But he knew what had happened, and that he told, together with the vision that had made him wake up in a cold sweat just hours ago.

Apocalypse was silent.

"Well, what do you think about all that—especially the things that happened in Ordyn?"

"I think that one cannot only love good—they must

hate evil. For some people, the only way to hate it is to have nearly been hurt by it. But I'm glad you were kept safe in spite of it all—the Spirit is obviously watching out for you, in spite of yourself, it seems," she added with a smile. "I'm glad you made it back."

"So am I."

"Tell me something," Sean added a few minutes later. "Do you think it was arranged—like by these beings or something—for us to end up in the same room, and the same bed?"

Apocalypse laughed. "You're getting more intense than me now, Sean!"

"Well," he answered sheepishly, "it did me a lot of good, in every sense of the word."

After Apocalypse finished laughing with Sean, she squeezed his hand affectionately.

"Me too," she whispered. Then they both rolled over, and drifted off into a peaceful and well-deserved sleep.



When sun shall set, and shadows fall across the plains,  
 The Darkness grows upon those who sleep;  
 The cold shall winter on the land, the wise will know,  
 Evil wakes when Good in slumber lies.

- 18 -

## THE MARTYRS' CRY

Apocalyne and Sean had now accomplished the first part of their mission in the village of Garss. The people they had spoken to were intrigued by the message they brought, and though not overly enthusiastic or supportive, were courteous and gave ear to their words, and attention to their prophetic leaflets.

After thanking and saying goodbye to Terrance, they left the city early the next morning as planned, reaching Rilmur before noon on the third day of their mission. However, their message was not met with as much fascination and interest from the people there. It was a larger town, and the people had a greater air of self-importance about them. Some taunted them. Others threw the leaflets on the ground. But more were, like most other Wylders, simply indifferent. They couldn't grasp the spiritual significance of the impending natural phenomena, and being unable (and unwilling) to understand, they chose rather to ignore the message.

Having done what they could in Rilmur, at least for the moment, they set their faces towards the city of Kurs, where they were to meet up with Jerol and Eryn to decide together their next moves.

“We were told this would happen,” Apocalyne assured Sean, who was somewhat dismayed at the outcome of the last city.

“How can people ignore such Truth?”

“They harden themselves, perhaps. Then nothing penetrates their souls anymore. But they will receive another chance to believe. Perhaps as the messages we have left behind find their way into any receptive hearts that might be among them, the hard ground of their souls will slowly be opened up to the Truth, and more will come to believe. Let us just pray there is time for such a more gradual enlightening of their souls, for the greater days of Darkness will not tarry long.”

“So this is the city of Kurs,” Sean announced, as they passed the city gates. “That must be the city square there, with all those people crowding around someone or something. Can you see what it is?”

“Not so well,” Apocalyne said as she strained to see who the two figures were that stood in the center of the crowd.

She felt a sudden chill when she saw who they were and what was happening. Sean saw it too. They both looked at each other and got off their beasts so they could walk up and get a closer look without being noticed.

“And who told you these things?” A voice mocked Jerol and Eryn, who were standing in the midst of the crowd. “Are you above us?”

“No,” Jerol shouted over the muttering of the crowd. “But we were given a message of Truth to share with all who might listen, that you might be prepared for the time of calamity that is to come. When these happenings of which the Planetys have spoken come

to pass, the spirits will be set loose and there will be a war of the worlds, a clashing of the spiritual and unseen forces that will manifest itself in the Children of Light and the Children of Darkness that walk among you. And the time has come to choose which side you will be on.”

“And whose side should we be on? Yours?” another voice rang out and the crowd started laughing uncontrollably.

“The side of the Children of Light.”

Another loud chorus of laughter followed that statement.

Eryn's voice silenced the laughter. “We do not come to make you choose our side! We come only to open your eyes to Truth, and to present you with the choices; it is you who will have to make them and live with the consequences. The Wylder life as you have all known it for years shall soon be no more. With the coming time of calamity, our history will enter a new phase. Those who live through this will know a more beautiful world than we could ever dream of!”

More laughter followed her cry of Truth.

“Wait!” a shrill voice suddenly called out of the audience. “I know you two. You were once the great dancers of the city of Ordyn. Did you not leave your assigned and privileged position in society to follow this so-called Truth you now profess—nothing more than a message only dreamers could come up with? Perhaps you should be sent to join the spirits you profess to speak for—by dying!”

The crowd went silent. The proposition of sending someone to an early death was obviously a new one, and it was as if the people were contemplating this thought for the first time, for indeed they were. But the nods of agreement that began rippling through the crowd showed that, although unusual, the idea was not entirely unacceptable.

Apocalyne's heart started beating faster and faster.

Sean was aghast. He'd never heard such things spoken of among his fellowmen, and certainly not this openly.

As Sean and Apocalyne slowly approached the square to see if they could catch word of the mumblings that were stirring within it, they studied the crowd that surrounded Jerol and Eryn. What few faces they could begin to make out as they got closer reminded Sean of the people of Ordyn; they had no doubt been influenced by them. The painted faces and bodies, now visible, with garish clothing and evil smiles, made this people look like something out of another world. Unlike the crowds they had faced before, who had not yet made a decision or even begun to comprehend a dimension beyond those that they had known all their lives, it appeared these people had fallen into a deeper state of the influence of Darkness. Apocalyne wanted to whisk her parents away before things got more out of control than they had.

Sean looked out of the corner of his eye and saw two men whispering together at the edge of the crowd in front of a doorway. One of the men turned to where Sean could see his face, and then turned again to his partner who nodded before they both entered the doorway and disappeared from sight.

"Did you see those two men, Apocalyne?" Sean said, a tinge of nervousness in his voice.

She turned and looked towards the doorway where Sean's eyes remained fixed. "No, but something terrible is about to happen. I can feel it."

Sean knew by her ghost-white face and the beads of sweat forming on her forehead that Apocalyne was right.

"They're up on the roof, some strange instrument in their hand..."

Just before Sean could finish the sentence, Apocalyne looked at her parents and they caught her glance. Apocalyne nodded gently in answer to their questioning glances, and then everything went into

slow motion for them. Apocalyne turned to look at the two men atop the roof.

Jerol and Eryn's eyes followed Apocalyne's. They gasped when they saw two arrows flying through the air. Jerol grabbed Eryn and then looked at Apocalyne before he shouted his last words to her: "Live for the Truth, child; we die for it!"

Apocalyne nearly let out a cry, except that Sean muffled it to keep from drawing attention to themselves. Jerol instantly fell to the ground with Eryn in his embrace. The second arrow had missed her, but the two killers were quick to follow it up with another one, and within seconds, they both lay dead at the spot where they had stood.

The man who had sneered at them only moments before now stood beside the two lifeless forms. Some in the crowd were shaking and sobbing; such a thing had never happened before—not in their village, not on the plains of Wylder.

"Let this be an example. Choose your pleasure—live your lie in peace, or die for your 'Truth!'" the man sneered. "You'd do well to make sure it is truth before giving your life for it." He snickered and went back into the crowd, which slowly dispersed.

Apocalyne hid her teary eyes. Sean looked up at the roof and saw that the two men had taken notice of them. Sean quickly grabbed Apocalyne and took her to the nearest sheltered sidewalk. From there they managed to blend with the rest of the dispersing crowd, and quietly creep toward the city gates where they had left their beasts. Then they hurried off before anyone would catch up with them—or hopefully even suspect that they had ever been there.



"Do you think it would be taking a great risk to go back and find their bodies so we can bury them?" Apocalyne asked Sean, still wiping away her tears as they rode back towards Kryppa.

Sean just looked at Apocalyne compassionately.

“I know, we shouldn’t take the risk, should we?” said Apocalyne.

Sean shook his head slowly and directed his beast to ride a little closer to Apocalyne so he could take her hand.

Apocalyne burst into tears again. “I’m so sorry. I’m not very brave.”

“I would want to do the same if I had parents, but I never really knew them. I was raised by my father’s sister. I don’t know why. I had heard tell that my parents were alive somewhere, but that they didn’t want me. But my father’s sister told me other things about them in my younger years, so after awhile I wasn’t sure what to believe anymore. I don’t understand. Life seemed so simple and peaceful back then. I guess that’s the way it is when you’re a child. But now it seems as if there is evil lurking in every corner, threatening to take us over. It’s almost as if everything is turning bad and anything good is being slowly pushed back to I don’t know where. Do you think there are any good people left outside of our city?”

“There are some, I’m sure,” Apocalyne said, struggling to hold on to the glimmer of light within her, which at this moment nevertheless felt as if it was barely glowing. “People like Terrance.—I know they’re out here, and perhaps we have even come across others. They just haven’t stood out yet. I know that they will, though. The message we spread will have to sink in, and when the difference between the Light and the Darkness becomes more apparent to all, then people will choose—that is, those who have not chosen yet.”

Sean looked ahead of him and said, “We’re nearly home. We should ride a little faster; we wouldn’t want to get caught in the night wind.”

In a couple more hours, just as dusk was beginning

to settle over the land, they reached Apocalyne’s home. When Arthis and Lauryn saw only two wylderbeasts returning, somehow they knew what had happened. Tears welled up in their eyes, but they tried to hide them for Apocalyne’s sake. Also, they rested in the knowledge that Jerol and Eryn had passed into the Celestial Zone, to the great Circle, and to their much-deserved place of bliss and rest.

The two young people got off their beasts and went towards Arthis and Lauryn, who received them with open arms.

“So happy you’re home. It seemed like so long,” Arthis finally said, breaking the silence.

“It seemed like forever. We sent away two young people, who have now returned as a man and woman,” Lauryn added in her own profound way.

Apocalyne was still in Lauryn’s embrace when she looked up. “Father and Mother, they...”

“Don’t even try to talk about it, sweet child. They are still with us—just beyond the dunes, with those wonderful beings of Light in the Celestial Zone. Remember them?”

Apocalyne nodded.

“Now you shall be able to hear their voices in the wind, in your heart. They lived a full and blessed life. Now they can continue it—in you.”

In a vision of the night winds I saw a child,  
Born of the Settlers, but his gift of life was short.  
Our son it was, and then I cried.  
But he smiled, and his smile gave great comfort.  
He is there, I know, beyond the Dunes. We shall see him again.

-19 -

## THE FOURTH ANGEL

The next while passed somewhat uneventfully. Lauryn, Apocalyne, and Sean paired up in turns to continue visiting the many remaining villages, and to spread the message of Truth as they had been instructed to, though they did so more carefully from this point on. Arthis, who had left his shop to an apprentice that he might better concentrate on the work of copying out the needed messages, had at the insistence of both Lauryn and Apocalyne now moved into Jerol and Eryn's old room. For Apocalyne, the empty room had been too great a reminder of her parents, and for Lauryn, having Arthis nearer to them, and in this somewhat more remote location than his own house, gave them better opportunity to concentrate on their tasks of writing.

Though each day's weather was as it always had been, the night wind seemed to tell of looming natural calamities—calamities which, though they might be perceived natural in themselves, carried with them

an unshakable feeling of doom, decision, and spiritual warfare. That was at least how our four Children of Light interpreted the ominous feeling that now lurked about them like an unseen beast waiting for its chance to be let loose.

They had now visited most of the established villages to spread their message. They had discovered that several of the marked villages on their maps were surrounded by any number of unnamed and unmarked settlements, and these were also visited.

The town of Zhyral was the last unvisited village left before Ordyn (for they had received no instruction to proceed to Ordyn as yet). On the evening before they were to depart, Apocalypse awoke to a strangely strong wind bursting through her room—strange because, though its effect was seen on the few pieces of furniture and items that lay in her nearly bare room, it didn't seem to touch her. She felt warm.

Slowly she sat up and looked out the window. The dancing veils that her parents had once spoken of were dancing in the sky for her.

“What does this mean?” Apocalypse asked. She remembered the words of the Celestyne beings—that all she had to do was ask when things were not clear to her.

*These are but signs to attract your attention, a voice seemed to resound inside her mind, to eliminate the temporal thoughts from your mind and set them on celestial matters. The meaning of this vision is that you must stay here. There are things to be done which only you can do.*

“Should our journey be postponed?”

“No! There is not much time, and the journey must continue as planned. But let the others go. Your presence will be needed here.”

“What will I do?”

“That will be shown to you when the time comes. Just remain quiet, and keep your heart open to the

voices in the wind. They shall lead you.”

“I will be waiting, then.”

“Good. Never fear. Remember, we are always with you.”

Then the dancing veils vanished, along with the voice that had spoken so clearly to her, as if it had filled the entire sky with its sound. The strong wind now blew her hair and garments as it did the rest of the items in the room, and she lay back down and fell into a restful sleep.

Early the next morning, she awoke to the unusual sound of a little bird at her window. Birds were not often seen about first thing in the morning, the few that existed having gone for shelter during the stormy nights. Apocalypse remembered the message of yesternight, and went to tell the others.

Sean was a little disappointed that he would not be traveling with his dear friend this time, but he knew the mission was of greater importance than his personal preferences.

“Be careful, Apocalypse.”

“I will be,” she said, reaching out and stroking his hair. Sean took her hand and kissed it. Arthis and Lauryn smiled at the two young people. After a few exchanges of hugs and farewells between the four of them, Lauryn and Sean left for Zhyral, while Arthis and Apocalypse stayed behind.

That afternoon, as Apocalypse lay in her bed (as most Wylders did during this severely hot time of day), she drifted off to sleep. She wasn't one to dream normally, unless it was the avenue which the Celestyne beings chose to deliver a message of great significance to her. And such was the case this afternoon.

She dreamed that a bird came to her window and awoke her from a deep sleep. She followed the bird for many hours. At last she came to a rocky formation with a large hole, presumably the mouth of a cave.



There was no telling how deep the cave went. She would have to get a closer look.

She started walking towards the cave. The cave became larger as she neared it. It was as if she was taking strides larger than she would normally be able to take, almost as though the cave were being moved toward her even as she came closer to it. Then she gasped. At the mouth of the cave stood a tiny child. Concern overwhelmed Apocalyne, and she ran towards the cave. But just as she neared it, the child disappeared from sight. She looked in the cave and all about, but no child was seen.

True to the odd way dreams are, Apocalyne suddenly found the child in her arms. A beautiful toddler he was! Then she heard strange rumbling sounds, sounds typical to a great disaster—crashing, burning, people screaming in terror. She turned around to see where these strange sounds might be coming from. She saw nothing.

Then the babe shifted, and Apocalyne's attention was drawn back to the child in her arms. In his eyes she saw all those things she had heard—and more. It was as if the future was being opened up to her in and through the eyes of this child. There were visions of tribulation, fire, beasts and plagues—terrifying things for her to behold. But as suddenly as they had begun, they came to an end. They were followed by visions more beautiful than anyone could describe. Dusty and brown was the only world she knew, yet now she saw lush green grass, trees, beautiful flora covering the land, a variety of unusual animals—adorable creatures, yet ones she had never seen before. So many delights that they wiped away the terror she had just witnessed. It was a land greener of earth and bluer of sky, such as the legends of the Old World had spoken of, and all at once she wondered if it had indeed been as beautiful as the visions she now

beheld, why it had ever been left behind.

And then she awoke. It was late afternoon. Sitting on her window frame was that same bird—at least it appeared to be—that had awoken her that morning. Breathing heavily and dripping in sweat from the vivid dream she'd just had, she looked at the bird.

*Strange thing, she thought to herself as she followed the bird to her bedroom door. I wonder what this little bird is still doing here. Perhaps it is waiting for me to follow it. It must be a sign—perhaps of the bird in my dream. But why would a bird be a sign?*

She knew that brushing such things aside simply because they clashed with logic would not be good. The Celestynes had told her to listen and look for signs in the wind, and even in the world around her. No, she would follow this bird wherever it was leading her.

She got up and went to the dining room where the bird had now flown before her, as if it were aware that she had inwardly made the decision to follow it. As she reached the table, the bird flew out the door and disappeared into the afternoon sky.

The door was open and the warm air brushed her hair against her face. In the next room she could see Arthis still sleeping peacefully. Even though she might now have questioned the significance of the bird's appearance—and disappearance—she couldn't resist the thought of going for a relaxing walk in such nice weather. She walked over to her parents' old study and quickly scribbled a note, letting Arthis know that she had gone for a walk and that he needn't worry.

On and on she walked—longer than she had intended, but she felt no desire to turn around just yet. She had caught sight of the Great Dunes, and they seemed to beckon her to themselves. Evening fell and the first stars appeared—a sign that she should be heading back to her house before the gusty

winds and sandstorms of the night overtook her—but Apocalyne walked on. It was as if she were being drawn by some extraordinary force that could not be defined or described, but which was unmistakably there.

Then it was that she saw it. The same cave and rocky formation she had seen in her dream. The pull became stronger, and Apocalyne followed it all the way to the mouth of the cave. Oddly enough, the cool wind that would normally have intensified, making way for the blasts of the nocturnal sandstorms, died down. The air was cool and still. The stars now filled the sky with their own glory, and logic told Apocalyne that she would do better to stay here for the night than to venture home and risk being caught in the night winds that might overtake her on the plains.

The strange pull that had been so strong and intense all afternoon faded and Apocalyne felt normal again, albeit curious as to the purpose for which she had felt led to journey here. It was a dark and mysterious place, but nonetheless peaceful. To the right, a short distance away from the cave, she noticed a pool of water—not a regular, natural pond, but more like a large hole in the rocky surface of the immediate area that was filled with clear water. This was most unusual, for there was very little surface water anywhere on the Wylder plains. All Wylders gathered their water from deep wells, and though it was not a rare commodity, it was certainly a valued one. Understandably curious, she stood up and walked over to get a closer look.

Expecting an apparition at any moment—for it seemed the most likely thing to happen next—she was not at all surprised as she approached the pond to see ripples spreading across its surface. Was someone swimming here—someone she had perhaps not taken notice of yet? Or was it perhaps someone—or something—that had not been there till

just now? She was not frightened, simply curious to see what would come next.

As she knelt down in front of the edge of the pool, she suddenly noticed bubbles rising to the surface a short distance away from where she sat, and the ripples growing larger and more obvious. The being—whatever or whoever it was—was rising to the surface. To her inquisitive mind, it seemed to take forever.

*Is it that deep?* she thought to herself. Though the water was clear for the first bit of distance, she couldn't see the bottom, and wisely thought perhaps she should be careful lest it was unrealistically deep—even an entryway to another dimension, perhaps. She scooted away from the edge just as the being emerged from the surface.

She was pleasantly surprised to see that it was a very human-looking, and in fact quite a handsome-looking, young fellow. Most definitely good company for a lonely night at a cave, one might think!

He shook his hair, releasing a fountain of shimmering droplets that vanished back into the pool, after which his hair appeared strangely dry and airy. “Have you been here long?”

She shook her head, a little surprised at his casual mannerisms. He was not at all like the other Celestyne beings she'd met in the Celestial Zone.

“You're wondering if I'm a Celestyne like the others you have met.”

Apocalyne nodded. That was precisely what she had been thinking.

“Indeed I am,” he answered.

Her puzzled expression led him to make the next statement. “And you wonder why, if I am one of them, I do not look like them, but rather more like you.”

Apocalyne nodded again.

“Come, sit here beside me,” he began softly, allaying her nervousness. “I am what you might call

a Settlyr. When my body grew old, my spirit passed beyond these dunes and into the Celestial Zone, like most others who have passed from this world have. This is the form of my youth. When our spirits pass into the next dimension, we can appear as the other Celestynes—those that you saw—or in the form we ourselves have grown comfortable with.”

Apocalyne did not fully understand, but she knew that eventually she would.

The man continued. “There are things about the Celestyne dimension that cannot always be explained. The veil between our two worlds is thin, yet the difference is vast. Sometimes the Father of Light lets us appear in the way you would be most able to accept. It depends on the mission or message that we are purposed to bring. I am come to be your Angel of Comfort. You’ve known great sorrow, and yet more lies ahead on the path you are meant to tread. The world you know now is about to be plunged into an age of Darkness. It will be but for a short while, but that while shall see much sorrow, much brokenness, much grief, and great Darkness upon the hearts and souls of men. And you have been chosen to be the candle to shed Light on all those hearts who shall open themselves to it. You will need to stand strong in that day, and comfort others with the comfort that you will be comforted with. I know you’re tired and it’s been difficult for you, hasn’t it?”

Apocalyne blinked away the tears that welled up that instant. She thought of her parents and their sudden death. He wiped the tears away and pulled her head against his chest. “Be comforted to know that they are well cared for, and you will see them again one day. All souls who have opened their eyes and ears and hearts to the Father of Light, as your parents did, are the Children of Light, and all those who have not closed their hearts to this Light will be

someday reunited in the Celestial Zone just beyond these dunes. Because of this tragedy, and because of the strength and comfort you receive from this assurance, you will be more able to comfort others who shall lose those dear to them in this time of Darkness.”

He paused for several moments, and then continued, “But the Darkness is growing, and is ever more extending its fingers over the people of the plains, that it might snatch them from the hope of this glorious future. And you have seen how the evil of this Darkness is taking hold, and it shall yet take hold in greater measure, seeking to bring all men under its dominion and influence of destruction. Simplicity and peace have ruled this land, but the hand of Darkness has grown stronger, and sought to cast out the peaceful life we once delivered unto men. And now the time of calamity that is destined to be will be. Yet it will be but for awhile, though to many this while will seem like it will never end. But you must give people hope—tell them that it will not be long before the dawn will break and deliverance will be theirs—if they will cast off the works of Darkness, and take unto themselves the armor of Truth and Light.”

“You spoke of the Father of Light. Who is He?”

“He whom I call the Father of Light, and that which you call the Spirit of Light, are one and the same. He is the Power behind all that is good and true and lovely, and it is this same power that has given life to the Wylders—and indeed all living things. As for form, He has none, for He is Spirit. But He can appear in whatever form pleases Him, and in whatever form people will understand. Thus He is manifested to us as a Father, and thus as children we learn of Him. He is the Creator of the Light, the Supreme Spirit over all beings, mortal or eternal, that have the gift of life within them. There

is, however, another power: the Lord of Darkness, the Deceiver and perverter of all Truth and goodness. He seeks to blind men's eyes to the Light, and to turn their unquestioning hearts over to his deeds of Darkness. It is this force that is compelling the Children of Darkness to foist their evil upon your world, even as the forces of Light are compelling you to rise up against them."

"But how is this to be done?"

"That knowledge will be revealed to you in the same moment that you shall need it."

In the few moments of silence that followed, Apocalyne could not take her eyes off of this Celestyne Angel of Comfort. He was so unearthly, yet so human as well. *I do not remember him telling me his name*, she thought to herself. She was too awestruck by his presence to ask aloud, but he knew her thoughts and answered with amusement, *In our dimension, names are not important. They are to you, I know, but in the next dimension we are known by our purpose, the aura we've been given. It is difficult to understand. But if it will make you feel more comfortable, you can call me Trysten. Come now, to the Cave of the Rock. There we shall rest, for it is much strength that you shall need.*

Together they walked the short distance to the cave, where Trysten sat down. Then she lay her head on his lap and he gently closed her eyelids.

"Sleep a truly Celestial sleep—not merely in rest of the body, but also of the soul. It will strengthen your heart for the times ahead of you. And when you awake, you will return to your home, where it will soon become clear what you are supposed to do next."

She slept a heavenly sleep indeed, and when she awoke, she felt strength and courage permeating her body and spirit. It was a refreshing feeling indeed. She knew it would be tried as time went on, but for the extra boost she was grateful. Trysten

was nowhere in sight, but somehow Apocalyne had expected this. It seemed as strangely normal as his unexplained appearance had. She walked home with renewed inspiration.



Dark clouds loomed on the horizon. Arthis and Apocalyne looked eagerly out the window, hoping for some sign of Sean and Lauryn's return before the dark clouds burst. It had been over a week now since they had first left. One should not need to be reminded that in such a desert clime, storms are not too frequent—especially not such horrid storms as these clouds seemed to suggest.

Everyone in the village of Kryppa could see their neighbors looking fearfully out of the windows of their homes. Hopes were in each one's heart that this would be the rare but refreshing cloudburst of rain and nothing more, but the word that had been going around of the atmospheric imbalances made more than a few folks nervous and apprehensive.

To the relief of Arthis and Apocalyne, Sean and Lauryn finally came riding up to the door of their home. They looked tired and worn, yet full of tales to tell. But those tales would have to wait, for just then began a fearsome thundering, as jagged streaks of light flashed through the Wylder sky. It wasn't the familiar sort of lightning for this dusty planet, the sort that lit up the entire sky, but these formed sharp beams of light that pierced through the darkness, creating strange patterns across the sky. It was an eerie sight!

"A warning to all those who have allowed the Darkness into their hearts," Lauryn said solemnly as she watched. Arthis and Apocalyne turned to her as if to ask what she meant. "The power of Light will strike them with great fear, rather than as the soft rising of the morning sun."

With that, as Sean tied up the beasts under a cover

that had been made for them, the others retreated into the safety of their sturdy house.

“It would appear that ours is the only village that has not yet been influenced by the evils of Ordyn,” Lauryn began when all were seated around the dining table. “Zhyral was by far one of the worst we’ve come across—perhaps because it lies so far on the edge of the plains, and yet so near the Dark Hills. Strange, strange happenings filled the town. Everyone displayed odd paintings on their bodies—some paintings of animals, some paintings of plants, and some had unusual shapes and patterns. Each night there were some who would chant around a fire, burning strange-smelling herbs and sometimes animals. There was a darkness about it all. Sometimes there were terrible screams. We thought someone might be hurt, but, no, it was all part of the chant and festivity.

“On the first morning we went to the market and found sleeping bodies laying about everywhere. We were told that this was a nightly occurrence, a time when all ‘nocturnal creatures’ come out, and that upon occasion these people would ransack the marketplace or someone’s home! The Spirit whispered in our hearts that we should not preach in the square as had been done in former cities, but that we should leave the leaflets in strategic locations and then leave in the night while there was still time and safety.”

The “strange happenings” Lauryn had described were so heathen to Arthis and Apocalyne that their eyes widened in shock. It seemed that ever since the deliberate murder of her parents in the city of Kurs, the regions around them were sliding deeper and deeper into the pit of Darkness. The manifestations of its evil reach seemed steadily to be becoming commonplace.

“We even passed through some of the same villages we had traversed before on our way back, and they

too had digressed. It was as if we’d entered another world!” Sean added.

Apocalyne looked out the window, her eyes lighting on the range of dunes in the distance. “Indeed, the spirits have spoken truly. It shall not be much longer now. The time of calamity is at hand.”

They who see shall know. Those who understand shall follow.  
The Mediator shall come, and stand on the border  
Of Time and Eternity.  
Strength shall be given, and the people shall come to their deliverance.

- 20 -

## **A VOICE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS**

Early the next morning Apocalyne awoke. The storm was over. Looking out the large window beside her bed, she could see a thick fog covering the ground, about three or four feet high. It was rising. The desert sun, which would have already begun to dry any remainder of water that had been left after such a storm, had not yet bothered to raise its shiny self to greet their world. Apocalyne lay there for some time, looking often out the window to see if there were other developments, but mostly meditating on all the things that the Celestyne beings had told her, and the signs she could see in the world around her.

*What dull clouds of smoke cover the ground. I have never seen such an odd thing. The spaces of goodness are getting briefer, while the sorrows lengthen and make that room for the terror to come. Oh, I pray that the Light will help me know what I am to do. The twilight has almost passed; I can feel it. The hours of Darkness*

*are just about to come. Give me strength to face them, and the courage to do what I must do.*

“Look outside,” came a sudden and unfamiliar, but pleasant voice.

Obediently, she looked outside. The barely distinguishable form of a Celestyne was appearing in the midst of the swirling fog, and it continued to speak, “The time has come for the people of Kryppa to embrace the full knowledge of the Light. Even now they gather in the village square. Go now, and speak unto them those things that they shall need to hear.”

Then the form faded, as the words nestled their way deeper into her consciousness. Dressing herself, she woke the others, who were now accustomed to hearing the new and often sudden revelations of direction and guidance that Apocalyne would receive. Together they hurried to the city square. True to the voice she had heard, a crowd was already beginning to form as people showed up to survey the damage of the storm, and discuss how they could repair the most needy community areas.

The discussion appeared as if it was being chaired by a young man who everyone recognized as the assistant to Father Kryppa. Father Kryppa had been seen but once by Apocalyne, and that several years earlier. She remembered him as a kind man with gentle eyes, and a smile full of mercy. But, like all other Fathers, he rarely made public appearances.

His representative, however, appeared in control of the situation. “Any storms are unusual for our clime, but one of this magnitude is most certainly rare. We sympathize with those who have suffered the greatest loss, and realize the great restoration ahead of you before your homes and lives can return to normal. And so Father Kryppa has decided...” The young man suddenly stopped, and everyone’s

attention was turned to something that was happening behind them.

Father Kryppa was being brought to the village square! He, in deference to his age and rank, was being carried on a simply decorated litter. Silence fell upon the people, and they quickly made way for him to reach the center of the square where his assistant stood. It wasn’t long before the Father alighted, standing in front of the young man.

“Thank you, Martyn,” his pleasant voice sounded. “Would you allow me the pleasure of speaking to my people this once?”

Martyn bowed politely and stood to the side.

Father Kryppa turned to the audience, and then began, “My assistant has done well in representing me so far. I thank him. Now I will finish what he was beginning to announce at my behest, and that is that we will be giving each family a designated amount of Grenyrs from the village treasury. It is a gift, to make it easier for you to repair the damage. If we lack sufficient materials here, which I have heard might be the case for some, we shall arrange for teams to travel to nearby cities and purchase them.”

Having said that, however, he paused for a moment. Then he continued in a firmer voice, “But that is not the only thing that I have come to tell you. We have been studying the planets, and I, being interested in spiritual matters, have come to understand something about the ecological imbalances and disasters that have been pending for so long. With this time of terrestrial terror comes a time of warring.” The people turned and looked at each other, aghast.

But Father Kryppa quickly continued, “No, not a war with other villages of the plains, but a war of the forces of the spirits. I do not know what part we shall play in this struggle, or if it will even come nigh us. I am not that enlightened. But the dreams that I, as

an old man, have been blessed to dream, tell me of one who knows the Truth—and they have told me that this one is among us. I know not who that one might be, but certainly they do. Listen, my people, to this one. A great burden has been placed upon this one's shoulders; let us not make that burden any heavier through disbelief and mockery. The Truth is priceless. Treasure it."

With that, Father Kryppa bowed his head low, and his helpers carried him away. The crowds looked at each other, wondering who this person might be. After no one said anything for several minutes, the crowd slowly began to disperse.

Apocalyne's heart was pounding harder and harder, and her body was tingling with apprehension. She knew she was meant to speak now, but she was losing the moment. Looking around at the people slowly walking away, she bravely walked into the center and stood on a small raised platform. The ones who remained called the others back, and they looked in awe at the young woman that was so boldly assuming the place of speaker.

Finally, after the hushed voices and murmurs had died down, Apocalyne began. She started with a message similar to what they had spoken in the other Wylder villages they had visited before, and added those things that came flooding into her heart to speak unto these people, whose lives had been largely sheltered from the greater evil that seemed to be gaining hold all around them.

"I beg you to not look at my youthful appearance or seeming lack of maturity and understanding. For it is not in pretence of my own goodness that I stand before you this day, nor do I come as a personage that expects to be praised and honored for her wisdom. I am here to present you with the Truth that has been shown to me by the invisible ones, the Spirits of Light who even now are preparing to do battle

against the forces of Darkness in this war of the worlds our Father spoke of. I have come that you may know the great deliverance when it comes, and that you may impart the knowledge of this Truth to others, that they might in turn know the same.

"You have all heard the sayings and predictions of the coming time of calamity—ecological imbalances, we are told, that will be followed by catastrophe and devastation. Those are the horrors of nature that our planet is soon to face. But there is a greater terror lurking behind these visible forces of nature. It is the terror of war—the war of Light against Darkness, of Truth against Deception, of Life against Death. We have been untouched thus far by the tendrils of evil that, unseen to us, have begun to permeate the lives and homes of some of our fellow men on these plains. But those tendrils have not yet stopped. Their slimy fingers are creeping across our world, hoping to choke out its life and destroy everything in their path. They have choked some, and left others for dead. It has been left to us to go on a rampage against this foul enemy. Its strength is in fear, and its grip in doubt and compromise.

"I know that this is a frightening truth for many of you. You have never seen the next dimension, or tasted the fruits of the pure knowledge of Light. Such things are rarely spoken of. You go about your lives, living one day after another, content to survive and live peaceably. But this simplicity, this joy that we have been given by the Divine ones is now being threatened. The time has come to open our eyes to the powers that war in the unseen dimensions, and to do what we can to save ourselves and others. Deliverance will come. A New World is promised us, but we must fight for it."

The people were awestruck by the authority and wisdom possessed by such a young one. After several moments of silence a lady called out, "And how might



we save ourselves and others from this evil Darkness?”

“By taking a stand against it, and opening your hearts and minds to the power of Light, that you may become one of its children. My friends and I have writings that explain more. These messages of Truth will help to open your eyes, but it is up to you to open your hearts. Cherish the messages on them—they were delivered to us from the realm of the spirit, beyond our dimension, by those who have become eternal beings of the Light themselves, and who stand ready to aid us as the days grow yet darker.”

Apocalyne left the center of the square, and Sean put the baskets of leaflets where she had been standing. “Come and take one for yourself and for your family!” he called out. He turned and watched Apocalyne begin walking back towards their home. Even though he had heard her speak many times before, the eloquence and urgency in her voice this time had taken even him by surprise.

Everyone rushed to the baskets and took a leaflet or two before hurrying back to their homes and back to the dreary task of repairing the damage done by the storm.

Thus far, they had not yet received instruction to preach the message of Truth to their own village of Kryppa. Perhaps this was because the people of Kryppa had always possessed some measure of Truth and Light, and the influence of evil such as they had come to see it in other towns and villages wasn't evident here. Even now there seemed little reason for this sudden and complete revelation of their convictions here in Kryppa. But now that devastation had come—an unusual thing, and certainly one that attracted people's attention—and the Father had prepared the ground of people's hearts, the people were more than ready for these seeds of Truth.

As for Ordyn, the only explanation Apocalyne and

Lauryn could come up with for the more direct orders they continued to receive from the Celestynes to not visit it just yet, was that the devastation for Ordyn would have to be much more intense for the eyes of the people to be opened to the Truth, and opened wide enough to drive them to a decision.

They speak of that they know not.  
They read the skye as a book, seeing letters,  
But understanding not the words, nor their meaning.

- 21 -  
**THE ECLIPSE  
AND THE FLOOD OF EVIL**

The meal that night was a silent one. Every time Apocalyne thought of her speech to the people of Kryppa that morning, she began shaking. She knew it was not her that had spoken those words. Apocalyne's shaking was of concern to the others, but especially to Sean, who was seated beside her at the table.

"Are you all right, Apocalyne?" he finally asked, reaching over and touching her forearm.

"Yes," she smiled, a little embarrassed. "I was trying to control the trembling, but I guess I didn't do so well." Her smile started to fade and the others stopped eating as they saw the tears welling up in her eyes.

"What is it, dear girl?" Lauryn asked, full of motherly concern.

"I can't hide it, can I?" Apocalyne said, burying her face in her hands.

Lauryn arose from her chair and stood behind Apocalyne, putting her hands on Apocalyne's shoulders. They had all become more and more like a family, sharing each other's burdens as well as joys.

Apocalyne uncovered her head, revealing a tear-stained face. "Those words I said this morning, they weren't mine! But everyone looked at me as if I was the one saying them! I feel such a heavy burden on my shoulders, that people believe that I'm moving their lives. But I'm not!"

"That's not everything, is it, Apocalyne?"

Apocalyne still looked straight ahead. "What do you mean, Lauryn?"

"You explained the trembling. What are the tears for?"

Apocalyne's eyes took on a faraway look. "There is so much evil on our doorstep. It must needs come. I can see it all and hear it. It's so very terrible! Strange, frightful sounds are filling my ears. Terrible, terrible pictures fill my thoughts, and I know it is a glimpse of what might come upon us tomorrow, or the next day—any day now. So much terror! Will I be strong enough to stand against it?"

"Of course you will be, Apocalyne," Sean said, reassuringly. "The Celestynes have helped you so far, haven't they? I just know they'll help you be strong enough."

Apocalyne looked back at Sean. "I hope so!"



That night Sean tossed restlessly on his bed. So much was happening—to him, to his world, to his new love!

*How strange it is that I love her. She is so starkly different from me—in nearly every way. She is so deep, and I'm so shallow. When she is the Apocalyne that I always knew, she is like a little girl—simple, playful, innocent. But then, there are times when she is not herself. Sometimes it's as if she were someone else,*

*some wise old Tyler. She acts like an entirely different person! I can't keep up with it.*

Had Sean thought about it, or even remembered what he had been told by Ordyna those many months ago, he would have known the reason for this. But now, as it did then, these more mysterious manifestations of the spirit were lost to him, and all he saw was what appeared on the surface. And yet it was a surface he was becoming more intrigued with all the time.

*I guess it's one of the many things I love about her. At least I think it is. Then again, who can explain love? "Not I," said the fool, he chuckled at his thoughts. I never had the courage to admit that I was a fool, but perhaps this bravery has come from being around Apocalyne, he mused, and chuckled once more.*

*She is so strange, yet so beautiful. I must say, though, that now my perception of a Tyler is entirely different than the one I had some time ago—the old lady with gray hair.*

Sean wasn't sure if it was these before-sleep thoughts that prompted the dreams he went on to have, or if they were meant to come to him regardless. But all that night he had frightful dreams that would wake him up suddenly, and he would find himself staring at one of the four corners of his room, gasping for breath, and his bed soaked in perspiration.

It had happened three times now. Sean was only a bystander in each dream, unable to do anything. Each seemed a continuation of the same horrible vision he'd had the first night he and Apocalyne had slept together in Garss, in Terrance's house: people screaming, explosions going on around him, and other terrible disasters occurring. In his dreams, filled with the same confusion he had seen before, he would see Apocalyne—sometimes emerging out of a fire, sometimes walking out of crowds. Then everything would go silent. He could see the people gather around

her, while she shouted some message. But he could not hear a word she said, or anything after that. In the next dream, a huge beast followed behind her and tried to devour her. This was the shortest dream, for the fright of that terrible moment had woken him almost as soon as the dream had started.

But the final dream offered no such relief, and it terrified him the most. Apocalyne was running from something—he could not see what. She ran fast and furiously, with her back turned to him. Then his eyes shifted to a noise that was coming from the opposite direction. It was a crowd of evil-looking people. They were running after her—a lone woman! She turned to face him and Sean gasped. She was with child! Only a bystander, there was nothing he could do. He tried to run towards her, but his feet wouldn't move. He tried to scream, but no sound would come forth. He tried to divert the crowd, but it only turned into that huge, ferocious beast he had seen before, and then continued to chase her.

“No! No! Noooooo!” Sean shouted in his sleep.

The others came running. It was now dawn, and Sean had been dreaming all night. He looked a wreck! His pillow and bed were soaked with perspiration, his eyes were bloodshot and he looked dreadfully tired.

“What happened?” Apocalyne asked, sitting beside him, stroking his hair.

Sean looked up into the eyes of that young woman he could not remove from his thoughts—or his heart. He smiled weakly and drifted off into a peaceful sleep. Somehow he knew that this dream wasn't meant to be told. He would lay it aside for now, hard as that might be, in order to not worry the others—especially Apocalyne. He trusted that these things would be revealed to her in their good time. In the meantime, he would remain with her, and follow wherever she would lead.



It was only a few days after Sean's strange visions of the night that the sky, on a typical sun-parched afternoon, began to grow strangely dark. No one on the planet had ever experienced such a thing, so people were filled with awe and wonder at the thought of what it might mean. The Planetyrs, however, were quick to ease the anxious masses with their explanation. They were wise in the ways of astronomy, and respect for these studious individuals was plenteous. If a Planetyr had something to say, the people listened.

It was but an eclipse, they explained, a normal and natural occurrence, when a moon wanders into the path of light cast on the planet by their sun. The sky would be darkened for a while, after which time all would return to normal. They urged the people to remain within their houses, and not to behold this wonder with their bare eyes, for it could cause great damage to one's eyesight. Even so, it was a cause for celebration, they proclaimed, not for fear. For this was the first known eclipse to occur over the Wylder plains from the time the first generation came upon it.

Thus, as the sky grew darker still, and the air grew ominously colder, most people remained obediently hidden in their homes, curtains drawn, waiting patiently for the sky—and their lives—to return to normal. And that moment finally came. Curious, apprehensive individuals gingerly pulled aside their curtains to watch the last shadows of darkness flee away, and the light of the sun once again cast itself in what now seemed a most pleasant manner upon the land. Even the people of Ordyn, riotous as they were, had stopped their rowdy activities to honor this great wonder of the heavens.

As Apocalyne, Sean, Lauryn and Arthis opened their curtains to the re-emerging sunlight, they remained silent, filled with awe at the phenomenon

they had just witnessed.

“It’s a sign for our times,” Apocalyne announced, breaking the silence. The others turned and briefly looked at her before she continued.

“It matters not what ‘natural’ causes the Planetyrs try to ascribe this to. It is a sign—a sign of warning. It took some time before the darkness totally engulfed us and our land. Even so, it is only a matter of time before the Darkness will fall upon us all, and when it does, it will be a thick and strange Darkness—so thick that it will appear as if no light can pierce through it. But the end of the Darkness will come, and Light will flood us once more. And the Light that we’ll know after the gross Darkness shall be only the brighter for our appreciation of it.”

Just then some commotion was heard outside the door.

“I’ll go see what it is!” Sean told them, walking towards the door.

There stood a ragged, frightened man in a condition they’d hardly ever seen anyone in before. He appeared as if he had come a long ways, though they recognized him as one from their village.

Everyone’s attention was now turned towards him. They huddled around, as Lauryn gave him a drink.

“What happened, and what brings you here?” Lauryn asked him.

“I came to see the young woman—the Tyler.” With that he turned to Apocalyne. “After all that you said, some of us were sent to purchase materials for needed repairs. We decided to combine our efforts and bring both that which was necessary for our own homes, as well as for the other portions of the city that needed repair. We went first to Rilmur, though we did not stop long there, journeying past it to a place called Yldin, where we rested a night. Then, we proceeded to the town of Ayelin, where traders had told us we’d find good building materials. There we saw strange

things.

“Some of the people looked as though they had come out of that forbidden area—the hole full of the unspeakable that lies beyond the Dark Hills. Others in the village were overtaken with fear of what those people might do. The night we stayed there, there was much noise and chanting. We left early the next morning with our supplies. Then, our last stop was a brief one in a town called Kurs.”

At that moment, Apocalyne caught her breath. “Kurs?!” she asked, sitting back, her eyes wide.

“Yes ... you know of it?”

Apocalyne nodded, and turned her head to choke back a few tears that had risen to the surface from the horrific memory of her parents’ death in that city. Then she turned back, and motioned for the man, who had paused at Apocalyne’s reaction, to continue.

Then the man began shaking, and the memories of that city seemed as frightening to him as Apocalyne’s had been to her. “W-w-when we went to Kurs, we found the people to be most peculiar. They looked like strange creatures, painted and fierce-looking—worse than those in the town of Ayelin. They milled about aimlessly, and the city seemed to have not been cleaned for some time—quite a contrast to the orderly place I had expected any Wylder city to be. All seemed to be tolerable until that night. First it was the chanting, then it turned into some terrible screams like none of us on this trip had ever heard.

“Two others with us, Jol and Elliot, ran nearer to the place they had come from to see if someone was hurt. Indeed someone was hurt! But it was purposeful. These people, t-t-they were hurting each other! Jol and Elliot didn’t realize this and tried to help the people who were being pounced upon, but then the crowds pounced upon them. It was as if it was a sport! We stood a ways off and watched. We were frightened that they might do the same to all of us if we tried to

intervene right then, and then none would be in a position to help the other. After a few minutes they left Jol and Elliot alone, and we hurriedly picked them up and brought them back to our small room. They were a dreadful sight to see! We stayed two more days till Jol and Elliot had recovered enough to travel back home. Their lives were nearly ended by those horrid people whom I cannot even imagine bear the name of Wylders!”

The others were deeply saddened. They had already seen for themselves how the tentacles of evil had overtaken Kurs and many other towns besides. But now it seemed only to be getting worse. So much had changed, even within the last few months.

The man started to weep. “I never thought the people of Wylder would have been capable of such evil. How is it that they have become as they have?”

Apocalyne looked straight into the man’s eyes. “These are the ones who did not open their heart to the Truth of the Spirit. They have closed their hearts to the Light, and therefore the Darkness has taken hold of them, and with it, has given them over to evil, and every unclean and hateful work.”

The man was weeping and shaking his head, barely able to get out the words. “But why? Why must it be so? Why could we not continue to live in peace and simplicity as we always have?”

“That time will come again, for the Darkness cannot win. It can only obscure the Light for a time. But Light is always stronger than Darkness. In the darkness, all is hidden. In the light, all is revealed, and the truth is made known. Light shall win, just as the brightness returned after the darkness that eclipsed this day. Fear not, but stand strong, and open your heart to the Light, that the Darkness may gain no power over you.”

In the hour of twilight, at the setting of the sun,  
 At the rising of the evening star,  
 The sign in the sky shall be followed by a sign upon land-  
 Then the time of Darkness shall draw nigh.

- 22 -

## THE HAND OF DARKNESS

Kryppa became a fairly united city after the tales of the visits to Ayelin and Kurs were spread among the people. There is something about evil’s attack from the outside that strengthens and unites the good, if it hadn’t been that way before.

Shortly thereafter, being in need of further supplies, it so happened that two men of Kryppa set forth to the town of Ordyn. Jol was one, for he now knew the ways of travel well, having been on the trip earlier. The second man was Kurt, a husky farmer. He had a great herd of wylderbeasts for transport, among other creatures, and managed to take care of these animals single-handedly, even in such a harsh climate as theirs. It was for his farm that supplies were needed, and he had requested Jol’s presence on the venture.

In spite of his earlier experience in Kurs, Jol had no reservations about embarking on this trip. He was the authoritative, heroic, yet oft unreasonable type,

who would bend all rules and conventional manners without thought if his blood began to rise (indeed, it was these very traits that had so nearly brought him to the brink of death in Kurs). Kurt, on the other hand, had a wise yet unassuming manner that drew little attention to himself.

The two men squinted as they entered the city of Ordyn around dusk. Smoke and incense filled the air, torches were being carelessly waved by people dancing in the streets. Decorative items of all sorts were being put up around the city. People were dressed in garish clothing, and it seemed that innocence and pure beauty had all but vanished.

A short, scrawny man whose face was painted with bright colors, and whose bony body was tightly covered with showy material hardly fitting for a man, came up to the two men.

“You aren’t from here! You look too pure and innocent!” he jeered. “We know those qualities well—too well, and have for too long; take a taste of impurity and corruption!” His repulsive smile turned into a hideous laugh as he jerked his liquor glass in front of their faces and let some spill, then laughed some more.

The two men stood still and serious—Jol in anticipation of what might follow, and Kurt in silent shock at what he was seeing (though Jol had prepared him that dealing with the Ordynians would likely not be a pleasant undertaking). Finally, the man left muttering to himself. It wasn’t long before they were approached again—this time by a tall young lady.

“Greetings! You’re too handsome to be from here!” she laughed, insincerely. “Come, we have clothes that might better fit your stature.” She pulled Jol’s arm and took a few steps in the opposite direction.

“What do we need them for?” Jol asked.

“You’ll always need them if you’re to stay in my city,” she taunted, “but I was thinking of the parade.

You know, I’m sure there’s some performance you could come up with for us.” Her grossly made-up eyes winked at Jol and then at Kurt.

“Parade? What parade?” Kurt questioned, suddenly interested in an opportunity to perhaps bring out some of his wylderbeasts for show, and to be sold.

“Ordyn is hosting a great celebration for all who would like to come. It will be a festival such as has never been seen before in all the plains of Wylder...”

Just then the three turned their heads; a boy was running through the streets shouting, “Ten days to the parade! Ten days to the parade! All are welcome! Prepare, one and all, to join in the performances! Spectator or performer, prepare, one and all!”

Jol and Kurt turned towards each other, while the young lady said with a flick of her wrist in the little boy’s direction, “See, there! He told you. Now I won’t have to waste my time with such honest and sincere people.”

“What do you mean?”

“Ah, I can see it in your eyes! Be off with you. Go back home where you belong. This is no place for anyone who hasn’t already thrown their life away.” She turned her back.

Jol and Kurt looked at each other, wondering whether that was a tear they had seen in the corner of her eye. Shaking their heads in disgust at the city, they went about to find the items they had been told could be found here.

The stench of the city was quite nauseating for the two men, not to mention the strange yet obviously dark spirits that the people carried. It seemed as though any trace of beauty and simplicity that might once have dwelt in this city had now been wiped out, or at least driven undercover for the time being. Jol had already witnessed the contrast that the influence of the spirits of Darkness had cast over such cities,

of which Apocalyne had spoken that day in Kryppa's town square. But to Kurt, this was all new, and he was not a little uneasy.

Jol, however, found it curious that, although the spirits of these people were darkened, they nonetheless had about them an atmosphere of joy and feasting, and wondered if such merrymaking, even in its somewhat harsher forms, was altogether wrong or to be shunned. It was in part this curiosity at what had been described as the "influence of the tendrils of Darkness" that led him to so easily agree to lead Kurt on this trip into Ordyn.

Lost as he was in such thoughts, Jol was suddenly brought back to the present by a quiet murmur coming from a small building they had just passed in a narrow and at the moment deserted alleyway. Curious, the two stopped and found the murmur coming from a window that stood low to the ground, and opened to what appeared to be a lower and half-underground portion of the house. A weak and sickly teenage boy lay in a bed near the window's side.

"Can we help you?" Kurt asked the young boy, who continued on, whining and muttering to himself. Kurt reached his hand through the window as if to offer his assistance, but the boy only trembled, causing some concern to Jol and Kurt, for it seemed nobody was aware of the boy's plight.

"Come out, it's cold and damp in there. We'll help you."

The boy recoiled, and his body shivered and trembled the more, as if he was entirely filled with fear. "I c-c-can't. I-I-I can't go out there. Th-th-they'll follow me!" he stammered deliriously.

"Come with us!" Jol offered, ignoring what he took to be the boy's delirious groans. "We'll get you out of here. You look like you need help!" Jol looked sideways for a moment, as if seeking Kurt's approval.

"N-n-n-no! I can n-never leave the city. Th-th-the

dark ones will..." At that, the boy stopped, and broke into sobbing, urging the two men to leave immediately, and leave him alone.

It was the sight of this frightened boy, and other similar encounters that left Kurt the more shaken, and Jol suddenly convinced that there was more to this dark atmosphere of mirth than could be seen at first glance. Unable to do any business, so engrossed were the people of Ordyn in their preparations for this festival, Jol and Kurt made their way to Phel and then Kurs in hopes of finding what they sought. But in each place they found that similar preparations were underway. It seemed news of the great festival had spread, and everyone was preparing.

Deciding there was not much more they could do, Jol and Kurt returned to Kryppa where they shared news of all they had seen.

"The cities of Phel, Kurs and Ordyn were in a state of great upheaval. Ordyn has sent forth messages to all the surrounding cities—and the word is sure to spread from there—declaring that in a week a great celebration is to take place—the greatest festival in the history of our world, to honor the great eclipse. Given Ordyn's well-renowned expertise in the arts of entertainment, it will likely be an event of the grandest proportions. There will be a parade, and then a grand performance in the great theater. Anyone and everyone is welcome, so proclaim their messengers, whether spectator or performer."

"Are we, then, to attend this great festival?" a man asked.

"I don't know," Jol continued. "I, for one, have no desire to go. It is a filthy city, ridden with physical and mental diseases of all kinds."

At this point, Kurt joined in. "There is nothing they have but Darkness. Though they proclaim mirth and freedom, in truth, they are bound—I have seen it. There can be no joy amongst them, it seems, unless



they strive most diligently to find it, and thus they seek to find pleasure in yet greater and stranger reveling. No, I will stay here, with my beasts, and my happy simple life. There is no joy there—only Darkness.”

The tone of sincerity and conviction with which this normally quiet and unassuming man spoke convinced many, who agreed with his sentiments. They seemed eager to preserve the little they had of their simple lives. Most of all, they desired to remain on the side of Light and Truth their eyes had now been opened to—and they knew these were not to be found in Ordyn.



Apocalyne couldn't sleep that night. She was thinking too much. The wind was also howling louder than usual. Soon the howl turned into a crying, wailing sound, and she knew she was meant to look and listen for a message. She propped herself up on her elbows.

It was those dancing veils again—only this time they were red! They were flying around the sky before her eyes, but then these red veils began to make some formation. She strained to see what it might be. They were writing against the blackness of the sky, and in the writing of the Wylders, formed one by one the letters of the word “Ordyn.”

“Ordyn?” she whispered. “What must I do?”

Then all the veils dispersed, and began again. Another word was formed. *Go*, Apocalyne read. Then in a flash the meaning of the message appeared clear as ever: *Go to Ordyn*.

“For the festival?”

The veils now slowly began to fade, and Apocalyne knew she had understood their message, though her questions were far from answered.

“But what will I do there?”

Then she remembered the words that had been

told her before, *In all that you will be called upon to do, we shall be with you to help you, and show you the way.*

The veils seemed to be frozen in movement, as if waiting for her to get the full message. Satisfied that she understood, even the part about being shown as she went, they vanished. She quickly dressed and quietly tiptoed to the room where Sean slept.

“Sean! Sean!” She shook his arm.

“Yes?” he asked, cocking his head and opening one sleepy eye.

“I’m meant to go to Ordyn—and to attend the festival!”

“What?!” He sat up. “But you can’t. It would be much too dangerous for you.”

From the look in her eyes, Sean suddenly realized this had not been her own idea; it was another mission that had come from the beings of the Celestial Zone, and he dared not question their doings. Rather, he sank back down, and his mind flashed back to his own dark experiences in that city—and from there, to his dream of Apocalyne running, the memory of which suddenly seemed to rush back upon his consciousness.



The next morning they discussed it together, and with further consultation, and listening to the guidance that the Celestyne Guards had assured Apocalyne would always be with her, it was determined that Apocalyne would secretly set forth together with Sean, Lauryn and Arthis, as well as a few others from the village of Kryppa to provide any assistance such as would be needed. It was decided that, for her part in the festival, Apocalyne would perform a dance she had learned from her parents, and, while she had the audience captive, make her witness. That way, she would have their full attention. It was Ordyn’s time.

When Father Kryppa learned of this—for the Fathers of the cities had their people everywhere—he sent a messenger to give his blessing, which read: “I am not certain of all your beliefs and reason for these beliefs. Nor do I know your background. But I know one thing—the power of Light is with you. And I pray that power will guide you always, child.”



Two days before the team was to depart, horror struck the village. A band of rowdy youths from the city of Ordyn heard from some of the people of Phel and Kurs that the people of Kryppa were a good people who had not digressed as they had—and what was more, that they would not be attending the great and historic festival. In retaliation for this act of independence from the rest of the Wylder communities, they set out to terrorize the people of Kryppa in the same manner they had now made common in their own regions.

Riding in on their beasts, with torches in their hands, the band of 20 or 30 young men attacked Kryppa at twilight, when all of Kryppa sat at dinner. They rode in and set fire to anything their torches could reach, and then rode off. The fires quickly began to spread throughout the village, and the men of Kryppa, who were too concerned about saving their families and quenching the fires to pay much attention to the fleeing band of delinquents, did what they could to save their village.

It need hardly be said that, in a world where water was scarce, that fires were among the greatest calamity one could fear. And so, though all worked long and hard to combat the flames as best as they could, much damage was done. Several lives were lost, and much of the central part of the village was destroyed. There was bitter crying and mourning all the night long, and the vague disgust that the people of Kryppa had once felt for these wayward towns now

bloomed into a perfect hatred.

Apocalyne, Sean, Lauryn and Arthis lived on the remote outskirts of the village, so their home was untouched. But upon seeing the flames licking the homes of their fellow villagers in the distance, the four of them had rushed to the village to help. By the time they reached the village, the fires had mostly been put out. But the entire village wrung their hands in anguish. Their simple, beautiful hometown had been torn apart by evil.

They joined hands with the other villagers to help those who had been wounded, and kind Father Kryppa gave another sum of Grenyrs towards helping the Kryppans get back on their feet once again. All thoughts about the festival vanished for the time being.

As for Apocalyne, she knew the city of Ordyn would not take kindly to her performance at the festival, but those were the commands she had been given, and she knew that she must obey them. The preparations continued in earnest for the entire team. It was decided that Jol, Elliot, Kurt and Matthys—the young man who had brought the tidings of their first trip to the other towns—would accompany them. Matthys and Elliot had knowledge of the instruments of music, and together with Jol and Sean, they had planned Apocalyne’s performance in every detail. Together they would travel to Ordyn. Together they would confront the evil, and expose it to all whose eyes had not yet been opened to see it before.

Their mirth is empty. Their faces are painted, and smile.  
 The Light is not within them, nor desire they it without.  
 As the night winds seek to extinguish the light of the candle,  
 So shall Darkness seek to quench the Light while it yet burns.

- 23 -

## THE FESTIVAL

“If anything happens to me,” Apocalyne pleaded, “please, will the rest of you promise to return to Kryppa? It will be our bastion, our stronghold of the power of Light in this time when Darkness has overshadowed the land of the Wylders. And the visions, dreams and apparitions—listen and look out for them. No matter what, we must preserve the Light until these dark times be overpassed.”

They all nodded.

“Please, do be careful, Apocalyne,” Sean whispered, remembering his nightmare.

“They will take good care of us,” she answered with a smile, looking in the direction of the dunes. “And even if something does happen, we won’t be apart for long.”

“How do you know?”

“Because we are the Children of Light, and all the Children of Light will one day come together again, in that day when the Light overcomes the Darkness. We must only take care to preserve the Light within

our own gates and hearts, and pray that this Light will draw those who desire it out of the Darkness they have been entrapped in.”

They were nearing the city gates.

“Ohhhh, I remember this awful place,” Sean said. “I came so close to my death here.” It was easy to tell that he, more than anyone else, dreaded the thought of being within those gates again.

“Don’t worry, Sean. This time it is the Celestynes themselves who have sent us,” Apocalypse encouraged him. “And they will be with us to protect and deliver us from whatever the Darkness may seek to harm us with.”

Sean smiled, and for a moment—the memory spurred by his senses of being within this city once again—he recalled the words of Ordyna about the Goddess of Light, and how this Goddess manifested herself within Apocalypse. He would have spoken of these things to Apocalypse right then, but the memories themselves were still somewhat vague, and Apocalypse seemed fully absorbed in her own thoughts of the task that lay before them. So he said nothing.

As they entered the city gates, the anointing fell on each of them, especially on Apocalypse. All she could see before her was her mission—to give these people a chance at deliverance from their own terror, and that of others.

She would not partake of the parade, but rather save her appearance for the performances within the Theater of Ordyn. She watched, solemnly, as the bizarre proceedings of the parade took place around her. You could hardly see the face of anyone—male or female—for all the patterns and paintings on them. Brightly colored banners and streaming ribbons of color filled the air, and cymbals clashed. People pushed and shoved other people as if they were animals or herds—no, even animals would not be treated in such a lowly manner in Kryppa. Apocalypse

had no idea that the people had degenerated to such inhumanity and deterioration of spirit and principle. Ever since Kurs, she had been sheltered from any direct contact with the evil that had spread across the plains around them.

Those evils are not fit to be described here, but were rather similar in fashion to those we ascribe to our own ancient cities of Sodom and Gomorrah—as a vivid sign to all that, but for the Light, the heart of man is desperately wicked. Those Wylders who had not totally given themselves over to evils and witchcraft, yet had also not embraced the Light were still overtaken with fear and delusion. Theirs were the spirits that were crying out to be delivered. And their time of deliverance had now come.

The stage of the theater was set. The people, like spiritually hungry, ravenous creatures, waited for their minds to be filled with all manner of unclean food. The spirit and mood of each dance that preceded Apocalypse’s performance was so warlike and ominous that it sent shivers down their spines.

And then it was that Apocalypse’s turn came. Everything went silent. There was a peaceful, yet eerie stillness in the air—peaceful for those who yet had a tiny flicker of Light in their heart, eerie for those who had adjusted themselves and their spiritual senses to the Darkness. As she walked onto the grand stage, her presence was as a ray of Truth piercing the Darkness. The challenge had been made, and the war of the worlds was about to begin.

There, in the center of the circular theater, she stood, illumined only by moonlight and the purity of the white scarves that completely enfolded her graceful form and hid the features of her face from all who were watching. Then the music began, and every eye followed her moves as she danced to a sorrowful tune—steps that wept as they told of the pitiful plight of her people. The veils unfolded, and twirled around

her as freely as the desert winds, her gestures depicting a cry of intercession for deliverance from beyond. Then the candles were to be lit, signaling that there was indeed hope—and Light would come again.

The first large candle was lit, revealing a large pedestal on which it stood on the side of the stage. Apocalypse danced as if she was drawn to the glow, and the candle soon found its way into her hands, the glow of it instantly revealing her brave and beautiful features. There was nothing hidden now. All those who had seen her recognized her instantly—all the more for the manner in which she stood out as a beacon of pure light in a night of gross darkness.

“She’s the young woman from Kryppa! The one who is called the Tyler! Apocalypse!” a voice screamed in the crowd. The peaceful spell was broken and the war had begun. The crowd started yelling and screaming profanities, throwing any object within reach onto the stage below. Lauryn and Arthis stood up from their concealed positions within the crowd and looked around them, not knowing what to do. Sean, standing off to the side of the stage, looked at the one he loved and then at the crowds all around. The blood began rushing through him, as did the rage.

Crumpling the leaflet he was holding until it could be crumpled no more, he shouted to Apocalypse with all his might. His voice rang above the crowds: “Don’t let them crush your voice, Apocalypse! Speak the Truth!”

At that very moment, as Sean’s voice called out, Apocalypse flashed back on the words that left her father’s lips as he was shot down—“Live for the Truth, child!” She turned and saw the faces of her mother and father beside her. “We’re right beside you, darling. You have all the help of the Celestynes on your side. Stand up, and let the Guardians of Truth speak through you!”

With that renewed encouragement and visual assurance of her parents’ well-being, Apocalypse looked at Sean and held the candle up to her face so the crowds could see that she was beginning to say something.

The people quieted down, curious to hear what words might proceed out of her mouth after facing such opposition and ridicule. Perhaps it was also their morbid desire to see what else might give them good cause for mockery.

Her voice rang out, “Listen, people of Wylder—a name I was once proud to call my own, yet whose existence I now spurn. You have shut the Light out of your lives and now Darkness seeks to enter in. The simple, peaceful life we have been given is being torn to shreds by the devilry you pursue. You have been stripped of your dignity, and now parade about like ignorant fools—children whose parents never bothered to teach them the precepts of what was acceptable, and what was to be spurned!

“Turn from your evil ways, your witchcraft and demonic rites. Do not follow the ways of the Darkness of Ordyn. Renounce your alliance with the beings of Darkness, and align yourselves with the Beings of Light. They wait, ready to embrace you and lead you back to the harmony that once filled our world.

“The forces of Darkness lie in wait to devour you—what’s left of you. I beg of you, turn to the Light. Just open your eyes and hearts to the Light! For those of you who have watched your brothers and sisters fall into the horrors of evil, and have been confused and have sought shelter and reprieve, the time of your deliverance has come!” The tears were streaming down her cheeks by now.

The vast majority of the crowd sat stupefied, not perceiving the war of the spirits. Apocalypse, who had spoken her last sentence before falling on her knees, was now weeping as her plea continued.

“Destruction is at hand. The beings of Darkness will not spare you. They care not for your lives. They will kill you to keep you from becoming Children of the Light. We are at the threshold of war. The choice is yours. The war of the worlds is about to begin! Open your heart to the Light, or be swallowed in the destruction of Darkness. Turn to the Light, I pray you!”

The silence that had fallen upon the crowds was now shattered by the screams of those who had given themselves over to the Darkness. Seizing control of the moment, they incited the mob to begin throwing things onto the stage while others lunged towards the center trying to reach her. It looked as though they were trying to kill her.

“Oh, please don’t let her die! Please, spare her,” Sean prayed. There was not much else he could do. They were only a few against so many.

Apocalyne put her hands up to protect herself against the flying objects, when just then a strong, rugged man whose head was covered in a mask not unlike those many had worn and paraded in all day pushed his way aggressively through the crowds.

“Get back! Get back!” came the commanding but unfamiliar voice as he continued to push people aside.

Seeing he was headed straight for her, Apocalyne closed her eyes, awaiting whatever would happen to her next. She felt herself being lifted up and carried off, the man shouting, “I’ll take care of her!”

At those words, some of the crowd left off attacking her, not knowing what he meant and thinking he was to do away with her. But others followed him.

Sean looked on curiously. Somehow he felt that whatever was happening was in answer to his prayer. He smiled and lifted his eyes towards the sky in the direction of the dunes. “Thank you! Thank you!” he whispered gratefully.

The mob followed the strong man who still held

Apocalyne in his arms, pulling at him and Apocalyne, spitting at her, and shouting all sorts of vile things.

He walked to the city gates, which opened of their own accord, causing the crowd to move back in awe. Once he and Apocalyne had gotten through, the gates, again of their own accord, shut behind them. Realizing the man had effectively carried Apocalyne to safety, the mob rattled the gates, shouting, “This is our matter! She has blasphemed our town and our people, and ruined our festive occasion! Give her to us that we might shred her like we did the simplicity that used to rule our lives!”

“Feast while you can,” came the strong voice. “You have rejected your hope of deliverance. Fill your cup of iniquity till it overflows. Soon you shall see such great terror that you yourselves shall want to be shredded to pieces, but no—no such relief will come. It would not be sufficient punishment for your lewdness.”

The crowd roared. Their cries faded in the distance, as the man continued to walk away from the city gates, Apocalyne still in his arms.

“Who are you?” Apocalyne whispered, looking up at his masked face. “And where are you taking me?”

“We’re going to the Cave of the Rock.”

“Trysten?” she asked.

He shook the mask off, and nodded. Apocalyne smiled and tightened her grip around him.

“Thank you for coming to help me.”

“It was both in answer to Sean’s prayers, and part of the plan that the Father of Light has for you. Your time is not yet over. There is yet more for you to do.”

“What?”

“I will tell you all when we reach the cave. It’s not entirely safe here. But your next mission is of extreme importance. It has to do with another life!”

“Whose?”

“You will see.”

In the power of one lies the strength of the other;  
In the gift of one, lies the salvation of all;  
In the moment when time shall unite with eternity,  
The doom of the Darkness shall have begun.  
The Mediator shall come.

-24 -

## **ECSTASY IN THE POOL OF TRUTH**

“The dancing must have tired your feet. Refresh them in the pool,” Trysten said to Apocalyne once they had arrived at the pleasantly familiar cave.

Apocalyne quietly obeyed and sat beside the pond, bathing her feet and legs in its rejuvenating water.

“It’s a magical pond, isn’t it, Trysten?” Apocalyne observed. “Even with my feet shifting the water, I can see the reflection of the stars so perfectly on its surface.”

“It’s a door to the next dimension—the spiritual world.”

“The Celestial Zone?”

“Yes.”

“But I thought that the Celestial Zone was beyond these dunes, within what our legends have called the Circle.”

“It’s hard to explain, but the Celestial Zone is more than a single place, or another location upon this

world. It is, as we say, another dimension, where time and space as you know them do not exist. And this pool is as an entryway into that dimension, though it is only one of many entryways. You could even say that there is a door to this spiritual dimension within your own heart.”

Apocalyne closed her eyes as she tried to comprehend Trysten’s words, and picture the things whereof he spoke. And there within the recesses of her mind, as she closed her eyes to the world around her and opened them to plains beyond the realm of mortal existence, she discovered that Trysten remained, and still stood there before her. In that moment, thoughts and memories of anything else that would have cluttered this landscape of her inner consciousness receded to a vague and distant background. And then it was that Trysten spoke, in a manner that filled her being not only with the words being spoken, but also the very thoughts and emotions of him who spoke them.

*The time has come to tell you of the next mission.*

Yes, she said without words, and her heart raced at the emotions she suddenly felt welling up inside her. It was as if their very souls had become inseparably linked, and in that moment of oneness, her feelings were overwhelmed with a host of emotions such as she had never felt before.

*Do you fear anything?* his voice resounded in her mind.

“Sometimes. But there are times I feel I’m not me, it’s as if there is someone else within me. At those times I am not afraid of anything. I feel as if all the power of Light is at my disposal and I could fight and withstand any force.” There was a light in her eyes when she spoke, the excitement of a soldier going to his first battle.

“Then is there nothing you are afraid of? Are you afraid of Love?”

Apocalyne looked at Trysten, puzzled.

“Of all the instructions we have given you from beyond, you have followed each one exactly. But one you have been afraid to manifest, and that is the gift given to you by Charity, the Guardian of Limitless Love. Are you afraid of it?”

Apocalyne hesitated for a moment, trying to find the words to explain herself. “It’s as if part of me breathes it—then another part of me fears the weakness it might bring. I guess I don’t understand it, so I’m afraid of it.”

“If unselfish, Love can be a great power, a great force. The greatest kind of spiritual love renders you invincible to the powers of Darkness. Love for Truth is also an important love; it too is a weapon.”

“What about human love?”

“When it originates from the heart, and comes from beyond, it’s the most beautiful, magical thing.”

“So it isn’t a weakness?”

“Selfishness is a weakness. Pure Love is a strength, and, as I said, when that permeates your being, you become invincible. It’s that kind of love that makes people give their lives for others. That kind of love has no boundaries. You must remember that. In times like this world is coming to know now, it is Love that will heal the wounds that people have felt. In our dimension, all is Love. There is so much we want to give to your people, and those who know us must be the channels. Once the Love is flowing through you, this pure and perfect Love, it washes away the fear.”

Apocalyne nodded and was silent for several minutes, pondering all that he had said.

Finally, she mustered up the courage to ask, “And what of my next mission?”

Without opening her eyes to the physical world around her, she became aware that Trysten had stepped into the water, and was now standing in front



of her. He spoke no words, but she could feel his thoughts, and knew what was about to happen.

And so she stood still, as Trysten pulled the delicate white dress off of her shoulders. He lifted her up and then brought her gently into the waters of that mysterious pool. She leaned against him as he began to whisper into her ear.

“It is your destiny, and the will of the Father of Light, that you bear a son. He will have the heart of your people, that he might understand them, and yet he shall have the wisdom and strength of the Celestynes. He will grow with you for but a short time. Then he must be brought into the next dimension, where he will be taught and nurtured in the ways of Light, that he might be prepared for the days of the future. For this world shall soon pass away—and the history of it will be but a dream, the memory of it as but a moment in time. Will you do this thing, that the power of Truth and Light might be prepared to return to this world?”

“I will do anything for Truth,” Apocalyne answered without hesitation, turning and now opening her eyes to look deeply into his.

“For Truth,” he answered as he bent over to kiss her and stroke her soft body.

As Apocalyne closed her eyes once again, they sank down beneath the surface of the water, and she could hear Trysten’s voice speaking into her mind once more, *This is our Dance of Love—the Dance of the Angels. Such grace and elegance as the Beings of Light know cannot be performed among the crude elements of your world.*

Apocalyne nodded. Her eyes were still closed, enjoying the sensation of being held in the strong arms of this Celestyne being, and feeling the invigorating water stroking her face and hair.

“Open your eyes, Apocalyne. See the beauty of the sparkling, crystal clear water of Truth. Let it become

part of your soul, so you will never forget the purity and beauty of it.”

Slowly she opened her eyes and smiled in awe and wonder.

“‘Beauty’ doesn’t even begin to describe the splendor!” she said as Trysten floated back a moment from her embrace to let her enjoy the perfect beauty and freedom of movement there was to be found in this magical environment. The water was a pure and crystal blue, with rays of light of many shades sparkling and dancing through it.

“There’s music! I can hear such beautiful music! So peaceful, so heavenly!” she said, reaching out to catch rays of light that were piercing the water, and little crystals that were floating effortlessly past her gaze.

Admiring her graceful form under the water, Trysten stroked Apocalyne’s long hair that was dancing in the soft current. Embracing her, he whispered, “And this is only the beginning of the Dance of Love, the Dance of the Angels.” He kissed her again, and then they made passionate love, with the water around them as their bed, and the reflection of the stars above them as their blanket.

After what seemed like hours, but to the world still bound by time had actually been days—days swimming in what Apocalyne now had come to call the Crystal Pool of Truth—Trysten came splashing up through the surface, Apocalyne in his arms. She felt no remnants of the water on her, though the strength and clarity of mind she had received from it remained within her.

Setting her down on the side of the pool, and placing her garments on her, Trysten gave her one last kiss, and then took both of her hands in his. “I must go now, Apocalyne—but only from your sight. Remember, I am your Angel of Comfort. I will always care for you, and your little one as he grows within

you. Do not fear; no harm will come to you or the little one as you remain within this hallowed place, by the Pool of Truth, and in the Cave of the Rock. And when you need help, call me. The Father of Light will send me to you. And if ever you want to know something, then look into the Pool of Truth, and whatever the Father of Light wishes for you to know will be revealed there.”

He loosened his grasp of her hands and slowly disappeared under the surface. But she heard his voice, still, in her heart, *See? I may go from your sight, but will always be with you. You will always be cared for, as you always have been.*

Just then Apocalyne looked up to see a large desert bird flying towards her. She scooted back towards the mouth of the cave, for it was a fearsome-looking creature.

*Do not fear!* Trysten’s voice sounded in her mind. *It is sent with nourishment, and will do you no harm.*

With that, the creature swooped down and dropped a portion of meat and some bread by her side, before disappearing into the afternoon sky.

“Drink of the pool—it is more than just water, and you will need as much as you can drink.”

She looked down at the pool and cupped her hands to drink of its refreshing supply. It was as she had imagined—sweet and cool to the taste.

*The Crystal Pool of Truth, she mused. I’m imbibing Truth.* Thirsty as she was in the heat of the day, she drank to her fill and then retreated into the cool shelter of the cave to rest.



As time passed, she continued to drink of the pool, and the desert bird brought her meals each day. Her strength increased, and the child within her continued to grow.

One lonely afternoon, Apocalyne wondered what had become of Sean and the others. Remembering

Trysten’s words, that she could ask and then look into the pool, she did just that.

The surface of the waters appeared to move, and suddenly she could see Sean, clear as ever. Beside him stood a young woman, and there were about fifteen others of all ages in a dimly-lit room.

Sean spoke, “Seeing that all of us who have come seeking the Light have found one another, we know that there must be more who believe, but they are still out in the streets and corners of Ordyn. It’s a great risk, but we know that deliverance is for these souls as much as it is for our own. None of us should be afraid of what might happen to us, because the end of this world as we know it is coming, and it won’t be long before a new, more beautiful world of Light and Truth will replace it. So let us do what we can to seek out and bring together those who shun the works of Darkness, both here and in all the villages ’round about. Long live the Truth!”

“Long live the Truth!” the others repeated.

The view showed teams of two and three walking out of the dimly-lit room and into the streets. At last, after all the others had left, Sean and the young woman also went out into the streets.

Apocalyne’s view followed the two of them down the streets and alleys to what could be described as a catacomb-like area. The rooms were mostly underground with dim lights and candles. The only windows opened at the level of the sidewalk and were covered by slats of wood or material.

Sean and his partner gave a coded knock, and someone looked through a peephole. “Who’s there?” came a woman’s voice.

“Sean and Lyn,” came the reply.

The door opened quietly and a cautious woman let them in. They went down a flight of stairs that led to the underground chambers.

“Oh, I’m so glad you could come so quickly. Did

you hear about Amber?” The lady asked Sean and Lyn.

“We haven’t heard anything. What about her?” Sean replied.

“But I sent a messenger a short while ago. They didn’t find you?”

They both stopped and looked at her. “We received no message. We just decided that this would be our next stop.”

“Well, then the whispers have surely led you here by their own means!” the lady exclaimed as she clasped her hands together and tried to hold back the tears.

“What is it, Demyla?” Lyn asked, putting her hand on Demyla’s shoulder.

“Amber gave birth this morning to her third child. You know she was so very thin and sickly already. But it seems that rumors have gone about that she is one of us, and her relatives are looking for her. So she didn’t want to go to the doctors to have her baby delivered, because then her relatives could have found her, and most likely would have taken the baby away. Such a sad, sad thing.... She’s still at the hideout with her husband. I don’t know how much longer she’ll be able to...”

Lyn comforted Demyla. Lyn knew that Amber and Demyla were the best of friends. It had, in fact, been Demyla who had introduced Amber to them.

“We’ll go and see her, Demyla. Don’t you worry. The ways of Light will triumph.”

Demyla nodded and rested her head on Lyn’s shoulder.

Soon Sean, Lyn and Demyla were in the room with Amber and her husband, Jamin.

Jamin gently tapped Amber’s shoulder and said, “Demyla, Sean and Lyn are here.” He did not know Sean and Lyn personally, but he’d heard Amber speak of them, and though he had not yet been converted

himself, he was an open-minded man who hadn’t made his decision one way or another yet.

Amber opened her eyes and made a feeble smile when she saw them.

“She’s very weak. She can hardly talk,” Jamin explained, “but I know she is very thankful you’ve come. I am discouraged, but have faith that you can ask for divine help from that Celestial realm you speak of. It’s our only hope.” Jamin’s voice cracked and his eyes were dim with tears. “The children and I love and need her so much.”

“Let’s pray,” Sean suggested, and the four of them that were in the room knelt around Amber and pled for her healing.

After they were finished, Sean said, “She is in the hands of the Father of Light now. We just have to trust, and continue to pray.”

“Are you all right with the children, Jamin?” Lyn asked. She knew Demyla had a family of her own to care for back at her home, and wouldn’t be able to help them for long.

Jamin looked at her hesitantly. “I think I’ll manage. Thank you for everything you’ve done.”

Sean and Lyn looked at each other for a moment before Lyn suggested that they take the baby.

“Oh no, I wouldn’t want to impose on you. You have so much work to do already.”

“We’ll take him until Amber is better,” Lyn assured him.

He looked at Amber sleeping there so peacefully, and then back at them. “You know she’ll be better, don’t you? You have so much faith! I wish I had faith like that.”

“You can,” Sean assured him, and told him more about the faith that Amber had begun to have. There and then, Jamin made his decision.

“I’ll do my best to spread the word!” he said with a smile.

Demyla led the two back up the stairway. Lyn covered the baby in her arms with her headdress. The two of them hurried back to their home.

Then the vision faded, and Apocalyne found herself staring at the ripples of water in the Pool of Truth. She wiped a tear from her cheek. "You're doing wonderfully, Sean! My prayers have been answered!" she said, remembering that one night at Terrance's where she had prayed for his full commitment to the cause.

As the months passed, she would frequently ask for a glimpse of Sean and his burgeoning ministry in that city of Darkness, and she was never disappointed. She learned through these visions that Arthis and Lauryn had returned to help those in Kryppa after that first night of the festival. Sean had stayed and had found a good partner in Lyn. Together, along with all the others who had chosen the Light over the Darkness, they continued to spread the tidings of deliverance to as many as would hear.

This was an increasingly risky mission, and as time went on, Apocalyne was aghast and saddened to often see the lives of some of these dedicated, selfless souls cut short, as those of her parents had been. But she was comforted to know that they had escaped the perils of evil and gone on to a better place. The Children of Light who had not yet perished gave every ounce of their strength and love to help those in need.

The plagues and calamities foretold by the Planetyrs had also begun, though in her hallowed spot Apocalyne partook of them only in the visions of the pool. But they swept across the plains of Wylder, striking one town and then another as a punishment, no doubt, for all their crimes. Ordyn and the Children of Darkness were without doubt filling their cup of iniquity, and their lands were

now beginning to suffer the consequences of these actions. Father Ordyn had passed on to whatever terrors of the afterlife awaited him, and Merynda now proved to be far crueler to the Children of Light than he had ever been. But Apocalyne knew it couldn't be much longer before things would change, and that gave her great hope.

The shadows of Darkness shall seek to call  
Upon the wynds to quench  
The flame of Light,  
But the wynds shall turn, the Light shall be lifted upon it, and be saved.

- 25 -

## WINGS OF DELIVERANCE

The sun suggested it was about midmorning. Months had passed since Apocalyne came to the Pool of Light. Now, hot and tired, and great with child, Apocalyne decided to get a drink from the Pool of Truth. As she drank the first bit of water from her cupped hands, she sat back and looked at the water. Bubbles and waves disrupted the normally still surface, and Apocalyne stared at it in wonder.

“My dear Apocalyne...” Trysten’s voice pierced the stillness before he emerged from the surface. “The time has come for you to once again face the people. As you know, many of the Children of Light have perished at the hand of the evil witch Merynda and her fiends—though their grief is now ended and they have entered the next dimension. And now Merynda is planning another pagan parade, and the people of the plains will be gathered in Ordyn once again.

“Now that the Children of Light have spread their tidings further, and the people have all had their chance to be made aware of the unseen workings

around them, you must go yet once more to deliver the call for deliverance, for the darkest hour will soon be upon them. Prepare your heart, for the beings of Darkness in the caves to the far east of Ordyn have been set loose, and roam the plains freely within the hearts of those who have given themselves over to the Darkness, just as the beings of Light inhabit those who seek to rescue the undecided from the horrible fates that are yet to be seen.

“Merynda and the Children of Darkness on this planet have released these beasts of Darkness through their desires for evil, and now not even Merynda has control anymore. The Kingdom of Darkness rules, and the darkest hour is yet to come. We must rescue all those hearts who are yet trapped in their indecision.”

Apocalyne thought it strange that, with all the evil she had seen, that the darkest hour had not yet come, and that even after all that had occurred, some people had still not come to see the Truth clearly enough to make their decision.

“What you witnessed was only the beginning of sorrows. The beings of Darkness were released at the people’s decision to defy Truth and accept the lies. Now the Children of Darkness have but one last phase of horror before their night will come to an end. We must open the eyes of as many souls as we can before this tragic end comes.”

“I will do anything for Truth, Trysten—my only concern is that my strength will not carry me all the way to Ordyn. I feel this child—our son—might be delivered any moment.”

“You will be given great strength. I will carry you to the city of Ordyn, and no harm will come to you or the little one, for he is destined to rule when he is grown—and that time will not be long in coming. Come, let us begin our journey.”



The hours of being carried in the hot sun took

their toll on Apocalyne. Hot, weak and tired, she felt as if she had no strength left. It was now twilight.

“Apocalyne, worry not for the strength that you lack. It makes all the more room for the strength that we have to give you. You will not be alone. You never have been,” Trysten assured her as he put sandals on her feet and led her to the gates of Ordyn. “Remember, I am only going from your sight—not from your presence.” With those words, Trysten disappeared.

The cool evening wind brushed against Apocalyne’s face and ruffled the flimsy white garment she’d worn these many months—though it looked just as it had the night she first went to the cave. It seemed that the Cave of the Rock was a haven right between the two dimensions, and anything could happen there. It existed in the dimension of time, and yet was timeless in itself, as if it partook of the same Celestyne power that had formed the Pool of Truth next to it.

There was an eerie stillness in the city. It was the type of silence that precedes some great catastrophe and confusion that cannot be escaped from. Apocalyne walked through the city streets—Ordyn looked like a ghost town. Not a soul was in sight.

*Where is the parade?* she wondered to herself. She thought there was supposed to be a parade, but if there was one happening, it certainly could not have been anything like the one she’d gone to months earlier. In that day, the noise of feasting and revelry had echoed throughout the entire city. Now, only silence greeted her—and a strange smell unfamiliar to her senses.

Turning one corner, she gasped and jumped back. As if struck by some sudden plague, or felled in some massacre, bodies lay everywhere, in every position. The doors of some homes were open, and Apocalyne peered in, covering her nose at the putrid smell that filled the air and turned her stomach. It was as if the

spirits of death and war had swept through the city, taking the lives of as many as they could.

She slowly turned her head. She heard distant chanting. It was coming from the direction of the theater. She walked to the theater and, upon entering the doorway of the large enclosure, saw two men fighting in the center—a new form of sport and entertainment that had arisen in this vile city, and which now captured the fascination of its people as the peaceful dances of Jerol and Eryn once had in times long past and forgotten. The people were chanting an idolatrous chant, egging the men on.

Apocalyne pushed through the crowd and bravely walked into the center of the stage. The crowds looked on in wonder. The two men stopped their wrestling and looked at the pregnant figure walking towards them. One of the men began cursing at her, and the other stood and stared at her in silence.

“Pardon me for intruding. I must speak to you and the people who watch you.” Her voice was gentle, but firm and resolute. The man who was cursing lunged towards her, but she didn’t flinch, and the other man went forward and held him back, then took him to the side.

“You may remember me, or you may have forgotten that night many months ago when I asked you to make your choice between following the Darkness, or turning to the Light,” she called out to the crowds, who were looking on in amazement at this interruption.

A low murmur rose from the crowds. Apocalyne shouted all the louder, “I come to you one last time—in the name of the Beings of Light. Their hearts and hands of mercy are open to you, willing to take you and save you from the wrath that is to come—even after all the evils you have committed and all the curses you have brought down upon yourselves! The forces of Darkness are about to wreak their final

damnation upon this world, and will not spare any of you—all the less so if you have sold your souls to them. Their purpose in using you to destroy the Truth and life of peace that we once had has nearly come to an end—and when it has, your end will come with it, for you will be of no more use to them. Once destruction has come, you will all go with it! Therefore, I beg of you to turn to the Beings of Light. Let them deliver you from the destruction that is to come! This is your last chance. The war of the worlds has begun, and Darkness will be swallowed up—along with all you who choose to follow it. Here is your chance at deliverance—take it!”

Some of the crowd listened and believed, but for many, it was too late. They had chosen the dark side, and would not be persuaded. In a moment, the silence that had followed her last words was shattered by hideous shrieks that sounded as if they could not have come from a man. Indeed, they proceeded forth from those whose souls had been inhabited by the beings of Darkness, and at their cry, many became incited against this intrusion into their dark territory.

In a moment, the mob was upon her, but Apocalyne could not be seen. In the confusion of the moment, she had slipped out unawares and ran for her life into the deserted streets of Ordyn. She had been promised that no harm would come to her or her little one, but she knew she must do her part. But she could feel a strength flowing through her such as she knew could not have come from her own weary frame.

The mob, however, was little dissuaded by her disappearance. “Search the streets! She cannot be far!” a voice cried out. With that, the mob left, and the theater grew silent—but it was not empty. A crowd—albeit a small one—still sat silently on the floor, contemplating all they had seen. Behind them stood Sean and Lyn, who had observed the entire

spectacle.

They too had heard the call of the Celestynes to come to this festival, that it would be the last hour of decision for the people. After these many months of doing all they could to help open the eyes of as many as possible to the unseen workings around them, and bringing them to a knowledge of the Light, they wanted to see what would happen at this last hour. Many had already believed, and were gathered in Kryppa, where they remained safe from the workings of evil that had begun to devastate the regions around them.

Sean watched in amazement as he saw the dream he had had when they had lived peacefully in Kryppa coming to pass—that frightful nightmare that had worried him so many nights since. He closed his eyes to send up a prayer, and saw a vision of a desert bird ascending. He knew Apocalypse would be all right.

His surprise at seeing her great with child had not escaped Lyn, who squeezed his arm affectionately. “You love her, don’t you?”

Sean nodded.

“Can we not run down and try to save her?” she suggested.

“We will not stand a chance against the crowds. No, she is in good hands—as the Celestynes have assured us from the time she first vanished. They will not allow any harm to come to her. But we must do that for which we have been sent here—look at these people,” Sean pointed to the small crowd that had remained seated instead of blindly following the workers of Darkness. “They stand ready to follow us back to Kryppa. That is our task. Let us speak to them.”



Weary and fatigued, Apocalypse looked behind her. The searching mob had split up, and was combing the city. Though she had reached the outskirts, she could still hear voices not too far away.

“Which way would she have gone?” someone

shouted.

Apocalypse entered a nearby house. The door had been left open a crack. It was dark inside, and looked as deserted as the rest of the streets of Ordyn had been moments earlier. She went inside and sat down a moment to catch her breath.

“I don’t know if I can go on like this much longer, Trysten,” she said in a whisper, panting for air.

*It will be but a moment, then deliverance will come,* came the reassuring reply in her heart.

Relieved, she leaned against the wall and closed her eyes.

“Apocalypse?” a whisper startled her.

“Who is it?” she whispered a response, hoping to keep quiet so as not to attract the crowds who were still looking for her.

“Is it you, Apocalypse? This is Terrance. I’m at the end of the room. Come, make your way.”

She strained to see what was there, but she saw nothing. The darkness was too thick.

“How can I know?”

“Trust me, child. Don’t worry. When the crowds come for you, you can escape through this door beside me.”

She looked puzzled. *How did he know?*

She crawled over until her hands felt the stone frame of a bed. “Terrance? Is it really you?”

“Don’t touch me, child. I am dying—it is an illness of some sort.”

“But why? You ... you are a Child of Light. These diseases of Darkness should have no power over you.”

“It is not by the power of Darkness that I have been defeated. The Light is calling me home. It is my time to go to that blessed resting place beyond the dunes.”

“I ... I thought you were in Garss,” she whispered, her voice breaking for the tears that were welling up within her.



“So I was. I heard whispers months ago, telling me to go and help the Children of Light in Kryppa. I found Arthis and Lauryn. You remember them?”

Apocalyne nodded. “How are they? And why are you here?”

“You always had so many questions, didn’t you? Lauryn and I came here to help reach those who could still be reached, together with Sean and the others. Arthis remains in Kryppa. We helped for some time, until our days were completed.”

“Where is Lauryn?”

“She passed on already—some days ago. You knew her even better than I did. But we have both lived full lives, and even our illness did not allow us to suffer much. This world will soon come to an end, and then we can return, perhaps. When the new world is created, these sorrows will seem but a dream, and our troubles will have been worth it all.”

Tears ran down Apocalyne’s cheeks.

“Do not cry, my child. We will be with you always in heart. We will watch you from that world beyond. Now go. There is a secret door beside me. Light a candle that you might see, and that I might die in the warmth of its glow—as a true Child of the Light.”

Trembling, Apocalyne lit the candle beside Terrance’s bed and kissed his forehead. “If ... if you should see my parents in that place where you will go, send my love to them, please, Terrance.”

Terrance smiled. “That I shall do, my child. That I shall do.” And then he fumbled for something under his bed.

“For you, Apocalyne...” he said, handing her a pouch containing some papers that had been tied together, “messages from beyond for the very last of this dark, terrible era. I was instructed to write them down for the Tyler who was to come to us. I did not know when we first met that it was you—I should have, but I suppose my spiritual eyes were not as

open as my spiritual ears. But they are open now, so take these words that have been given for this time, for this dark hour. May they give strength and comfort, to you, and to all those that shall hear them from your mouth.”

Then Terrance closed his eyes and passed away peacefully. Apocalyne knelt down and wept. Suddenly she looked up. She could hear the crowds coming closer. Slowly, as her strength would permit, she pulled herself up to her feet and found the secret door Terrance had mentioned.

“The light! What’s that light?” Someone in the crowd shouted, seeing the candlelight in Terrance’s room. Then suddenly the ground trembled beneath their feet.

“What is this? The ground shakes!” voices began to call out, and people began screaming.

“We mustn’t forget the young witch! Be brave, you people! Darkness is on our side!” one of the ring-leaders cried, and the crowds followed him to the house where Terrance lay.

“The door is cracked open. She might be in there! Quick, search the house!”

Another tremor sent many of the people to the ground. But the Children of Darkness went on, driven by a frenzy, an inhumane—no, demonic—desire to catch this young woman who had dared to defy them.

And then it was that another group of searchers caught sight of her. Just about to turn a corner, she stopped and the ground beneath them trembled once more. Apocalyne and the crowds looked up to see one of the dark mountains to the east of Ordyn opening up, and spewing forth fire and great clouds of smoke high into the air.

“Behold, people,” she cried, “the time of destruction is at hand—and the time of deliverance for the Children of Light!”

With that, the deranged mob ran toward her.

Overcome with a peace that passed all understanding, Apocalyne looked up.

*How will I be delivered, O Father of Light?*

Just as the words left her lips, the crowd saw what appeared to be two large white wings unfolding from behind her shoulders. The crowds looked on in awe as she closed her eyes and rose up above them, and they watched her fly into the desert beyond the town.

Sean closed his eyes for a moment of inexpressible gratitude as Apocalyne flew to safety. Lyn looked on in wonderment.

Everyone's awe turned to terror as a stream of molten rock suddenly showed its trails emerging through the cracks of the Dark Hills beneath the exploding mountain. Moving forth slowly but surely, the red-hot tendrils of destruction snaked their way across the sands that led to Ordyn, and the rest of the Wylder plains.

"Go!" Sean called bravely to the small crowd he and Lyn had now gathered outside the theater, and to everybody else who could hear. "Go! Run through the wilderness to the town of Kryppa. It's your only chance!"

Obediently, each one of those who had opened their hearts to the Light ran towards the city gates, opened them and formed a band that ran relentlessly through the sand. The fierce desert wind and sand stung their faces, but no one felt it. They looked back as another great explosion sent its tremor rippling across the plains of Wylder. It looked as if the entire earth beyond the Dark Hills had opened up and was sending forth a flood of hot lava that now spilled forth from between the Dark Hills, and was running directly and rapidly towards Ordyn, and several other towns nearest the Dark Hills.

Everyone covered their ears as the horrible screams of terror arose from the city. Many of the wicked were caught in the stream of fire, and those not already

running to Kryppa now ran wherever they could to escape the fiery torment.

"Run, and do not look back! Stop not for a moment!" Sean urged the followers of the Light on. And so they ran—the men helping the women and carrying the children. It was daybreak before they reached the city of Kryppa. They were welcomed with open arms by those Children of Light who had already claimed their deliverance there.

They all stood and watched as in the distance a final great explosion blew fire hundreds of feet high, and then the volcano came to a dead but smoldering silence. It was a strange sight. The destruction seemed like a final judgment, yet the feeling pervaded that there was still more to come.

He shall grow among men, this Child of the Celestyes.  
He shall leave them, but only to return.  
His coming shall be hidden, His coming shall be seen—  
Uniting the divided as one.

- 26 -

## **THE CHILD OF THE ANGELS, AND THE RESCUE**

Meanwhile, Apocalyne had been taken back to the Cave of the Rock. All that night she labored and travailed, and with the dawn came deliverance. She held in her hands the son of promise. Apocalyne laughed through her tears at the beautiful babe that lay before her.

“I know not what the angels will call you, but I will name you Sun—a glorious ray of light after a long, dark night.”

The child returned her smile. Apocalyne took his chubby hand and rubbed it against her cheek.

“Let us go and bathe you in the Crystal Pool of Truth, my boy. You are certainly the most precious treasure I have ever had. Only I know that you are not just mine. You must go with the angels when they come for you.”

Sun stopped his gurgling for a moment, reflecting the sadness Apocalyne felt at the thought of him going

away for a time.

“But do not worry, my little one. You will only be gone for a short while, and then we will be together forever. The Celestynes have promised.”

Only a day had passed, yet Sun grew as if it had been a year. But Apocalypse was surprised at nothing, for she knew that though he had her heart, he had all the nature—and soon the wisdom—of a Celestyne. And the Celestynes knew no time.

That evening, when Apocalypse laid herself down to rest beside her slumbering Sun, Trysten’s voice spoke in her heart. *In the morn, you must take Sun across the dunes. Two Celestynes will come and take him, as I told you before. Shortly afterwards, the fifth angel and Celestyne Guard will come to ready you for the last part of your mission.*

“Will I see him again soon? Even in this short time, I feel as if I’ve known him for a lifetime.”

“All in time, Apocalypse. He will always be special to you, and you to him. But now is the time to be brave. There is yet one more hour before the dawn of the new world comes in its full glory; before the great, everlasting victory, when Truth and Light will reign freely in your world.”

Apocalypse closed her eyes in acquiescence. Soon she was fast asleep beside Sun.

Early the next morning, Apocalypse woke Sun up. “My darling boy, it’s time for you to return to the realm of the Celestynes.”

Sun nodded cheerfully. Apocalypse’s eyes were full of longing. She so wanted to stay with this child that she had borne—but she knew that this brief moment of surrender of her will would be rewarded with an eternity of Truth and Love, whose treasured existence had by this time all but faded from their planet. She hugged him tightly, and then they both stood up.

Apocalypse took the boy by the hand and walked the short distance between the Pool of Truth and the

Great Dunes that marked the beginning of the Celestial Zone. There was no one else in sight for miles around. They continued to walk for hours until they finally saw two figures approaching. They were Celestynes, to be sure. But not of the Celestyne Guard. Though they were similar to the first Celestynes that had appeared to Apocalypse that night long ago on the dunes, they were not equipped with armor and weaponry.

Apocalypse’s heart ached as Sun ran towards them. Their unusual, yet kind and benevolent jewels of eyes looked into hers. They were filled with love and compassion. One of them beamed a message into her heart, *Do not fear, little one. He will be well cared for, and we will never let him forget you.*

Apocalypse’s eyes filled with tears. Sun turned around and waved at her. She waved and blew him a kiss.

“Goodbye, my boy. May you grow into a strong and wise man.”

Sun smiled, and Apocalypse watched him and the two Celestynes disappear beyond the dunes.

She closed her eyes for a moment, and then felt a hand wiping the tears from her cheeks. Opening her eyes she saw the next Celestyne Guard Trysten had spoken of.

His curiously big—yet again, kind and caring—eyes looked into hers and emitted such trust and courage that Apocalypse felt at peace again.

“I am the fifth Guardian that you were told would come to you. I am Foresight, the Angel of Preparation. I am here to tell you of the rescue.”

Apocalypse looked at the being curiously. There was so much she didn’t understand.

He went on to explain. “There will be more storms and pestilence, and as you can see, the mountain of fire has not yet been put out. But inside you must have peace and strength, to help the others. Do you

have the messages that were delivered unto you in Ordyn?”

“Yes,” Apocalyne answered, thinking back to the pouch in the cave, and the messages it contained.

“These serve two purposes: the first is to instruct and strengthen you. The second is to help you fulfill the mission I have been sent to prepare you for. I am here to allow you to peer into the immediate future, so that you won’t be taken back by the things you will encounter, but so that you can help those who will be. Do you understand?”

Apocalyne nodded and looked into the being’s eyes, where visions of the near future flashed before her, much as she had seen visions in the eyes of the child in her dream so long ago. She shook as she watched the trauma and plight of those who had been deceived—yet had not hurt or harmed the Children of Light—and would turn to the Light as they saw its power. She saw how she should seek those out and bring them back to the city of Kryppa with the others, while the Celestyne forces rained righteous retribution on all those who, though having survived the eruption of the fiery mountain, continued to resist the Light.



Apocalyne awoke to find herself on the ground, her head on the lap of the Celestyne Guard.

“You must return to Kryppa now, and take the strongest of the Children of Light with you on this last mission of mercy, that you might save as many as you can. The mercy of the Father of Light is without end, and there are still some among the Children of Darkness who belong to the Light. When this is done, the time will come for your last mission.”

“This is not the last?” Apocalyne asked, a little overwhelmed by all that she had been chosen to do.

“You have yet to meet the sixth and seventh Guardians. But fear not. As your days, so will your strength be, Daughter of the Light,” the being said,

and then disappeared.



Apocalyne was glad to not have to be alone on this task. She returned to Kryppa with great joy, though also with heaviness of heart for what was to come. There was little time for fellowship of any sort, but the knowledge of having others beside her was a great strength. Sean, Lyn, Jol and Elliot were among those that went with her. Arthis stayed back to help care for those in Kryppa.

By the next morning, the team arrived at the site of what had once been the proud city of Ordyn. This was where Apocalyne had been led. Other teams had also set out to the remaining cities on the plains for the same purpose, but to Apocalyne and those with her fell the task of seeking among the cities that had fallen directly in the destructive path of the lava. And destructive it had certainly been. The streets of Ordyn now lay buried under a layer of lava which, though it had cooled in the cold night winds since the eruption, still emanated its own warmth. The flow of volcanic rock had stopped a short distance outside Ordyn, and gone no further, though it had also consumed several other towns nearest the edges of No Man’s Sand.

The volcano was still rumbling, even though the major explosions had finished. Ash filled the air, putting a dark blanket over the city even during the daytime. Tremors still shook the ground beneath their feet every so often, and a pungent smell filled the air, stinging their eyes and burning their noses. Each of them wrapped makeshift masks from their clothing around their noses and mouths. It was some time before they saw any people—that were alive, that is.

The team broke up into groups of two or three to scour the surrounding areas for survivors. Jol and Elliot accompanied Apocalyne. They came across a small makeshift covering where they spotted a young girl holding a little pot over a fire that remained from

the explosions days before. (There were little fires everywhere, emitting the strangest smelling smoke.) They crept over to where she was. Turning around for a moment, she saw them. Startled, she dropped her pot and went running.

"I'll get the pot," Jol whispered, knowing that food was pretty hard to come by, and they had frightened her. Apocalypse and Elliot went running after the girl. She was obviously going back to someone, perhaps her family—or part of her family, anyway.

The girl ran a long ways, and finally stopped at a small doorway to the remains of a broken-down building. There was no door, and it looked dark inside.

Apocalypse and Elliot waited for a little while before going to the door. Jol caught up with them, and in no time the three of them appeared at the doorway where the little girl had entered.

It was quite dark and dank within, and they heard a woman's gasp. As she walked towards the door they saw her face. She had on the remains of partying garments, and had obviously been part of the parade that was going on just before the volcanic eruption.

She had a hard and embittered look on her face as she hugged the little girl who stood beside her. "What have you come to do to us?" she asked, coldly.

"We've come from the city of..."

"I know where you've come from. You've come from Kryppa. I can read it on your faces. But what do you want?"

"We want to help you," Apocalypse said, taking the lady's arm.

She quickly pulled away and answered, "You can't help me. Look, I've lost my husband, and all I have left is my daughter. I'm just waiting to die."

"Let's go," Jol began, "it's no use..."

"No, wait!" Apocalypse interrupted him, and then turned towards the woman with a look of compassion in her eyes.

"I ... I know how you must feel. I, too, have known loss," Apocalypse responded, tears welling up in her eyes. "My parents, whom I loved more dearly than any other, were killed right in front of my eyes by the same hand of Darkness that has wrought such destruction on the people and home you loved."

The woman tried hard to retain her composure, but at this show of understanding and compassion, she burst into tears and took Apocalypse in her arms. "Thank you for coming out here," she managed to say at length, when she could speak again. "We didn't know if we would see anyone again."

"We were sent here to seek out those who still sought to turn to the Light."

The lady sobbed, "I should have made my choice earlier, but, yes ... if there's any hope for me and my girl, then please take us with you."

"There is!" Apocalypse encouraged. "Come, then, for we must go and find others. There must be more."

The woman nodded and went with them.

For seven days they searched high and low among all the rubble of what had once been prosperous towns and villages, bringing as many as would receive the Light with them to find yet more survivors. Many came, but oddly enough, some were so hardened against the Light that even with all that had happened, they refused to take the Light, preferring to stay in the ghastly and charred streets of the cities where they had enjoyed the pleasures of sin for a season. Still others, those who were despondent, and seemed without hope within themselves, would be encouraged by the words of the messages from Terrance that Apocalypse shared with them, and resolved to follow them to safety.

After the seven days, the small band began heading back towards Kryppa. It seemed there was little left that they could do.

"Sean!" Apocalypse called out as the team began

making their way across the desert sands that led to their home.

“What is it?” he asked.

“We must go east.”

“You mean ... to those Dark Hills and the mountain of fire?”

“Yes ... I just feel—I know—we are meant to go there.”

“We?”

“Yes, you and I.”

Sean turned to Lyn and the others whom he had been walking with, and motioned for them to go on ahead with the rest of the people.

“What do you think it is?” Sean asked.

“I’m not sure. I just felt that same drawing feeling that I’ve felt before when I was meant to go somewhere.”

“Let’s go then.” And the two of them began to ride in that direction.

It took many hours, even on their wylderbeasts, as the hardened flow of lava that streaked the plains made it difficult to navigate their way. Although there were a myriad of questions wandering through Sean’s mind about all that had happened to Apocalypse during the months they had not seen each other, he felt compelled not to ask them just now.

As they came nearer to the first range of the Dark Hills, they could see the huge mountain of fire looming before them. They realized that the mountain of fire rose up beyond what appeared to be a range of smaller rock cliffs and ledges, in between which the lava had made its path from the volcano beyond to the plains. Looking back, they saw that these ledges had somehow strangely directed the flow of the lava directly to Ordyn and the other nearer cities, as if the ridges had been placed there for that very purpose.

It was when they more closely inspected these strangely placed ledges and cliffs that Sean and

Apocalypse suddenly became aware of a figure standing atop one of the cliffs nearer to the volcano (which was still quite far from it, seeing it had withstood the force of the explosion). They squinted to see what or who it could be. Then Sean thought he recognized the figure. “It’s ... it’s Malysse!” he shouted.

In truth, it was the form of Merynda they saw, which, although it did not look like Malysse had when she had first appeared to Sean, was nevertheless a form by which Sean now inadvertently was reminded of her, being the same as the form of the goddess Ordyna.

Sean spurred his beast on, followed closely by Apocalypse. The heat from the smoldering volcano was blistering.

There she stood, tall and defiant as ever. The rock cliff wasn’t too tall for them to see her, though Sean quickly realized that it wasn’t Malysse that he saw. The figure he found himself staring at looked old and decrepit, though her features were instantly recognizable to Apocalypse, who knew that this was Merynda, the queen of Darkness whom she had seen in her visions by the pool of Truth. Already past her prime, Merynda had nevertheless aged even more in an incredibly short time. But it wasn’t just the aged look that shocked Sean and Apocalypse. She looked hideous and like an evil old witch. The former unrealistically smooth olive skin of her younger years was wrinkled and speckled. The jet-black hair was matted and gray. But the worst thing about it all was that she stood there, defiant and unbending, unrepentant of all the evil she was responsible for unleashing into their simple world. Her face was scrunched into horrible contortions. She was outraged by the way things had turned out.

Her eyes burned as she saw the two of them standing below. She shook her fists and screamed as loudly as she could. It was a raspy, demonic cry,

“What are you doing here? Have you come to see me dethroned and ugly?” Then she pointed towards the mountain. “I sold my soul to the spirits of the dark caves, to the Lord of Darkness. He promised me eternal beauty, riches, wealth and fame. He said that if I just bowed down to worship him and do as he instructed me, I would live as no other on this planet. I would have all that I wanted—all the glory, all the power, everything! But he deceived me! He deceived us all! Look at me now! He not only took away all he had given me, but he took away more. He took away my spirit, the beauty and strength of spirit that I once had when I was just a girl. Now I’m worse off than ever—barely recognizable as a human anymore. I look like something out of hell!”

At that, the ground rumbled. It was as if something within the volcano was telling her that it was enough.

“Do you hear that rumble, children? There are no more beings of Darkness there. They were all loosed many months ago to dwell in our cities, to possess those like me who sold our souls to the ways of Darkness, and through whom these creatures could do their dirty work. But now we are all gone. Now the Lord of Darkness, the Deceiver, rules everything!” Merynda stood dangerously close to the edge of the cliff.

“Come down from the cliff, Merynda. You might fall,” Apocalyne called out.

Merynda’s eyes lit up at the thought of falling. Apocalyne sensed it. Hearing Merynda speak so terribly about one whose service she had been in all these years, she thought there might be a chance of her being able to receive some sort of mercy and renewing, though that would be far away. So she called out once more, “Don’t! Come down, please. All is not lost! The Deceiver has not won! The Power of Light will overcome the powers of Darkness. Turn now

from the evil that has deceived you, and plead the mercy of the Father of Light.”

But Merynda was clearly gone. All she could think of was escaping from the torture she felt.

“No!” Apocalyne called out, as Merynda threw herself from the cliff. Sean and Apocalyne turned away, wondering what terror awaited her in the afterlife she would be sent to.

Strangely enough, it suddenly began raining. Steam rose from the water’s contact with the molten lava still hot around them. Sean and Apocalyne quickly ran for cover towards a small enclosure beneath a rock some distance away.



When the gates of Time and Eternity stand open together,  
When the Mediator brings that which shall bind the two worlds together,  
The Presence of the Shadow shall grow stronger.  
For the Light must needs diminish, that the Darkness be drawn forth.

- 27 -

## THE LAST MISSION

By the time they reached the enclosure, they were completely soaked. Their clothes were filthy and soiled with polluted air and the refuse they'd come in contact with in their work on the charred and ash-covered plains. Apocalyne and Sean were silent for some time, just looking out at the rain that was falling hard as ever.

Then Apocalyne broke the silence, "It's good to see you again, Sean. I'm so thankful you could come with me, though I don't know why we were meant to come here."

"Don't look at me. I don't either. But I'm glad we're together."

"Perhaps it was just to see Merynda and give her a last chance, or to hear what she had to say about her life, and the Lord of Darkness."

There was more silence, before the two of them yawned. They each managed a feeble smile—for not much more seemed fitting after all that had happened—and decided to rest. Apocalyne pulled out

the few creased papers that Terrance had given her, and again read the messages of comfort and assurance. They told of a beautiful world to come—a Celestial reign of Love, Light and eternal peace. The words flooded Apocalypse's heart with hope, and she fell asleep thinking and dreaming of that world to come. Little did she know how much power these simple words of faith she had shared with others would give her in the final battle still to come.

Some time later—Apocalypse wasn't sure how long—she woke up. Sean was still asleep. Beside her stood two Celestyne Guards.

"You are at the threshold of your last mission. We are the Guardians of Vigilance and Strength, and we have come to prepare you."

Apocalypse was speechless. She could only nod. She had been so tired and worn, and now another battle was before her.

"If I knew not that this was indeed the last mission, I do not know that I could find within myself the strength to go on any longer," Apocalypse said.

"That is why the days were counted out. They were shortened that you might endure unto the end. Are you ready, child?"

Apocalypse nodded.

"Hold your head up high. The time has come for you to be fitted with all the power of the Celestyne Armory."

At that, within their hands appeared various articles of armor, such as Apocalypse had seen on the earlier Celestyne Guards that had appeared to her. She looked at them with awe.

One then placed a helmet over her head, while the other braided her long hair. The helmet covered her entire face, except for two holes which revealed her beautiful almond eyes.

Then came the white flowing gown of the Celestyne Guard, followed by the breastplate.

"Why white?" Apocalypse asked.

"White is for the purity of the cause of Truth; the breastplate is to shield your heart and make it brave so that you might channel all your strength to fighting the Enemy of Truth and Love, the Deceiver and Lord of Darkness. For he will come to Wylder in all his power and grandeur, and take upon himself the form of the great dragon, through which he shall seek to destroy the last vestiges of Truth and Light from what he believes has become his exclusive domain. Therefore you must ready yourself to challenge him, and for this, you will have to be equipped with all the power of the Celestyne realm. The helmet will be your deliverance, preserving the Truth that you hold within you—and protecting your mind from the wiles of his deception. The covering on your feet represents the Truth that you and your fellow believers have spread to others. Also put on these white gloves that you be not sullied with the filth of the Deceiver."

"Most importantly," added the second Celestyne Guard, putting the sword in its sheath around her waist, "it is with this weapon of Truth that you must strike the Deceiver's heart. When this Truth pierces his heart, the battle will be over. He knows this too, which is why he has fought so tenaciously to rid Wylder of any trace of Truth. And this last battle will be a fight unto the death."

"Lastly," continued the first Guard, "hold out your arm that I may fit you with this shield. This will protect you against all that the Deceiver will spew out of his foul, fiery mouth. Hold up this—your utter, undying confidence and belief in the Truth, and it will protect you from being stunned by whatever weapon he should attempt to use against you."

The two Celestynes stepped back to get a last look. They both nodded with approval.

Apocalypse looked down at herself. "But ... but how will I know how to use these things?" Although she

had beheld the armor before, the weaponry was entirely unfamiliar to her.

“You have already used them,” the first Guard answered, “as you stood strong in the face of evil, and defied the forces of Darkness. Only now, the battle shall take place within your own dimension.”

“You have nothing to fear,” the other Guard added, “so long as you hold on to our presence within you, just as the presence of the first Guards within you gave you strength to accomplish the first missions. Just so will we be manifested within you. Vigilance will protect your mind and heart from the snares the Deceiver would cast you in, to get you to doubt the very Truth you have upheld thus far. And Strength shall empower you to stand against this Deceiver with all the power and might of the Celestyne forces that is embodied in the armor we have placed upon you, and place within your hands the knowledge of battle that is already within your heart.”

“Only trust, and forget not the Truth for which you are fighting,” the first Guard now continued. “The power of Darkness has overtaken your world, and so within your world it must be defeated. This is your final mission. Go now. Your beasts await you outside the cave. They know where to go. They will carry you and your friend. The Father of Light and all the forces of the Celestynes shall be with you. Be brave and relentless in this, the final battle of Truth against the Deceiver.”

*A sadness overwhelmed their souls when they awoke to find  
The world they loved, the world they knew, was lost, was left behind.  
The desert sands below their feet, the empty skies above,  
Would be their home, to make their own, with selfishness or love.*

- 28 -

## **DRAGON, THE DECEIVER**

It was hardly midday, yet the sky was a deep red. Ominous clouds circled the sky, as if heralding some great event. And a great event it would indeed be. The people of Kryppa looked at the sky and prayed that whatever was to come, that their lives would be saved. None of them knew what was looming on the horizon, but whatever it was, they knew it would come upon them soon.

Suddenly the ground beneath their feet trembled. Those under shelter came running out of their houses momentarily, to see what was happening. Their eyes all fell on the distant and smoldering volcanic mountain that had caused so much terror, confusion and death only days before. It shook violently, as if some sleeping beast had been awakened, and was filled with fury.

Several more tremors shook the land. The mothers took their children and ran for shelter.

“Come out, women and children!” Arthis called out. “Shelter isn’t safe. The houses might collapse upon

you. We must brave these quakes where there are no structures that could threaten our lives!”

Quickly, the city’s residents, along with the many refugees from the other cities who had come to escape the hands of Darkness, went running to the large clearing that Arthis had pointed out. There were only a few dry trees and cacti around. Many sat silently, holding each other in their arms, while their eyes were fixed on that volcanic mountain in the distance. Its rumbling grew all the louder, and many covered their ears.

Like something out of a nightmare, a giant dragon lifted his head from behind the smoking mountain. Though it was a great distance off, its figure filled the sky behind it, and it seemed only a few steps away—and it did not take long for him to begin those steps. The dragon now lifted himself up, and like a child stepping over tiny toy blocks beneath him, the beast stepped across the Dark Hills that had always stood as a hedge between the plains and the imagined evil behind them.

Then he began to grow, until his abominable head seemed to almost touch the lowest clouds. They could see his large, reptilelike body, covered in red and green scales, and his unrealistically large tail fanning the smoke that was still rising from the now dwarfed volcano behind him. Swiftly it began making its way towards Kryppa.

The women and children began screaming. Arthis held out his hands, motioning for them to be silent. “Let us pray! Let us pray for victory, and not give ourselves over to fear—for that shall only be the victory of Darkness.”

Obediently, the women and children quieted themselves and prayed as if they knew it was the only thing that could save their lives.

They had been praying for less than a minute when they saw Sean and Apocalyne racing towards them

on their wylderbeasts. They would have thought it a strange sight to see these beasts carrying themselves as fast as they were at that moment, but none did, their minds only upon the terror that loomed in the distance. Then Apocalyne’s beast stopped, while Sean’s continued forward until it reached the crowd of people in the open clearing.

Apocalyne dismounted as the villagers stood and watched her in awe. She was dressed in a strange suit of armor such as they had never seen, and now began walking towards the distant dragon. Deceiver, the dragon, slowed his approach. Then his vile eyes lighted on Apocalyne. Sean, whose beast had not stood still until it had reached the other villagers, now leapt forward, wanting to go and join her, but Lyn stopped him.

“Sean, look at the armor that she has been given, and the way she walks bravely towards that beast. This is her destiny. You weren’t meant to do it. If you go, you will be giving your life, but saving no one’s. Let her do what she was called and chosen to do.”

Sean ceased to struggle. He knew Lyn was right. Laying aside his manliness for a moment, he broke down and wept. “Why you, Apocalyne? You’re so gentle and young and full of life—yet all the while so brave and courageous.”

A soft and familiar voice echoed in his mind, *This was My choice. Because of her weakness, the Deceiver will think her an easy victory—and in his moment of glee, she will rise again and cut him to the heart. For it is not her strength that she relies upon, but Mine—the strength of the Truth. The Truth shall set her free.*



Apocalyne’s heart began pounding faster and faster as she neared the dragon—and the dragon neared her—his every footstep causing the ground to tremble beneath him. It did not take long for the two to meet. Beads of sweat formed on her forehead, and her eyes

began to sting with the poisonous smoke and fumes that filled the air around the dragon.

The dragon reared its ugly, venomous head and hissed at her. His evil mouth looked like he had already swallowed up her victory and was gloating over it.

Suddenly the dragon spoke and his voice thundered across the land, "You foolish little girl! What do you have to counter my strength that you come forward so bravely? You are full of courage, but that is only enough to help you die honorably!" And with that, he laughed hideously.

"I have the Truth—and that is more than enough to defeat you!"

"Truth?!" Deceiver roared, and a beam of fire shot out of his mouth.

Apocalyne held up her shield, which magically deflected the flames.

The dragon laughed gleefully again before spewing out another rod of fire. Apocalyne again raised her shield to deflect the flames, but the impact threw her to the ground.

"You're no match for me, you silly girl!" he hissed.

Quickly she got up and answered him with a challenge. "You're no match for the Truth, by which I live!"

"Don't say that word again or I won't even humor your desire to be victor over me. I'll just kill you with one thrust!" He stomped one of his scaly legs, shaking the earth and sending Apocalyne to the ground once more. Another blast of fire proceeded out of his mouth before he laughed eerily.

Apocalyne mustered all the strength she could and jumped to her feet.

"You tempt me!" he roared once more. The blast sent her to the ground again, followed by another breath of fire. The dragon looked at her and laughed again. The laugh was deep, and the sound of it

rumbled across all the plains, and seemed to come echoing back down upon them from the sky.

While he laughed, Apocalyne looked beside her and saw a huge rocky cliff, with steps carved into the side. It had not been there before.

"The Celestynes! They are helping me!" she exclaimed. Exhausted as she was, she ran up the steps. Soon she was eye to eye with the foul beast. His head was thrown back all the way, eyes closed, and he was still cackling, thinking the last strong blast of fire must have injured her too greatly to allow her to rise up again.

The dragon opened his eyes just as she reached the top of the cliff. Surprise and fury overwhelmed him.

"Long live the Truth!" she said.

"If you valued your life just a little more, you wouldn't have said that awful word," he growled.

"Long live the Truth!" she repeated, screaming it out with all her might.

The dragon uttered such a roar that it threw everyone in Kryppa to the ground. Apocalyne, too, was shaken from the cliff, and fell down onto the ground, far below. Her motionless form lay there, the sword still sheathed and around her waist, unused. The people in Kryppa looked on, trembling and praying.

"And without hardly a fight!" the dragon hissed and laughed gleefully. He picked her limp body up with one of his reptilelike claws.

"You see!" he roared at the people in Kryppa, holding Apocalyne's form in the palm of his claw. "I am victor! I, Deceiver, the Dragon, have conquered the Guardian of Truth! The planet of Wylder is mine, and no one shall stand against me!" He lumbered over in the direction of the villagers, and the tremors of his footsteps could now be felt rumbling under the very foundations of Kryppa. The people looked

dismayed as they saw Apocalyne's silent form held helplessly in the clutches of the Dragon.



Apocalyne opened her eyes. She felt weak, but at the same time felt a strange warmth creeping over her body. She looked at herself. She was still clothed in her Celestyne Armor. Her sword hung sheathed at her side. The shield lay next to her. But as she looked around, she could not tell where she was, and she struggled to remember how she had gotten here.

"Where am I?" she questioned aloud, but her words faded into nothingness. She attempted to stand up, but the movement instantly filled her with pain, so that she sank back down next to her shield.

The comfortable warmth began to cover her body once again, and she found her thoughts drifting.

*That's right. Go to sleep. The battle is over.* The words entered Apocalyne's mind as if they were being spoken by some being residing within her. *Rest in the warmth, in the comfort. Let go. There is no more need to fight, to struggle.*

Her eyes began to close. Somehow she knew she was not to give in to this comfortable feeling of helplessness, this numbing but soothing sensation creeping over her body, but yet she felt powerless to resist it, nor could she feel any desire to.

Suddenly she was jolted into wakefulness. A being of Light stood before her, in the familiar and human-like form of a Wylder, though its features were hard to discern.

"Rise up!" it commanded. The voice was a masculine one, and it spoke with tones of great urgency, though it also communicated a deep concern.

"Where ... where am I?" was all Apocalyne could think to ask.

"You lie on the border between life and death, between time and eternity. But the Darkness has

taken you captive. You must not give in. The battle is not yet over. The victory is yet to be won."

"But I cannot move..." she haltingly tried to explain.

"That is why you must. You cannot give in to this feeling, or the Darkness will have won. If you let go, you will die, and the battle will be lost. The Truth shall be driven underground, and hidden from the sight of those who shall likewise fall under the spell of Darkness. Then all we have striven for shall have been in vain, and we shall have to try again. But how many will languish in darkness until that day for lack of Truth?"

"Tell me what I must do," Apocalyne pleaded. All that she had fought for, the path of life she had chosen to follow, the message of Truth she had chosen to represent, it all came flooding back into her consciousness.

"The Darkness must be defeated once and for all. The dragon must be killed, and the power of Darkness that rests within him must be destroyed. It is yours to bury this sword of Light and Truth into its darkened heart, and it is ours to channel all the powers of Truth and Light you shall unleash to overpower the Darkness that it stands for. It is a battle we must fight together, and only together can it be won. We cannot win it of our own selves. Nor can you, with such a small weapon, defeat this great dragon. But together the power of victory is ours to command."

With this, the being placed his hands upon her chest, and Apocalyne felt a surge of strength rush through her body. The darkness that had surrounded them dissipated, and was replaced with light and visions of glorious color. The being reached out its hand, and helped her stand.

"Who ... are you?" she asked, as she found herself gazing into the eyes of the being who had helped her.

"I am one who stands between your world and

mine,” was his only response. “But go now, for the time has come. The Darkness is about to be defeated.”



As the people of Kryppa watched, it appeared that Apocalyne began to move again. At first it seemed to be because of the motion of the Dragon’s approach, but then they saw her sword being drawn. The people rejoiced in their hearts, but remained anxious. Their prophetess was alive, but so was the Dragon, and in the physical it appeared obvious who was the stronger of the two. At the moment, Apocalyne was still cupped in one of his claws that he held close to himself, as if it clutched some valuable treasure.

The Dragon was so distracted with his victory that he did not notice that Apocalyne was no longer dead—if, in fact, she ever had been. Whatever the case, she had been given another chance. Just as the form of his giant reptilian body loomed over the village, Apocalyne lifted the sword for all to see, and then thrust it into the dragon’s heart, yelling with all her might for all to hear: “Long live the power of Truth!”

At the same moment, the sword began to glow and sizzle with streaks of energy that instantly began to creep across the creature’s entire body. The Dragon was stunned. He shook violently as the power of Light began to constrict him, and Apocalyne turned to jump to safety before he fell to the ground. The ground was dangerously far beneath her, but she chose rather to take her chances jumping than risk being buried under this monstrosity of evil when it fell.

“Please help me!” she whispered as she took her final leap as far to the side as she could. Unseen to her, a giant hand took hold of her and let her gently, though not slowly, down to the ground. Just as she stood up, the earth shook with a tremendous tremor. Deceiver had fallen to the ground. Exhausted and wounded, Apocalyne collapsed at the spot where she stood.

The people of Kryppa watched in awe as Deceiver, the Dragon, lay dead—defeated by the Truth. “Long live the Truth! Long live the Truth!” the shouts arose from the now jubilant onlookers.

Unseen to the people (for the large dragon lay between her and them), Trysten and the last two Celestyne Guards appeared at Apocalyne’s side. She was unconscious. As the Guardians of Vigilance and Strength stood beside her, Trysten knelt down and took her helmet off. Stroking her colorless forehead he whispered, “The battle has been won, Apocalyne. It was not without great difficulty, but the battle was won. You gave your life, and it was given back to you. There is no greater power than unselfish love, and love for Truth. And such love renders you invincible to the powers of Darkness. Remember?”

Just then color returned to her face and she opened her eyes. “Where is the Deceiver?”

Trysten pointed over at the lifeless form of the huge beast behind her, and Apocalyne smiled and faintly whispered, “The Truth!” before closing her eyes once more.

The lands were green, the skies were blue, the ancients have all told.  
The days were long, the nights were sweet, in long ago time of old;  
But left behind it had to be, the ancients have all told,  
Until some day they would return, as long ago time of old.

- 29 -

## THE CELESTIAL CONCLUSION

The two Celestyne Guards lifted Apocalyne to her feet. Still weak, she leaned against Trysten, who held her up.

“Faint not, Apocalyne. Look up, for your deliverance is but a moment away!” He pointed to a bright glimmer of Light that was growing just beyond the Great Dunes.

A Voice thundered across the plains, “Let the Light of Truth flood the land.” The Light reached out, claiming every corner of the plains—and indeed, of the entire planet—with its gentle glow. Everything in its path turned to beauty. The Light swept across the dragon, and he disappeared, flowers blooming where he had been. The rubble and ruins of Ordyn and its neighboring cities in the distance were immediately transformed into softly rolling hills. The Dark Hills and the volcanic mountain still visible behind them remained, though these too underwent a transformation: they were crowned with majesty. They would remain, to remind everyone of the former



things, which would be no more now that Truth, Light and Love reigned supreme.

As the Light swept over people, they too became wholly changed. The torn and soiled garments were replaced with brilliant Celestyne ones, and each person was filled with inner and outer beauty. Each soul became as it would be at its full potential.

While everyone looked around them in awe at the unspeakable glory that filled their lands and hearts, wiping away any traces of the Darkness that had threatened their lives, the loving Voice of the unseen Spirit of Light thundered through the lands once more. The Voice held an indescribable power—a mixture of great majesty, compassion and sympathy, and the beauty of a thousand voices blended harmoniously.

All creatures knelt down before the brilliant Light that emanated from beyond the dunes—the Light that had transformed their world. It was a moment that could not be spoken of; the Light and Love that shone from the dunes melted their hearts together and all anyone could feel was love, joy and peace.

Then a commotion was heard from the direction of the dunes. Everyone lifted up their heads to see hundreds, if not thousands, of Celestyne beings, Guards, and Wylder spirits moving towards them. It was a moment filled with more excitement than anyone had dreamed of! Loved ones were reunited, old friends rediscovered, and bereaved families united once more.

Jerol and Eryn came running towards Apocalyne, arms outstretched. The three shed tears at all that had happened since Jerol and Eryn had passed into the Celestyne realm. Words were superfluous then. Only embraces and tears could express all that was in their hearts.

No one knows how much time passed before everyone was drawn to that Light beyond the dunes.

It seemed to have some magnetic force—like a father's outstretched arms, beckoning his beloved children home.

When everyone reached the dunes, they stopped in astonishment. They had thought that nothing could be more beautiful than their new planet, but they were wrong. The indescribable glory that decorated the Celestial Zone was beyond compare.

After a few moments of reverence, the crowds of new Celestyne beings—the former Wylders—walked the crystal paths of Light. No one knew where they were going, but all were drawn in the same direction. In the middle of the Celestial Zone stood a huge crystal dome with flowers and jewels of rare beauty at its base. Around the dome, coming from the base, were seven transparent tubular passageways, each with small stairways in them that led up and in to the dome, which looked much like a bubble, the outer rim of which was comprised of what we might describe as cocktail lounges. The center of the dome was occupied by a circular table of gigantic proportions, large enough to seat everyone in one great circle. Soft music filled the air.

Then, in a form familiar to all Wylders, that of their own human image, appeared the great Spirit and Father of Light in the midst of the dome. To His left sat the Goddess of Light, Ayleen. On His right sat a mysteriously handsome young man—the Prince of Light.

Everyone was seated, and several Celestyne beings went around the circle, distributing necklaces to each person in attendance. Others distributed refreshments. Each necklace had its own uniquely shaped crystal pendant with a new and Celestyne name for its owner inscribed upon it.

The Prince of Light raised His goblet and proposed a toast to the Truth. Everyone raised their glasses in response. “To Love,” he continued, “and to a new

world!”

After a splendid feast, many people retired to the aforementioned cocktail lounges, which were now softly lit for relaxation and conversation. In the center of the dome, the large circular banquet table had disappeared, leaving a clearing for those who wished to dance.

Apocalyne stood beside Trysten, and motioned in the direction of the Prince of Light. “Who is that man? I...” Apocalyne paused, searching her memory for a moment, and then continued, “He appeared to me when I was battling the dragon. Even then, I felt as if I knew him, but I do not.”

“Do you not recognize him, Apocalyne?” Trysten asked.

She shook her head.

“It is Sun—the Prince of Light.”

Shock, elation and emotion welled up in Apocalyne all at the same time. “I wondered where my precious baby was, my dear boy! But he is no longer my dear little boy, is he? He has become the Prince of Light!” Forgetting all the dignity that might have been fit for such a figure of Celestyne royalty, and yielding entirely to her motherly love, Apocalyne ran over to where Sun was standing. Beside him she looked as if she could be his sister—his younger sister, at that.

“Do you remember me, Sun?” she asked excitedly. In the emotions that rushed through her, she forgot for a moment that he had already appeared to her, and saw him only as her child whom she had not seen since his infancy, and who had grown so much in but these few days.

“How could I forget my beautiful mother’s face?” he said affectionately, and they threw their arms around each other.

“You’ve grown so much! I ... I missed your whole childhood! How did it happen?”

“We Celestynes are not affected by time as you

knew it. There is no time for us. We only know eternity. Thus I lived all the ‘years’ of my childhood in what would seem but a few days to you.”

“It’s hard to understand, but I know it will become clearer to me. I’m just happy to be reunited with you!”

“And I with you!”

“What a glory that you were able to spend all of your childhood growing up in this beautiful place! Tell me, who cared for you?”

“I was taught by the Celestynes, the Guardians, as well as the Goddesses!”

Apocalyne looked into Sun’s eyes with admiration. She was speechless.

Sean’s attention was no doubt drawn to this strange reunion. He knew that Apocalyne had been with child, but he did not imagine that the man she was now speaking to could have been her son. He gave a tender kiss to Lyn and excused himself.

Sean tapped Apocalyne on her shoulder and she spun around.

They threw their arms around each other, and embraced for quite some time.

“Where is that beautiful woman who was with you before, Sean?” Apocalyne asked curiously. Though they had been together not too long before, it had hardly been the time for asking questions.

“She’s just over there,” he said, pointing in the direction of Lyn. Feeling as if he owed some sort of explanation, he continued, “After you disappeared, I ... I began to see visions as well, and hear the voice of the Celestynes in my heart.” Sean looked down, a little embarrassed. Then he caught a glimpse of Lyn again, who smiled at him, and that gave him the courage to continue. “I continued the ministry of spreading the Truth. Lyn was one of the first people I met that would actually listen to me, and one of the first to join the ministry full-time. We became close companions, and...”

"I know! I'm so happy for you, Sean!" Apocalyne encouraged, and squeezed his arm affectionately.

Sean scratched his head for a moment, still adjusting to the supernatural realm and wondering how she knew.

Their embrace was interrupted by two smaller-looking Celestyne beings who came out of nowhere, sounding their trumpets. Everyone formed a semi-circle and waited respectfully for what was to happen next.

A golden veil to one side of the room parted, and in walked the Captain of the Celestyne Guard. Everyone bowed low in reverence.

"There are those standing here who have served faithfully as the Warriors of Light. There are those who gave their lives in service to the Light. Others suffered cruelty at the hands of the forces of Darkness. You have all earned your citizenship in the new world of the Celestynes well. Yet at this moment we want to honor our Defender of the Truth, the one who represented us in defeating Deceiver, the Dragon."

The two small beings approached Apocalyne, who, startled, obediently followed their beckoning and knelt before the Captain of the Celestyne Guard.

The Captain proclaimed, "You will now be a part of the Celestyne Guard. There will be much to learn of the Celestyne way, but I know you shall learn most quickly. Serve the cause of Truth well as one of our faithful warriors."

He bent low and kissed her forehead and when he arose, she was girded with all the weaponry and armor that the other Celestyne Guards were fitted with.

Apocalyne was uneasy for a moment or two. She looked around at those familiar, yet still peculiar, faces of the Celestyne Guards—the first of whom she had met long ago on the dunes. She felt strangely out of place. Reading her mind and heart, as she scanned their faces, they all looked deep into her eyes and

embraced her in spirit.

"Let me return you to the enjoyment of the evening. Long live the Truth, my people!" the Captain called out.

"Long live the Truth!" everyone echoed.

Jerol and Eryn hugged each other and smiled at Apocalyne. They were so proud of her. They had all fought the battles that had been set before them—and had won.

Apocalyne turned and walked back to Trysten, who put his arm around her. Suddenly she heard a voice in her mind. It was Sean, who had discovered himself equipped with this new and nicely private form of Celestyne communication.

"Speaking of truth, Apocalyne, you'll have to inform me of all that happened while we were apart—that young man you were talking to, as well as your new handsome Celestyne friend, and anything else that took place! We all have a lot of catching up to do!"

She turned and looked for him in the crowd. There he was, dancing closely with Lyn. He turned and winked.

Apocalyne winked back. *Someday, Sean. Someday I'll tell you the whole story!*