



**The Eoss Trilogy**  
**by Lena Chere**

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## **Preface**

You can now read all instalments of the Eoss Trilogy combined into one volume. They are visionary occult fiction influenced strongly by chaos magic and by other esoteric systems.

Platara Mountain Volume 1

Mount Clexa Volume 2

Silver Manes volume 3

Heather of Heather Bay prequel

Cover painting by Justin Kingsley Pitonak

Lena Chere also writes as Candy Ray

# **Platara Mountain**

**by Lena Chere**

**Eoss Trilogy, Volume 1**

## **Dedication**

With gratitude to all the Facebook groups that have influenced this story.

# Chapter 1

“Eoss isn’t a comfortable friend; she belongs to the chaos, and she stirs things up.”

Alexandra nodded. She was sitting on her mother’s knee wearing a white nightgown, and she had been trying to explain to her mother about the other world.

The world she saw in her visions was one where people hurried along pathways made from grey stone slabs, and shiny metal shapes whizzed by on the other side of the paths.

Twelve years later it was all the other way around. Alexandra lived on Earth, in the world she had seen in her visions, and she remembered having been somewhere else up to the age of four. But the details had escaped her except for one name: Eoss.

She looked up ‘Horse Goddess’ in the public library and found Epona. It was Epona, not Eoss who was the horse goddess. Unlike Eoss, she wasn’t a horse herself, and officially she was no longer worshipped. Cowboys in wild west films said ‘hoss’ which sounded closer to Eoss, but the correct word was ‘horse’ to rhyme with ‘course.’ Horses for courses.

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Eoss was galloping across a field in the world Alexandra had forgotten. Someone had asked for her help to restore his settlement, and because she dealt with order as well as chaos she wanted to help. When she arrived, the settlement was all scattered wattle and stone where the huts had been torn down, and clouds of dust lingered from the smashed boundary walls. There was grit in the air which scratched the face and nostrils of anyone there who breathed.

Eoss sought for people, to whom she would say, “Build! Start now and build!” Although it is order when you build, chaos comes first and levels the place to rubble so that its complement, new building, can begin.

She headed for the stables, and mercifully there were no horses left in them dying of hunger and thirst. There were no human beings around either.

If the humans had gone, and had left some horses trapped in stalls, Eoss didn’t know whether the laws under which she operated would have allowed her to unbolt the doors. She was what is known as an egregore, but she had not been developed from a servitor. A group of people had conceived her right from the start as a strong entity who serves many.

This group knew one another only on what was called 'the internet' in that other world, the Earth.

Eoss had come here because there was no barrier to her passing through the vortices that lie between universes, and she felt drawn to this particular universe. Then one day Sandra, her rider, had somehow travelled to Earth. Once she had arrived there, she was from that time called Alexandra.

Eoss had no idea how her rider had moved from one universe to another, and it was perplexing the way those who called her Alexandra thought she had been there all her life instead of only from the age of four. Eoss made no attempt to move her again because she herself could gallop in both places, and as she did not understand the strange forces that had moved Alexandra, she thought it best not to interfere. Yet she was saddened to observe that Alexandra often felt lost in that other world.

So now Eoss was a riderless horse, but she was far from lost. She always knew where she was going as she knew today, directed by a prayer rather than by a bridle towards the human being who had called on her.

She found him sheltering in a damp cave with the others from his family: a woman and three young children who didn't look as if they could survive for long without better shelter.

"Build!" Eoss called out. "Start now and build!"

The human shook his head. "I have no materials with which to build, and no-one to help me build. There are no other survivors but us. We were outside the settlement when it was destroyed."

"Go and find someone to help you; an ally, not one of those who destroyed the settlement." Eoss was well aware that her advice was both blindingly obvious and impractical to carry out, so she added, "I will go myself and seek such a person."

That was the human prayer answered, or was it? For it would not be resolved until she found the one of whom she spoke, or preferably more than one. There was also the question of the spark of power she needed in order to assist, like the flints these people rubbed together to light their evening fires. However, Eoss could play with time and that meant her payment could be pushed into the future, to be taken later. She didn't like seeing it as a transaction anyway.

She began to gallop, covering many kilometres in a few moments, and searched for another suitable tribe in this country primitive yet congenial to herself, on this planet primitive yet congenial.

Eoss found another tribe, although they were some distance from the stricken family. She was satisfied that they were not the ones who had destroyed the settlement as she could not smell the weapons on them, and she tried with both physical and psychic senses. She whinnied and



pulled one of the sturdiest young men by the arm with her mouth. "Come-rescue the fugitives."

He looked round, shocked, and made a religious sign in the air with one hand. In his language he said the equivalent of "I am not riding the nightmare. Let the fugitives come to us."

Eoss sped back, not feeling any malice towards the tribe as they gathered around a fire behind her, smoking herbs in long reed-shaped pipes. It was just their tribal superstitions. She turned aside into a landscape that was a mixture of prairie and forests, and accosted a shaggy beast with humps; a beast which looked a little like a camel but did not use the humps to store water. They were just part of its shape. She persuaded the beast to follow her and drove it back towards the demolished settlement.

When they arrived night had fallen, and the woman and three children were shivering and sleeping fitfully under flat mats in the cave, while the man stood at the entrance brandishing a stick, looking around him. He appeared exhausted but afraid to lie down.

Eoss went over and nuzzled his hand. "Ride tomorrow on my friend, Kell. Not on me, I'm not solid enough to take you all. We'll get to safety."

"That's if we're still alive in the morning," the man said.

"Make a fire," Eoss suggested.

She couldn't go with the man to find fuel; it was an activity too rooted in the earth element, and all she could do was send him the courage and strength to do it. In the end he moved away from the cave leaving Eoss and Kell standing at the entrance, and gathered firewood from a sparse patch of woodland that could be reached by crossing several of the stretches of grassland. He made a fire, and Eoss and Kell knelt on the ground beside it while the family edged as close as they could, and the man pulled one end of a mat over himself and finally fell asleep.

Next morning the man, Pedro, lifted his wife Shaya and his children Robi, Rhon and Lita onto the back of the shaggy creature, Kell. They only fitted because the children were young, and Pedro strode beside them and led the creature with a string halter that he had made quickly from the edging on one of the mats. He rolled up the mats and asked Shaya to carry them.

Rhon and Lita, the two youngest children, were crying. "Mummy, I'm hungry," they both said at intervals.

"We'll have to find some food, Pedro, or the children will be too weak to go on," said Shaya, watching them anxiously through her curtain of red-brown hair.

Pedro didn't look at Eoss as they set out. The horse goddess often helped his people. But if the tribe who had attacked them had known that some of them prayed to her, it would have given them an additional reason

to destroy the settlement and a reason to hunt down any survivors, which they had not bothered to do this time. They were better off trying to escape alone.

Eoss noticed his thoughts and moved away, and she told Kell to smell out some food, something like fruit or berries, and then to smell out the tribe they had been near yesterday and to head towards them.

Kell felt confined, unable to do what he pleased for several hours, and he snorted hard and banged his head down so that it almost hit the ground. The family jumped, and the eldest boy Robi, who was nine, now began to cry along with the other two.

“Steady!” cried Pedro and shook the halter gently, and Kell settled down to his task of transporting them.

They stopped to eat fruit and to drink water from a stream, and then Kell took them across rugged open land until at last many hours later they reached the settlement where the other tribe lived.

It was a woman who saw them first. She raised her head from where she had been crouching, tending vegetables in an allotment field. “Strangers! Children!” She cried. “We must take them in. Children!”

Three men appeared at the perimeter wall as if from nowhere and appraised the family carefully. Pedro was still carrying a stick, although not as large as the one he had held when he was guarding the cave the previous night, and he quickly put it down. He waited until they were right by the wall and next to the three men before he spoke. The others in the family were silent, their eyes round, for the other tribe were darker than them with bronze coloured skin and hair and they wore brighter colours.

“Please help us,” Pedro said. “Our compound was destroyed by enemies.”

“Why did they spare you?” asked one of the men.

“They didn’t. We were outside; gathering pebbles and sticks for our children to play with.”

“All right, come in,” the same man responded. “Be loyal to us in return for shelter, then all will be well.”

“Yes,” said Pedro, and looked at his family.

“Yes,” Shaya echoed in a shaky voice.

“Yes,” murmured each of the children, looking down at the ground.

They were safe and grateful for it, although they still did not look at Eoss nor she at them as she hovered some way above the scene in the sky.

## Chapter 2.

Alexandra awoke and remembered she had been dreaming that she was travelling in a wagon pulled by a beast with shaggy fur and humps. The setting of the dream was strange, grasslands like a prairie at the foot of a mountain range. Alexandra lived in the city and had never been to the part of America where the prairies were found.

She so often felt incomplete as if half of herself was missing, and in this dream, she had been complete. Yet she was not herself in the dream; she was a little girl much younger with long, wavy red-brown hair that she could see hanging beside her face. She could also see the clothes she was wearing- animal skins stitched together with thread made from flax. It was like a character from a comic, a cave-girl.

The events of the day soon swamped her dream. In a few weeks' time she would be leaving school, and her mother had got her a job in a shop until college started in the fall. What would it be like, to be out in the world?

In an internet group, loosely based on an interest in the paranormal, she saw a comment from a girl named Kathy. "I believe I was once living a life on another dimension. It was a completely different me. Then suddenly, one day, I switched to being here. It's hard to find anyone I can talk to about it."

Alexandra clicked and wrote, "me too! I feel the same. But I can't remember the other world."

With the internet you can talk about anything, find anyone. She made friends with Kathy and talked to her sometimes in the chat box on Facebook. But she still felt incomplete.

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"Lita will be my rider in Alexandra's place. She will grow into the space that was left when my rider went away." Eoss said this to herself, to put an understanding that had come to her into words. She didn't make it happen; it was as if the strange force that had taken Alexandra away had also replaced her with Lita, and Eoss still had no idea what that force was. It was convenient because this would provide the missing fuel for the family's rescue which had been deferred into the future; everything fitted perfectly.

She flew down to the settlement to observe Lita, and noticed how Lita was tiny and vulnerable, and it would take her a while to learn. Sandra had been only four, but she had been born into it which made a difference. Lita was five, nearly six.

Here in her family's new settlement, they used the beasts with humps to pull carts, and they put the children in these carts and sent them to a school at the top of a hill. Here they studied most days while their mothers worked on the land. The men still hunted, but farming had become important as well and took up a lot of time for the mothers in the settlement. The people called themselves the Keye; however, they didn't speak about themselves much in the third person.

The cart stopped outside the school and Lita got out. She loved the sensation of flying up the hill and bumping over the stones, although these tame animals that pulled the carts were not as exciting as Kell. The people here called the animals 'yetas.' Lita had wanted to keep the wild yeta Kell and take him to live with them in their new hut, but instead her father had let him run away across the fields outside the wall and had told her never to speak of him again.

The school was really just a stone hut like all the other buildings, only much larger. Lita sat down on the floor with the other children, and then her brothers had arrived as well, and they came to sit next to her. The lessons were going to be about making pots to keep things in again; this would be the main lesson for quite some time until the children were contributing well-made pots for the adults in the settlement to use.

At first many of the other children had stared at them and poked and prodded them, because they came from outside the wall and looked a little different. But already they were more accepted. Lita hoped the other children would soon forget all about the way they had come in from outside.

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Shaya was washing clothes in the river with some of the other women. "I think I am pregnant," she said.

Kayli, an exceptionally large and strong woman, looked at her disapprovingly. "I hope not. We took in five of you which is already many; six is too many."

Dola, who lived in a hut very near to Shaya's, spoke up and defended her. "Kayli, no. We always need children. They are the river of life."

Later in the month Shaya found that she wasn't pregnant after all, and she was relieved. But why should that have to be? It wasn't fair. Before she came here, she didn't care how many children she had. Children were happiness as well as the river of life.

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Pedro was laughing with the other men as they came back from the hunt. He bound up the animal's legs so that they could carry it; he had

always been good with ropes, whether they were of hemp or flax or dried reeds.

“Well done, Pedro,” said Beeto of the deadly spear, and he sat down on the grass and pulled out a pipe from a pocket in the skins he was wearing. “I will stop and smoke here- why walk all the way home?”

The others kicked him, laughing all the while. “Lazy! Get up. If you want to smoke here where it’s not safe, do it on your own.”

“On my own? Oh, no- now you’ve made me get up!” Beeto leapt to his feet, and they all laughed harder still.

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Lita woke to remember a dream in which she had been riding a white horse through the sky, passing through the middle of clouds, and then streaking through the spaces between them in blinding sunshine. She was reluctant to tell the grown-ups; in her old tribe anyone who saw pictures like that in their sleep was always accused of being still a baby.

Being Eoss’ rider didn’t confer any power on the rider- it only empowered Eoss herself when she made a connection with a human being. The human would simply have sentimental feelings as though she was their pet horse being fed sugar lumps in a field, with a horse trough in the corner and healthy- looking farmers’ children scrambling over a stile. Nevertheless, in time the human being would often become known as a Shaman.

After setting Lita down in her bed, Eoss scanned Lita’s new tribe to see where the Shamans were to be found. She soon picked up that it was men only who were allowed to be Shamans, after smoking herbs with the other men in the evenings or after the hunt, and seeing more visions of spirits than the rest of them had seen. Women did not smoke and weren’t expected to be spiritual leaders, and they could find themselves in trouble for unusual behaviour.

Eoss made plans to stick to astral journeys with Lita, and to let her think they were dreams. Sometimes with primitive people like these she could materialize enough for them to ride on her physically, but that wouldn’t be appropriate with Lita.

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Robi and Rhon were with Shaya in the hall of images. There was no school today for the children; it was a painting day. It was not known whether their people had ever painted on the walls of caves, for they had not found any relics from the earlier stage of their civilization. All they knew was that now they had progressed to living in settlements surrounded by walls, there was usually a designated building where people went to paint pictures, and each family was allotted some space on the walls.

Eventually the walls would all be full, but this would take a long time, and if it were ever to happen a second building would be constructed.

Shaya knelt down, and her hair fell over her face as she picked out coloured chinks and handed them to her two sons. She would have to do something about her hair soon; most of the women here wore pins made of bone in their hair which kept it swept back and tidy. They also seemed to have devoted more time to training their children in drawing, and she watched nervously as Robi and Rhon began to sweep lines onto the wall with the chalk and then scribble hard, filling in the spaces. Lita was considered too young to contribute drawings and was with Pedro at home.

“What is it?” a solemn-faced older boy asked Rhon.

Rhon smiled. He was a rosy-cheeked child who usually looked happy. Both boys had green eyes and red-brown hair; nearly all their old tribe had green eyes, and Shaya’s hair colour was distinctive and had been passed on to all her children.

“It’s a field,” Rhon said, “with choogs in it eating the grass.” A choog was something like a cow.

“Don’t just scribble to draw the field,” said the older boy. “You must draw grass, with small flowers and leaves in it.” He looked at Shaya.

“Show him,” she prompted.

The boy began to draw on a stone block on the floor, which was the equivalent of rough paper. That’s where Rhon should have tried first, instead of on the wall. But it was all right; the older boy helped him, making the scribble on the wall into a background and chalking flowers and leaves over the top of it. Robi watched too and they both helped the boy as much as they could, although they didn’t have his skill.

Shaya planned to have a word with the school at the top of the hill; her boys needed to be given extra drawing lessons. The old tribe hadn’t valued drawing and painting as highly as these people did. It was seen in a similar way to visions and dreams, as something slightly childish. Skills in war were prized the most, but it hadn’t helped them when the enemy tribe had attacked because they were greatly outnumbered. Pedro, as the only surviving man, was not well-placed to continue their warrior tradition as his skill lay more in hunting and working with ropes.

After a while it was time to go home and start the cooking. “Come on, Robi and Rhon,” she called, and took their hands.

“That was fun, Mummy!” enthused Rhon.

Robi said carefully, “could I be a painter, Mummy? The elders here will be happy.” Robi was always anxious to fit in.

“You need to learn properly- I will ask,” Shaya responded as they left the hall.

When they got back to their hut Kayli was waiting outside with a stern expression, while Pedro stood sheepishly in the doorway with his arm around Lita, who was crying.

“What is happening?” cried Shaya, while the boys stood still and watched in silence.

“Your daughter has transgressed,” Kayli pronounced, like a judge giving sentence from on high.

“What did she do? She is only five seasons.”

Kayli continued to glare.

“Pedro- you tell me.”

“After you’d gone, Lita decided she wanted to draw as well,” Pedro said. “She thought it was not fair that only the boys had gone. She took chalk and stone and drew something just outside the door of the hut. Kayli came by and was angry. So, I put the stone inside the hut.”

“Lita- what did you draw?” Shaya asked.

Lita’s sobs grew louder. “Only the horse from my dream. I was riding it- I drew it. Am I naughty, Mummy?”

Shaya looked at Kayli. “She is very young,” she said again.

“It is forbidden to draw the white mare. She causes trouble and change. Some have worshipped her- we do not. She is forbidden.”

“I will tell Lita never to draw her again,” said Shaya. “Be patient; my children are still learning your ways. I have to cook now. Pedro, Lita, boys- go inside.”

Cooking fires were always lit in the yard outside the hut, and the family would wait inside while the mother cooked. If it rained, they would build up stones to shelter the fire. It was too early in their civilization to have chimneys or indoor ovens.

## Chapter 3.

Alexandra was at her friend Rebecca's house with several other school friends. They were lounging around listening to CD's and drinking fizzy drinks from cans, and then Jed the boyfriend of one of the girls called round and brought tarot cards. It was the first time Alexandra had seen them close up. Jed explained in outline what the meanings were and then did readings for all the girls. It was a laugh, and they all found the readings fairly accurate.

Alexandra was very interested. She liked the idea of becoming a tarot reader herself, maybe even a professional one. It would beat working in shops like she would be doing all the summer, and it would probably even beat whatever career they were going to steer her towards at college.

She told Jed what she was thinking, and he said, "you won't become a reader all at once. There are seventy-eight meanings to fix in your mind, and they're flexible meanings as well. They vary according to what you see with your intuition, and according to the position of the other cards in a spread."

"Well, how do I start?"

"Best to start with building up that intuition- it's the most important part. Meditate on each card and see what comes into your mind about it, and only then learn what it means from a book. The books will all be a bit different from one another anyway."

"So, meditate how?" asked Alexandra.

Jed explained one method; you picture the card in front of you and see it as a doorway, and then enter into it.

As soon as she could, Alexandra began. She bought a pack of tarot cards, one of the most commonly used packs, out of some babysitting money that she had saved, and she began to work her way through the major arcana. She followed the method Jed had suggested, doing the meditation first and then reading the meanings in the handbook afterwards.

The meditations were like a new universe unfolding. Alexandra had a good imagination and could easily see the images in her mind, and The Fool and The Magician spoke and carried out actions of their own accord, like little actors in a film.

There was a break while getting ready for the prom at the end of term, which Alexandra and her friends all treated as a major event in their lives. They prepared for it day and night, leaving no time for anything else.



Alexandra had a date, but he wasn't a serious boyfriend; they weren't having sex. She wondered when real relationships were going to begin.

When all the excitement of the prom was over, she went back to her studies of the tarot. She reached trump 7 The Chariot, which featured a chariot pulled by one white horse and one black horse.

Alexandra visualized the card in front of her like a doorway and went inside. The black horse didn't do very much; he just stood looking ahead as if waiting for a signal to start pulling the vehicle. But the white horse did something strange; she reared up and unclipped herself from the chariot. Then she came towards Alexandra looking at her intently, and spoke. "Sandra! It's Eoss. Are you all right? How is it, where you are?"

No-one had ever called her Sandra. She didn't think it was short for her name; Alex would be short for it, and Sandra was a different name altogether. But the name Eoss she knew; it had always been there, deep within.

"So, you are Eoss? Your name is all I remember from the other world I was in."

In her mind she saw Eoss raise one hoof and felt her soft mouth nuzzling her ear. "Yes, you left me and came here. I've only just found a new rider. But they don't want her to ride me- I'll have to make her forget."

"What are you talking about?" Alexandra's vision dissolved into floating bars and spots- she couldn't visualize for any longer and opened her eyes. At least now she knew who Eoss was, but she still remembered nothing more about the parallel world.

She wrote down what she remembered in a journal that she had started, and a week later she tried again with The Chariot card to see what would happen this time. Again, the white horse detached herself from the chariot, and this time she flew up a little way into the air. She was like Pegasus without the wings.

"Eoss, why do you need a rider?" Alexandra asked. She had been pondering the previous conversation and had managed to make more sense of it.

"When you ride me, you unite your energy with mine. You will lose a little energy, but not much- you won't be tired. It is so that I can help someone. There are other ways to do it, like the fire, but in that other world the people do not light sacrificial fires, or even candles. They only cook and warm the settlements and I can't use their fire. So if I can find one, I take a girl as my rider."

"Do they have to be virgins?" Alexandra didn't know why she asked that, it just came into her mind.

"That is a superstition," Eoss said, "and it comes from far back, from before I was in my present form. A story about a matchless maid and a unicorn. I don't know why I choose girls who are still children; it's

something I do without understanding it myself. But it isn't because they are virgins- they could still be riders when no longer a virgin."

"So, I was a rider, and my name was Sandra?"

"Yes."

"Who did we help?"

"Those who prayed."

"Are you a god?"

"They say so. But they fear me."

"Why?"

"I don't know." Eoss tossed her head and mane and galloped towards the horizon, and then she stopped and looked back and said, "I also don't know how far you can follow me, when we're inside a card. But we can meet here and talk, and be happy, like we were before."

Alexandra's eyes filled with tears, and the meditation dissolved.

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Pedro was standing by the perimeter wall watching Robi and Rhon as they practised with small spears. They were back from school, and it was still light enough to go out in the open and show him the exercises they had been learning. In the old tribe the boys would have learned first to fight with the spears, but here hunting skills were prized more. They were confused by having to unlearn the previous lessons, especially Rhon who complained about it. "Dad, why can't I fight like before? This new stuff is too hard."

"When you have practised many times, it will become easy," said Pedro. He glanced away for a moment outside the wall, and he saw a movement far away in some bushes. It looked more like humans than an animal.

After that Pedro kept on looking, although subtly as if he wasn't looking, like he had been taught. At last one of the figures came into view just for a second, and he wore the clothes and ornaments of the Rayan tribe, an offshoot from the larger Gorra tribe that had destroyed their previous settlement. They moved like scouts who were checking to see how vulnerable the colony was.

Robi threw his spear a little too hard, and it grazed the wall. If it went outside and hit one of the scouts it would give them an excuse to attack. The smaller Rayan tribe had not attacked anyone so far, but they might be building up to being as strong as the Gorra.

"Robi! Come away from the wall," called Pedro. "Go further in before you throw."

"All right, Dad," said Robi. He always obeyed at once- a good boy.

Pedro told the other men when they met to hunt and smoke. "Maybe we should think more about being warriors," he suggested.

“There’s no need,” said Mua, the senior hunter. “We have our own group of warrior men who defend us. It is enough; the other men can do other things. Rayan have never attacked us, but if they do we have fighters.”

Pedro shrugged. “As you say. If I see them again, I will tell you again.”

Later when they were all walking back with their kill, Beeto came over to Pedro and whispered in his ear. “I will tell you something about Gorra and Rayan. They both look for people who sacrifice their virgin daughters to the horse goddess. When they find them, they kill them.”

Pedro was shocked. “No-one does that,” he whispered back. “I have never met anyone who burns people and certainly no-one who burns children. It is a lie.”

“We don’t know,” Beeto replied, slightly louder. “We don’t know all tribes, or how big the world is. They may have travelled and seen it somewhere.”

Pedro resolved to take the stone away from Lita, the one she had drawn the horse goddess on, and smash it with a boulder. He hadn’t liked to do that before, to take it away from a child. But when he got home, he couldn’t find it in their hut. He asked Lita, but she would only say, “I haven’t got it anymore.” He hoped that was true but decided to keep a watch in case it reappeared.

## Chapter 4

Alexandra was making good progress with learning to be a tarot reader. She gave readings to her friends, and the meanings seemed to make sense to them. But her friends were all in the same circumstances as herself, teenagers who had just left school, and she wanted to practise on someone outside that circle. She persuaded Donna's mother Charlotte to have a private reading one afternoon, at Donna's house. It was a free reading; she didn't plan to charge people money until she had learned properly.

Alexandra was puzzled by the King of Pentacles in an odd position in the spread. "There is a dark-haired businessman around who is causing trouble," she said.

Charlotte shook her head. "No, there's no-one around like that." She looked at Alexandra fixedly, her eyes hard.

"Oh, sorry. I must be wrong. I don't know what that card means; it's confusing."

"Well, you're only learning, honey."

The next time she meditated, she asked Eoss about it.

"The cards will reveal secrets that people don't want to talk about," explained Eoss. "Secrets they don't realize will come out in the reading. You must learn to recognize when they are trying to hide something. The King of Pentacles was a lover who has moved on now, but he's still causing trouble."

"I can't imagine my friends' parents having secret lovers," said Alexandra. "They seem too old."

"Do you want me to help you spot these things?" asked Eoss. "You could call on me when you do the readings."

"Well.... I'd rather learn to do it by myself. Isn't that the whole point?"

"I'm pleased you think like that. It will take time, then. Just keep practising till you get the instinct."

Eoss returned to the world she usually inhabited. She was having problems there again with men who wanted to persecute the followers of the horse goddess. The Rayan tribe were talking about Platara Mountain, saying that was where the virgin girls were sacrificed. It was an old Shamanic site which had been abandoned for eleven years, and they had been girl Shamans like the ones in the ancient Norse culture on Earth; not like Lita's new tribe, where the Shamans all had to be men. The worst thing about it was that most of the tribes on the plains had never heard of Platara Mountain and wouldn't realize the stories were false.

Eoss was fast losing her patience with them. It meant that she couldn't help the Rayan if they were in trouble, and it didn't feel right to be partial to some of the tribes and opposed to others, just as if she were a human with friends and enemies. Once again, she was glad that she was making Lita forget about being a rider in her dreams.

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Alexandra realized that it was a while since she had spoken to her online friend Kathy. She was busier now because her job in the shop had started this week, and it was a lot to learn. Was everyone as nervous as she felt in their first job? She didn't want to look stupid, making mistakes all the time. A bit of relaxation after work would help.

That evening, she logged on to the paranormal group and was pleased to see that Kathy was online. In the chat box she told Kathy about her new interest in studying the tarot and her ambition to do it for a living.

"Really, tarot?" Kathy wrote. "Way to go! You could learn magic. I can do magic- it's something that's been with me since I was young."

Alexandra knew that a lot of the people around her were wary about magic, especially adults, who tended to be conventional. But after meeting Eoss, her very own paranormal being, she was more open-minded.

Kathy typed another message straight after the first one. "Here are some books that helped me." About fifteen book titles and author names appeared, where Kathy had copied and pasted them.

"All right, I'll take a look," Alexandra typed. "I guess tarot IS magic. Where did you learn magic?"

"I just knew, from the other world I was in."

"Do you remember the other world?"

"Lots of spaceships there. I see them in visions, and I drew the logo they have at the front of the ships." She sent a picture.

"I think my other world is a different one," Alexandra typed back. Really it had only been one dream, in which she had been the little girl who was riding up the hill in a cart. But she was sure the people were cave-men.

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Lita had been riding in the school wagon again, and as she got out, she tentatively laid her hand on the yeta's neck. Its fur felt coarse and springy, and it didn't flinch at being touched, although the other children never touched them.

Dola's two girls Melia and Jella were in the wagon with her, but they were engrossed in conversation and didn't notice what she had done as they climbed out and began running hand in hand towards the school building. Lita hung back, half-turned, and stroked the yeta again. "I wish you were Kell," she whispered. The creature swung its head and snorted

slightly, watching her, as if hoping she would feed it something. She closed her eyes and rubbed her face against its fur, lingering for a few moments. Then she turned and walked slowly towards the school.

After that, Lita often slipped round to the stalls where the yetas were kept during the breaks between lessons. She would speak to them softly and stroke their heads. Melia and Jella would never have understood, even though they had become her friends now and came over in the evenings to play outside the hut. It was easy with their mothers being neighbours, and their mothers seemed to get along well too.

One day, after a lesson about different shapes and sizes of seeds and which pots to store them in, one of the teachers followed Lita as she slipped out to the stalls, and watched as she began to pet the yetas.

She beckoned Lita to come over. "Lita, we do not make friends with the animals," she said. Her tone was not unkind, but it was firm. "When children are too much with the animals, the stories say they ride them away into the mountains, and into the caves full of hot rocks that lead under the ground. The children are lost to the air wraiths in the mountains or the fire wraiths underground, and never return to their people."

Lita hung her head. She knew not to tell the teacher that she had once ridden on Kell, but she couldn't help saying, "I would love to have a yeta at home."

"They are not for the home, Lita. For work only, like pulling child carts and carts full of building stones." She leaned forward and brushed Lita's hair gently back behind her ears. "I am glad your mother wears the bone slide now. You should wear it too, and keep our customs, especially the ones about animals. Come back to the class with me." She led Lita back by the hand.

Melia and Jella giggled when Lita sat down beside them. "Were you running away, Lita?" whispered Melia. "The lesson is boring today."

"No, I just went outside," she whispered back.

"That's the same thing!" Melia laughed more loudly until the teacher made a 'shush' gesture, and Lita wished she could tell her friends the whole story, like she used to in the old settlement. It struck her for the first time that the people she used to know there were all dead.

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A meeting had been called for the whole tribe in the middle of the compound. Mua as the chief hunter was one of the two presiding over the meeting, and the other was Beirr the chief warrior. Beirr was solid and muscular like a wrestler with a thick, matted beard. He stood up on a kind of dais that had been erected from two stone slabs, and the other villagers all bowed to him respectfully as they passed on the way to sit down on the ground.

There was no single chief; these two shared the authority between them, but Mua was treated with more familiarity because the men saw him regularly when they went hunting with him. Beirr was usually out of sight, training his select band of warriors.

Beirr brought out the large war drum and set it in front of him, but it didn't mean there was going to be war because the fighters were not assembled with their weapons. Unlike some tribal peoples on Earth, this tribe did not drum regularly. If the men played anything when they smoked after hunting it was reed flutes the same shape as the pipes. This must be a special occasion.

Pedro and Shaya and their children sat quietly on one side of the central area, watching the proceedings. Maybe the Shaman would even appear. There was only one Shaman at the moment, and he was seen even less frequently than Beirr.

At last Beirr raised his hand and called for attention. "All my people," he said. His voice was deep. "We have agreed to enter into an alliance with the Rayan. They have watched us, and they do not want hostility. Our people and theirs need to grow and increase now, otherwise the winter will kill some and the animals will kill some, and killing one another will reduce us to nothing. The Rayan chief is among us as our guest- he will come out now."

Mua turned and walked towards the small group of military huts that were reserved for warrior training. He went inside one of them and returned with three Rayan, the chief wearing dark animal skins and a headdress, and two others attending him.

"I want this alliance," said the Rayan chief. This was his whole political speech, for the warriors did not waste words.

Beirr and Mua took sticks, and they both beat the war drum several times. "If you break the alliance, we fight. If you keep it, we do not fight," said Beirr.

"Yes," said the Rayan chief.

"Does anyone else want to speak?" asked Mua, looking round at the assembled tribe.

Beeto raised his arm. "What about the Gorra?" he asked. "Rayan used to be part of Gorra."

"Our father tribe the Gorra is a big tribe now and they intend to wander," replied the chief. "They have said that if they meet peoples unknown, they may fight, but that will be far from here."

"Good," said Beirr. "No more slaughtering on the plains." His glance fell for the briefest second on Pedro and his family, but he didn't draw attention to them.

"It is done. The Shaman will bless the alliance," pronounced Mua.

“Yes,” everyone murmured, and the children all craned their necks to see the Shaman as he too emerged from one of the military huts.

His hair was even more tangled than Beirr’s beard, and the skins he wore had bones tied onto them at many points and a very large pipe and flute tied on the left side. He looked reasonably young, what our world would call ‘the thirties,’ but men older than that often lost their strength in this stone-age society.

He lit the pipe and began to chant while walking around the war drum and weaving smoke round it in spirals. Later he left the pipe burning on the ground while he played the flute, and Beirr and Mua and the warriors played too. The three Rayan stood watching, smiling. Finally, the Shaman made some signs in the air, including the sign the young man had made at Eoss when she approached him. After that he walked away, and the meeting was over.



## Chapter 5

Alexandra was reading in bed with the night light on. It wouldn't do to tire herself out too much; even though there was no work at the shop tomorrow she had weekend shopping to do. When you're working there never seems to be time to buy things like make-up; the list of things to do gets longer and longer while you're waiting for a free moment.

This was the life she might be looking at as soon as college was over, and some day, (she hoped) there would be a man and children to fit in as well. What a grind! It would be more fun to be a card-reader and be free, maybe even go on tour with festivals or fairs.

The book she was reading was about magic and the tarot. It made sense to start by expanding on the subject she had already been studying, before branching out into fields that were completely new.

Already Alexandra had noticed a recurrence of the theme of sexual energy being used in magic. Maybe that was what was behind all this 'virgin' stuff with Eoss. She couldn't grasp whether sex would wipe the energy out, or whether it would provide more fuel, like the two halves of a nuclear bomb being joined together. She thought of asking Kathy about it, but her eyelids were practically closing, and she didn't have the energy to turn on the computer.

She gave in and turned out the light.

That must be Kathy. Of course, you can't always tell from the profile picture someone uses, but it looked like Kathy's was a genuine likeness - and that independent look on her face really marked her out from the crowd.

Kathy was lounging casually next to Eoss, as if they were co-conspirators. "Yeah, I see. It's... what's that Taoist word? Jing. I'm good with recognizing energies. Thought it was weird when Alex told me about it, but I should have known it wasn't anything pervy. Ok, they're little girls - but it could be anyone."

Eoss stood with her neck down near Kathy, her silvery mane flowing over it in curls, although the two of them weren't touching. "It's only a little nip," she said confidentially. "I need a word that doesn't mean 'bite' at all, but you know.... language."

"It could be real funny if Alex tries it, though. Teenage girls and their horses...as soon as they hit puberty, they read all those horse books. Even I did, but I switched to racehorses. Told my brothers I could smash the odds and win every time. They were pretty excited, till they realized most of it was kidding."

Alexandra was confused. Where was this? It looked like a meadow, but something was wrong- piebald spots on the air, and the ground shifting. Suddenly she felt unaccountably angry with Kathy.

“When did I tell you about Eoss?” she demanded.

Kathy looked straight at her; it was like a laser slicing into her, piercing her soul. “Oh, yeah, time.... Sorry, you told me tomorrow. I decided to hang out with Eoss now and see if I knew her.”

“I...don’t know where I am.”

“You’re asleep, kid. Dreaming. In my world, we always used to dream awake.”

“Dreaming?” Alexandra felt the panic rise. Her head ached, and the ground was moving even more quickly.

The next morning, she couldn’t remember whether she had awoken briefly at that point and then gone back to sleep. But she remembered the dream vividly. Then, five minutes after waking, she wasn’t so sure. It was ridiculous, like a cartoon, and some of the details were already fading.

Alexandra got up and went out to do her shopping, and later when she came back, she logged onto Facebook. “Hey, Kathy.”

“Hey, Alex.”

“Only just had time to sit down- working girl and all that. Mom tidied up my room- I feel guilty.”

“Wait till college starts,” Kathy typed. “Exams as well.”

Alexandra hesitated, then typed boldly, “have I told you about Eoss yet?”

“Can’t say you have. Tell me.”

“In my dream you said I’d already told you, tomorrow. Do you remember that?”

“I remember something, but you’ll have to refresh me. I do a lot of stuff at night. My grammar must suck at night- ‘already told you tomorrow’? It’s like that old Nilsson song my parents used to sing- ‘I can’t forget tomorrow.’ Doesn’t make sense.”

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It was Pedro who was the most affected after the alliance was made. Some of the tribe’s activities, like the agriculture the women did, continued the same as before because there was no need to change anything. The Rayan had their own farmland within the boundary wall of their settlement, where their women tended the crops.

Hunting was different; this was the area where it was beneficial to join forces. So now, every time the men went out on a hunt they were joined by a number of Rayan hunters, dressed in their own tribal style, and carrying their own weapons. Sometimes the animal they killed would be taken back to the Keye compound and other times to the Rayan

compound, and at both the celebrating and smoking and distribution of food were carried out in the same way.

Pedro wasn't as willing to talk as he had been before, and he hoped he wouldn't see a lot of ecstatic visions after the hunt, in case he forgot what he was doing and revealed secrets to the Rayan. To support the alliance, he shared his knowledge of binding ropes with them, which made them into better hunters. Apart from that he watched them carefully.

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Lita was on a kind of vision quest. Eoss did not know how it had arisen; it was just something human that she allowed to run its course without interfering.

Once again Lita found herself flying through brilliant sunshine, this time not on horseback, but self-propelled in flight into the mountain range, and on reaching Platara Mountain she dropped to the ground among the piles of ash from sacred fires. A group of eight or nine long-haired girl Shamans were crouched in the dust, drawing pictures in the ashes with twigs. They had drawn trees and choogs and horses, yetas and the many wild herbivorous beasts that the men hunted. Bunches of herbs in clay pots were dotted around the clearing, and piles of jagged, uneven crystals stood at the edges.

These were the girls from twelve years ago; Lita had gone back and entered their time, and she inclined her head and greeted them with the word, "sisters."

She didn't have any real sisters, Eoss reflected as she watched from a distance. Families were smaller here on the plains. There were countries on the other side of the planet where ten or more children was the normal number, but the women's bodies differed here and didn't produce so many egg cells. Nature had evolved variable kinds of body systems in the different countries of the planet.

One of the Shaman girls indicated Lita with a sweep of her arm and cried, "it is she who loves the yetas! She who sees their gentle hearts, that the others ignore. Hail to you, Lita."

Although she had already greeted them without being aware of what she was saying, Lita now came to, and was puzzled. "Hallo," she murmured shyly. "Where am I?"

"This is our home, Platara Mountain. You have come to visit from your own time. Come again whenever you like and learn our ways. You are not too young to start."

Lita walked around taking everything in, including the huts at one end where the girls lived, which were more roughly built than the stone huts in her settlement and were made mainly of wood. She peered into the fire pit that sloped down and led into caves, connected by tunnels that wound

through the inside of the mountain. The girls wore skins like her own, but they had unusual possessions, musical instruments and bones, and everywhere were stores of plants and stones that had been gathered.

It all began to shimmer more and more because it was only a vision, and then it faded, and Lita rushed backwards towards her home and her bed on the mats in Pedro and Shaya's hut.

Eoss was unfamiliar with the biological rhythm that wanted to send Lita to Platara Mountain at regular intervals throughout her young life, until she should become wise. She understood it less well than the biorhythms which caused some of the women to have ten or more children. So, she tossed her mane and gave up trying to fathom it. But she made sure of making Lita forget the trip she had been on, just as she always made her forget the riding.

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Alexandra joined a new Facebook group, a chaos magic one this time. She was learning so much from the books and the people in these groups. The major adrenalin rush came the third time she mentioned Eoss in a discussion; it was a closed group, so none of the conversations were private, they were all on the open page.

The girl who responded was using a colourful name, obviously false, but that didn't matter. "Eoss!" she wrote. "I remember that. We made her in that New Era sub-group. Dave painted a picture of her; I wrote a poem, and we each did a ritual at home. The next day the main group page was covered in stories about horses. It was amazing. But it wasn't twelve years ago- only seven."

Alexandra asked Eoss about it. She felt as if she was spoiling the magic by analysing it, but the time didn't add up and neither did the stories about the many other riders who had become Shamans, when there had only been herself and Lita.

"The time was out of synch when I moved to Lita's world," Eoss explained. "They have a different solar year, so what happens on Earth takes a longer time in that world. And the other riders- that was when I was in my previous form, before I was Eoss. I had a series of riders whose energy I used to grant requests, and when I became Eoss I carried on doing everything the same way. It was only the words the humans used that had changed, and I ignored that. Why don't you try and come through the vortex when you're asleep tonight? Come and visit us."

Alexandra shuddered. That happened sometimes in the meditation. "No- let Lita have her chance," she said, putting on a confident tone. But she sensed that Eoss had seen her recoil.

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It was evening, and the children had just returned from the school on the hill, brought back in the carts drawn by the placid tame yetas. They were beginning to run around outside the huts and play until it was time for the mothers to start cooking.

A Rayan hunter named Geed moved through the compound, on the way to retrieve some weapons and ropes that he had left in one of the stores. Suddenly he let out a loud cry. "This child! This child is a witch!"

All the people within earshot of his shout came running, including Pedro and Shaya, Dola and her husband, Kayli and Beeto. They looked to see who he was pointing at. It was Lita kneeling down in the dust, showing the stone with her painting of Eoss on it to Melia and Jella.

One of the men nudged Beeto. "Her family came from outside the wall. No wonder it is her." There was a muttering, a chorus of agreement.

"This again!" exclaimed Kayli severely. "I forbade this picture before, and it is still here. It has not been destroyed."

Pedro put his head in his hands. "I searched for this stone to smash it, but I could not find it. Lita said it was gone."

Shaya looked around, dismayed at the size of the crowd. "Enough!" she said. "Still you blame a child, who is too young to understand."

"We must call a chief!" cried Beeto. "Mua or Beirr, or the Shaman. For this, the Shaman is best."

"Yes," everyone echoed. "Call the Shaman." The crowd was still growing, and the three children sat frozen in the middle, too frightened even to cry out.

Eoss sensed the excitement and approached, invisible in the sky. "I made her forget everything, yet it still wasn't enough. I'll see what they do, and then I'll solve this problem." She was her usual confident self; however, the family's fear made ripples that threatened to damage her defences.

The Shaman was summoned, and when he saw the picture of Eoss he went back for a bowl of cloudy yellow paint and threw it over the stone, obliterating the picture. Lita wept loudly, while the Shaman smoked his pipe and played his flute over her each in turn. On the day when the alliance was made, he had not spoken, only chanted, but now he addressed Geed. "Tell us what the Rayan know about this kind of witchcraft, for you have seen it and we have not."

"The virgin girl will try to make her parents sacrifice her to the horse goddess," said Geed. "If she does that, she must die. When we meet barbarians like that, on other parts of the plains, we kill the whole family. But if the virgin comes from our own settlement, or from one of our allies

like you, she can be given a chance to repent and turn against the horse goddess, and if she does, she will be spared.”

“This is madness!” screamed Shaya. “I plead with you, leave my daughter alone.”

“Silence!” The Shaman raised his hand. “You come from outside. You are lucky the Rayan include you in the alliance. We will deal with the child the Rayan way, which is merciful because she may be spared.”

## Chapter 6.

It was Alexandra's first psychic fair. She was keen to get this one in before college started in a few days' time, because then she might be too busy. The summer had flown by, and she felt ready to start reading professionally, although in a small way to begin with.

Part of the fair was out of doors, but Alexandra's stall was in a tent, and she felt like a Gypsy fortune teller as she spread out a brightly coloured cloth on the table and lit a decorative purple candle. Behind her she placed a large card displaying the chaos star; she hadn't told her parents that part, but hopefully they wouldn't bother to stop by.

"Hey, you know there are Christian kids outside handing out tracts?" said one of the organizers.

Some of the people I've met would shout at them or even curse them, Alexandra thought. Not my style. She ignored the controversy and concentrated on the readings, willing herself to tune into people and their problems, and to care about what they cared about so that she could help them.

About two hours into the event, she heard a voice ringing urgently in her mind- Eoss' voice. "Alexandra!"

A magician, she had learned, must always be the one in control of non-human entities. It was especially important when dispensing with the trappings of traditional magic: the triangle and the circle with divine protective names inscribed around it, and the planetary talismans fashioned during appropriate hours, and with much prayer and fasting. Without these protections the modern magician must be of a firm will and banish with laughter.

"Eoss, I told you," Alexandra said in her mind. "I don't need any help to do the readings- all my own work. I'll see you later." She pictured how crazy this tent would have looked to her if she had seen it a couple of years ago, laughed to herself and relaxed, then went on with the readings.

There was a bit of a lull after lunch, and then she found herself sitting opposite a client who was looking at her in a completely different way from the others. No mistake: he was flirting with her. Any other client she would have told, sharply, that it all had to be professional, but not this guy- he was too attractive. It wasn't fair that he was getting away with breaking the rules, but she just couldn't tell him.

A warm hand slipped around hers and squeezed gently. "Do I do it like this? Or is that palmistry?" He grinned playfully.

"You know that's palmistry. For tarot you cut the cards."

Keep my voice steady. Maybe Mom should have come by after all. Or maybe not- I'm seventeen in two weeks; I can handle this.

The boy removed his hand from hers and said, "Okay, I'll cut the cards now, but can I take you for coffee after you finish today? It'll be good to unwind and tell me a bit about yourself."

"Okay, I will," she heard herself say. "I'm stopping at six. Now, let's do your reading."

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Alexandra and Josh had been dating for three weeks. As they danced, Alexandra felt as if the disco was a hailstorm with bells ringing and wind tunnels whirling in rotation. It was too much all at once, the new lifestyle at college and a boyfriend. She felt that this was going to be the grand love affair at last. But then she wouldn't be a virgin anymore, and she would lose her power.

This thought was so persistent- where had it come from? The chaos magicians didn't teach that. Some of them believed in orgasm for reaching gnosis, or that couples could follow a tantric path if they wanted to. But not this idea about losing power- she would have to meditate and try to uncover the source.

Alexandra hadn't done any meditation since before the psychic fair, and she hadn't got back to Eoss to see why she had called. It would be best to sort out her own hang-ups first; they could cause problems. By now Alexandra had experimented with several other kinds of meditation besides entering into a tarot card. The one with a black mirror was good for revealing things.

After the dance, it was obvious Josh was disappointed that she didn't go home with him. "I'm not ready," she said. "Next time."

"I hope so," he said, kissing her goodnight. "We'll be so happy."

When she got home, the house was quiet; her parents were in bed. They probably wouldn't have asked where she was if she had stayed out- they thought she was with friends from college.

Alexandra turned out the light in her room and lit a white candle, and drew a basic protection circle with a small fancy dagger. It had been a gift from an uncle years ago- probably meant to be a letter-opener.

She did some deep breathing, closed her eyes, and visualized a black mirror, and then visualized herself journeying inside it. She had acquired a physical black mirror too, on the back of a picture frame, but she found that the inner one was better.

It took a while to get into a light trance, but eventually she did, and then she saw a woman. It was Mother. But not her present mother- the original one from the other world. Her face was as sweet as on that day when Alexandra had sat on her knee wearing the white nightgown. But it was a



weathered face as well, the face of a savage wearing an animal skin. And what Alexandra had been wearing wasn't really a nightgown, it was a coarse linen suit that her tribe used to wrap babies and toddlers in at night. She felt love, and then sorrow, for she knew that these people had been destroyed- all massacred, all obliterated, and the latter generations on that world would not come from them, but from the other peoples that had survived.

Mother had meant to help by teaching her that she had to remain a virgin to be powerful. Her people believed that sincerely, but it was a primitive belief and almost certainly mistaken. Hadn't Eoss herself said that the girls could easily carry on being riders when they were no longer virgins?

That reminded her that she had promised to contact Eoss. But it was enough for one night; awareness of the massacre had left her feeling drained. She returned to normal consciousness, closed her simple circle, and went to bed.

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Pedro's family were confined to their hut. They had to stay there for six days 'for purification' as the Rayan called it, although nothing was being done to purify them. Then they had to be driven out of the settlement and across country to Platara Mountain by their accusers, who would observe Lita's behaviour there, watching for the sign that she was asking to be sacrificed.

There was a lot of anger that first day, all sitting in the hut with nothing else to do but talk. "Lita, how could you do this?" exclaimed Robi. "I spent days learning to draw properly to please our new tribe at the next painting day. You know about the extra lessons mother arranged. Now they will never accept me, and they may kill you and then the rest of us."

Lita didn't reply; she just cried. She felt as if she had been crying for as long as she could remember, her eyes red and sore.

"It is no help to scold her, Robi," said Shaya. "I too did everything to please them. Dola was kind, but most of them have never wanted us. They only want their own people. We should have perished out in the wilds- with our tribe dead, we were dead as well."

"Don't say that," said Pedro. "We may escape. If only they would tell her what she has to do to show she is innocent- but they will not say what it is."

"That way they prolong our suffering," Shaya said bitterly.

"Mummy, I want to go out," whined Rhon. "It's boring in here all the time. They must be going to let us out now."

"No, not for many days. They are too cruel. Accept it, or you will feel worse." Shaya took refuge in hating the Keye even more than the Rayan.

Pedro looked up, a sudden spark in his eye. "I will tell them the horse goddess saved us without us making any sacrifice. We gave her nothing; she saved us. That proves she does not want Lita. I will tell them."

"No!" cried Shaya. "It will be worse. Never, never say we prayed to the horse goddess, or spoke to her. That is what they are waiting for to kill us. Never say it."

Pedro had vowed to himself that he would not interrogate Lita about what had happened. But after being confined for a while, even his resolve broke down, and he asked her where she had hidden the stone with her painting of Eoss.

"I hid it under a pile of building stones," Lita sobbed. "They forgot them and did not use them to build, and one was sticking out, so I hid my picture under it. I couldn't give it up. I love the horse! And I love the yetas," she added, feeling that it didn't matter now what she said.

"Shush! Never say you love the horse- they will kill us." Shaya began to cry as well, and seeing that so did Rhon.

"I hate you all," said Robi. "I wanted them to like me. I could have been a painter- or a warrior."

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After a good night's sleep, Alexandra felt a little better. There were some hard tests associated with the unfolding of psychic powers; to be young and in love, and the only vision you see is that your race was massacred, and you were flung into another world.

Later, she finally felt able to go back to the Chariot meditation in which she could contact Eoss.

She could see immediately that something was wrong. Eoss was agitated, trembling like an earthly horse, and shying with fear. She was an egregore- how was it possible they could be afraid?

"Alexandra- help me!" Eoss pleaded.

"What is it? What's wrong?" Alexandra began to dread what she was going to hear.

"Lita and her family. They are in trouble because of me, and I'm trying to save them. I saved them once before. But this time.... the same thoughts are going round again and again in their minds. They will be hurt. Their child will be killed. I can't get through. You know what they want- a clear statement of intent for the help they need. But I can't get through this- how do gods do it in your world? How can they help anyone? I thought these people were too primitive to get stuck in their heads, but it develops so fast. They have been shut in their house which makes it worse, makes their minds go round and round all the time. Do you know what to do, Alexandra? Please help."

Alexandra felt out of her depth. "I'll...try and think of something," she said. "What are they like, Lita's family? Are they cave-men, who run around with clubs?" She hoped she wasn't trivialising the problem.

"A hardworking man who hunts to survive. A loving mother. Two small brothers, still only children. Lita herself is even younger- she was six last week."

Now Alexandra was angry. That wouldn't help. But yes, it would. She remembered that when she did tarot readings and tuned into the client, she had to care more about that person's problems than anything else, just for a temporary period so she could sense the answers. Because she had been one of Eoss' riders, she was a Shaman. That meant she could train herself to care more than anything else about this family's problem, and to journey into their world to help them. But she couldn't do that straight away- she was still frightened of moving through the vortex into their world, and it would take her a little while to overcome that.

"If you can wait a bit while I kind of psyche myself up, I think I can do it. Is that okay?"

"We don't have too long. They could be murdered. But time is a little different there, which may help."

"I'll do it, then." Alexandra came back, and again she felt swamped by everything that was going on. But she had to come through this.

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It was time for Lita and her family to be driven out to Platara Mountain. An escort of four strong Rayan men arrived at the hut, their faces stony so their feelings could not be read. They were carrying jute bags full of supplies, and tents made of similar linen to the one Alexandra had worn when she had belonged to one of the lost tribes of the plains.

"Come out now," ordered one of the Rayan men. "We shall be travelling to the edge of the known world, the mountains we see rising far away from us. It will not take a long time- about three times as long as you spent indoors for purification. We know how to look after children on a journey."

"Why must all of us go?" Robi asked.

"Shush," said Shaya. "We stay together."

"If the girl asks to be sacrificed, she dies and the rest of you will be exiled," the Rayan answered. "Better if you are already outside."

"We would all die, away from human settlements," Pedro objected.

"Something saved you before. Repeat the trick again," one of the other Rayan said mockingly.

The family said no more, and filed sadly out of their hut in the Keye compound which had come to feel like home. There was a moment of pleasure at coming out into the fresh air after being shut indoors, but it soon felt like too much time outside, especially when it rained for a while.

After trudging across the first few plains the children became tired, and three of the Rayan men carried them and gave the baggage to the fourth. They appeared used to it, as if they had done it before.

Pedro's family grew accustomed to the rhythm of walking, stopping to eat food that had been preserved in a store and to drink from streams, and sleeping in the strange linen tents. They did not speak much because they distrusted the Rayan and did not have their own language to speak in privately. The various peoples of the plains mainly all spoke with the same words apart from small variations of dialect, and they had not travelled far enough to meet people who used other languages. From what they had heard, even the Gorra had not yet met true foreigners, and this was their purpose for going wandering- to continue until they did, and discover what else was to be found in the world.

One night, when they were camped near a riverbank, Lita woke up to hear a rumbling sound approaching from the distance. She crawled to the mouth of the tent and peered out. Now that they were getting nearer to the mountains the ground was bare and sandy with only sparse patches of scrub. She saw a cloud of sand-coloured dust on the horizon which filled her with apprehension.

Just then she heard one of the Rayan stir. He stood up, went outside, and sniffed the air. Then he ran back, shouting and shaking everyone. "Get up! The telows are racing towards us and will crush us! Run!"

Pedro and Shaya struggled to their feet confused, asking what was happening. The Rayan tore down the tents, tangling the ropes, and grabbing as much as they could they started running. Pedro picked up Robi as he was the heaviest child, leaving Shaya to take Lita. Luckily one of the Rayan remembered the duty he had undertaken and picked up Rhon- otherwise Pedro and Shaya would have lost one of their children before even reaching the mountain.

The telows looked like strongly built antelopes and they were stampeding across this place normally empty of human life. The Rayan could not outrun them, but having done the journey before with other unfortunate families they knew to head straight for a stretch of long ditches and push every human into the deeper ones until the animals had passed. Coughing and covered with dust, the children stared in terror and fascination at these unfamiliar beasts; the men did not even hunt them for food as they lived so far away from inhabited areas. The adults realized there would be other savage animals here which ate the telows as prey, but so far these had stayed away because the human party lit fires every time they stopped.

They had lost one tent and some of the supplies, and another tent was torn to ribbons, leaving only one for them all to shelter in. Pedro had been planning to fight if they were exiled- try to kill the Rayan and take the tents

and food, but now there wouldn't be very much to take, and they were still a few days away from the mountains.

## Chapter 7

Alexandra was falling deeply into a trance. She thought of Eoss' new rider Lita and the deep connection between the two of them. She thought of Lita's vulnerable family and got herself into the mind-set of caring more about their problems than about her own. Then, tentatively, she willed herself to move towards them.

She was moving along a tunnel, like the ones people describe during astral projection. But already the fear was starting at having to go further than those projectors usually travel- not even into outer space or to Mars or Jupiter, but into another universe. Wouldn't it be easier to start with Africa or Australia? "Distance doesn't exist," she told herself.

She approached a spiral vortex, which must be the right one because she felt strongly that Lita was behind it. Then, once again distance did exist, because what characterised it was a sensation of strangeness. That other place really was totally other. She pushed a little, but felt overwhelmed, and awoke. "Try again every night," she said to herself, "and go someplace on Earth first."

That was how Alexandra came to experience astral projection to South America. She floated over dusty squares crossed by straggling groups of people speaking in Spanish, their clothes a spectrum of every bright colour, and their animated voices a warm exchange of ideas that she could have plugged into telepathically at any moment and joined in with the conversation.

She passed statues and fountains and so many churches with so many hundreds of Madonnas, each of them glowing softly at the centre of a rose and frankincense scented cloud. The church bells rang and created sweeping oscillations that divided everything into two. Alexandra could tell that the intention was to divide into pure and impure; however, in practice all it felt like was some regions where she could move around freely and others that were more restricted. Ironically, in the light of her beliefs, it was in the supposedly pure areas that she was unrestricted. The Madonnas were bathing her spirit self in the silvery notes of the chimes.

As Alexandra passed by convents with their heavier bells, she wondered what life had been like over the centuries for the many nuns here, and indeed the vestal virgins and temple maidens of earlier times and places, all of them dedicating their lives to an antiseptic atmosphere of crystalline refinement.

It was exciting that she had this ability; it must be because she had been a rider, but it seemed unfair that no sooner had she discovered her talent than she had to pass the test of travelling to an alternative universe. Even online, few people spoke about the spiral vortices, and even those

who did said things like, "I saw this thing, and it must prove that quantum physics is right. Hang on though- I'm not sure if it proves that or not." It wasn't exactly a field where there was clear information to be had.

There was also the worry about being disturbed; even though she had locked her door and turned off her phone, her parents were in the house and there could be some emergency in which they would need to wake her. Then if she were to start sleeping at Josh's place.... It would be a lot for him to take in, one minute just tarot and the next a great leap to interdimensional travel. He might think she was weird, and he could easily wake her up by mistake.

Maybe Kathy would know some techniques- after all, she had been with Eoss in the dream. Although it hadn't seemed to be taking place in Lita's world, more a kind of limbo which was outside time and space. Back on the Earth plane on her computer, Alexandra asked Kathy about it.

"Since I came in contact with chaos magic, I use sigils," Kathy wrote. "There are two sigils I use for what you're talking about, one for journeys and the other for holding things off, when you want someone to stop, go away and not wake you up. I'll send them, so you can try them out. But you have to do stuff with your mind as well. Draw the one for journeys where you're sitting or lying, then visualize it as well, and don't see anything else, and be relaxed and confident." It was never as simple as just a diagram.

Because she had previously reached the vortex without any help, Alexandra decided to vary it a little and draw Kathy's journeying sigil in the air when she got there. Finally, at the end of the week, she was through into the parallel world. It felt like going through a tumble dryer, but there at last were the plains from her dream that looked like prairies, the mountains in the distance and the human settlements surrounded by fortress walls which were tiny from up here in the air.

Immediately she felt disturbing waves slapping against her, as if she were under water instead of in the sky and it was a stormy day at sea. An instinct told her that they were caused by conflict between people. You couldn't live on Earth without seeing plenty of that; however, it was more primal and raw here and she was being buffeted so hard that she could barely stay level. She tried projecting a pentagram around her, but the waves continued.

Then Alexandra saw a lumpy, sandy-coloured creature a little like a giant llama moving towards her through the air. When it came close it nudged her and blew on her through its turned-up nose, and the waves gradually began to subside. The creature spoke.

"I am Kell, a friend of Eoss. She thought you would probably tell her you didn't need help again, so she sent me. You've been learning all that 'don't rely on the gods' teaching, but there's no need to be a superhero.

Shamans always have animal spirits that help them, or sometimes even plants.”

“Thank you, Kell. I’ll remember that. So where is Lita and her family?”

“You cannot save them now. It has to be a special time. You must come here again then and save them.”

“What!” Alexandra was dismayed. “It might be right in the middle of the day. And how will I know when it is?”

“Ask Eoss, in meditation- and when you come again call on me, Kell, to protect you.”

She was grateful for the ally, but now it was all the way back to Earth, and after a break to recover properly another journey, this time into the Chariot meditation.

Eoss looked like a pretty mare at a carnival, her mane and tail held high and threaded with silk ribbons. Obviously she had recovered her spirits, but Alexandra felt the crisis was far from solved.

“Tell me when I must go and help Lita.”

“She has to pass a test and reject me instead of becoming an offering to me. But they won’t tell her what she has to do to pass it. And she can’t take it until she reaches Platara Mountain- her whole family are being taken there and they will arrive in about four days’ time.”

Alexandra thanked Eoss, and when she came out of the meditation she tried to calculate the time. According to that girl on Facebook they had made Eoss in her present form seven years ago, but in the other world it had been twelve years. Not the easiest kind of mathematical calculation, and there could be any number of small variations on either side when you were dealing with days rather than years.

“I’ll have to practise entering into different times in the other world,” she thought. “Kathy can do it, so it is possible.”

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Robi and Rhon were fighting. “You poked me and punched me in the night in that tent!” shouted Robi, and hit Rhon repeatedly.

“Boys! Stop it!” called out Shaya.

They ignored her, and Lita’s eyes were red again from constant crying. Pedro and the four Rayan said nothing, only looked resigned as if they expected this. They tried to finish their meagre breakfast and still save a little for the two females.

“Mummy, Daddy, he hit me!” cried Rhon. “So I can hit him, can’t I?” He laid into Robi and pummelled him as hard as he could.

“Boys!” Shaya called again, but she didn’t dare go near because the blows were so savage they could have hit her and injured her, when she needed all her strength to travel across the hard mountain terrain.

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Alexandra endured the feeling of being put through a spin dryer and entered the other world. She called Kell and this time walked on the ground, her arm resting on Kell's neck. She was still partially aware of the buffeting waves, but they were weaker now, being filtered by Kell.

He seemed so full of wisdom, and yet she sensed that his physical body on this planet was an ordinary wild animal that grazed on the plains. "Are you in a trance like me?" she asked. "Or are you running with a herd at the same time as you're doing this?"

Kell explained that although his physical self sometimes worked with Eoss it was not fully aware of this higher part of himself that was functioning as the collective soul of all the yetas, like the totems on the planet Earth. "I am outside time," he said. "My physical self may be asleep or awake or running on the plains, yet when I am Kell the guide I enter into the past when I was sleeping, or the future when I will sleep again."

That reminded Alexandra of her own aim, and she spoke an affirmation in a firm voice. "I want to go back in time- back to when this present trouble began."

The environment shifted as if in a dream, and then she was standing in a street that consisted simply of a dust path running between stone huts. A little girl was crouched down drawing on a stone, and with a creepy sensation she recognized the child who had in her first vision seemed to be herself. She looked at the stone, and it felt like a bolt of electricity hitting her as she saw the picture. The picture wasn't just of Eoss- it WAS Eoss. In a flash she realized that sigils are only one way of representing a spirit; old-fashioned art is just as powerful and in primitive societies possibly more so. What had that girl said about making Eoss? 'Dave painted a picture, and I wrote a poem.' With or without a sigil, she was already real.

At that moment, the little girl looked straight at her. Her eyes widened, and she said, "Daddy! Come and see my horse, and there's a pretty lady with black hair, which no-one has."

As Kayli began to approach across the compound Kell turned to Alexandra and remarked, "she didn't say that the first time."

Alexandra remembered all the time travel stories she had read in which people go back and alter the past, and the consequences are always devastating. She quickly concentrated on exiting the scene and returning to present time.

The scene shifted again and this time she saw the little girl being carried along a rocky path by a woman who she resembled, who must be her mother. They both looked haggard and exhausted. Walking behind them were five large, strong men and two boys. They were all dressed in animal skins stitched together, although the styles varied and the sparse bone ornaments that they wore varied as well.

“The four men who are dressed alike have taken the family prisoner,” explained Kell.

The thought flashed across Alexandra’s mind that they might rape the woman and the little girl. Kell looked at her reproachfully. “Don’t impose evil thoughts from your own culture. Your thoughts may be heard.”

One of the four Rayan looked towards her, not right at her as Lita had done but vaguely in her direction, and telepathically she heard him say, “I would not touch them-they are unclean. They may be exiled.”

Alexandra thought quickly. “Look, Kell, sorry for thinking human stuff-but I can read that guy’s mind a bit. I could find out from him what it is Lita must do.”

“True, but he will only think about it when the time comes. He is too primitive to run it through his mind now. They are all too primitive to worry about things in advance- Lita’s parents only did it because they were shut up indoors, and then Eoss couldn’t help them.”

“I’ll come back when he does, then. This feels like a long trip, and I’m beat.”

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Josh was on the phone to Alexandra. “Alex, please come over Saturday. I’ll have the house to myself- the two guys I share with will be away. And assuming you don’t want to have the talk with your mom, it won’t be night, it’s during the day and afternoon.”

“I’d love to, Josh, but I might have to....” Her voice trailed off. She had nothing to do on Saturday; what she meant was that she might have to rescue Lita, and if she was no longer a virgin would she have the power? It was stupid; she knew it was only a superstition, but she had been so young when her original mother in Lita’s world had taught her that, and it was conditioning that she had to overcome.

“Well?” said Josh, his voice strained. “Might have to what?”

“Um... Josh.... nothing. I don’t have to be anywhere else.”

“Then you’re coming over?”

“Sure, yes. I’ll be over.”

“Great! I’ll get some nice food in, and drinks. We’ll have fun.”

Alexandra told her parents she was dropping by some friends on Saturday. She felt as if she was in a play, like she had been rehearsing this day for a long time.

Maybe she could jump into the future when Lita had to pass her test and do it before Saturday. She tried, but it was much trickier than going into the past and she couldn’t quite do it. One time when she was trying there was an insistent knock at the door. She visualized Kathy’s other sigil, the ‘don’t wake me’ one, but the knock came again. “Confident, relaxed....” She reminded herself. After several very tiring minutes of ‘I’m

confident... no, I'm not, I'm only thinking about being confident. No, I'm not...' she finally heard someone swear outside the window; it was Jed's girlfriend Lisa.

"Do you have to call me now? I was trying to get Alex to come down."  
Then Lisa stomped away.

## Chapter 8.

Pedro and his party had reached Platara Mountain at last. They looked quite different from the group that had set out, tattered and mentally worn down. The family sat quietly on the ground and waited as the four Rayan men recited several verses numerous times. The verses were in the earliest form of their tribal dialect and were intended to protect them all from the evil forces to be found on the mountain.

When they had finished, one of them turned to Pedro and said, “now you will sit here for the day, and we will see what the virgin girl does. We are on the mountain where her ancient altar used to stand, and if she wants to be sacrificed, she will let us know now.”

Everyone looked at Lita fearfully, and once again she started crying. Pedro and Shaya were petrified that crying might indicate she wanted to be sacrificed, but the Rayan did not react to that, so it couldn't be.

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Alexandra left the house on Saturday, putting her key in her pocket. Mom had told her to remember it in case she was home before them. “I doubt it,” she thought, and felt very excited and very aroused. She must be a normal young girl after all.

She rang Josh's bell, and he came down and opened the door, his eyes bright and his face quite flushed. As soon as she was inside, he kissed her and began various intimate touches and presses against her, no longer holding back as he had done before. Of course, he wouldn't have wanted to get too excited those previous times, and then been frustrated when she said goodbye.

They made an attempt at sitting in the living room nibbling snacks and listening to music, but it didn't last very long and within an hour they were upstairs in bed.

Alexandra found herself thinking those clichéd girly thoughts, “will this last forever?” She knew that men always make a show of not wanting to be tied down, even the ones who are looking for a serious relationship. It's a kind of social conditioning. But she mustn't think about conditioning today.

Around half-past two she was lying cuddled up against Josh and wondering what she would do if Eoss called her now to go into the other world. It must surely be about four days since their conversation - give or take a little and dividing twelve days by seven, and how would Josh react if she had to go?

“Josh,” she said, “do you remember the tarot?”

“Of course I do. I’ll never forget the way we met. Why, what’s it got to do with today?”

“I’ve been studying a lot more since then, magic and shamanism. I’d hate it if you thought I was weird.”

“Oh, don’t worry about that. Study what you like, Alex; it’s a free country. Just don’t get out of bed and start doing it right now.”

He would never know how close she was to having to do that.

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It was early evening on Sunday. Alexandra was doing some sorting out ready for college on Monday, thinking a thousand thoughts about her relationship with Josh. She wanted to see him as often as possible- how would that go, with them living in separate homes? She wanted it to last right through college- to be one of the happy couples, envied by those who were always breaking up. Was he going to introduce her to his family? When was she introducing him to hers? Just then she heard that voice in her head once again. It was Eoss.

“Alexandra! It’s time. You have to find out what Lita needs to do and make her do it- now.”

At once Alexandra locked her door and switched everything off, drew the curtains and got on with casting her simple circle and entering into a trance. She navigated to the spiral vortex. But when she reached it, her nerve failed. “I’m not powerful enough to do this anymore,” a voice inside her was saying. Desperately she fought it. She had to get through.

You can use anything for magic, she told herself. Sex, trance journeying, anything. I’m a Shaman now, with a gift for trance journeying. Be confident and relaxed, like Kathy said- it had worked before.

Nothing was happening. She called out mentally, “Eoss! Kell!” and she could hear their voices from far away, encouraging her to come on through the vortex.

After twenty minutes that seemed like an eternity, Alexandra dragged herself into the spiral. The sensation was worse than being in a tumble dryer this time because her doubt slowed her down and her insides were slowly twisted and ripped into pieces, yet still, amazingly, stayed whole. Her arms thrashed and clawed their way through until at last a blast of chilly mountain air hit her, and she was in the sky above Platara Mountain. She had proved that she still had her special gift, whether she was a virgin or not.

Below her on the lower slopes of the mountain, Lita’s family sat shivering among the rocks and sand. They were all clinging to one another apart from Lita who was crouched a little way away on her own, while the

Rayan were huddled just at the point where the plains ended, chanting and watching them. It was early morning.

Alexandra could see Eoss and Kell drawing closer, but it was that specific Rayan she fixed her attention on, to pick up his thoughts. Deliberately she ran a question through her mind, wording it the positive way around. "If Lita is innocent, what will she do?"

But there was no immediate response from him, and the family looked exhausted, as if their strength would fail before they could even do anything to show guilt or innocence.

"I think they're about to collapse," she whispered.

Kell floated towards her, a clumsy shape in the air, but the expression on his llama-like face was determined. "I won't let that happen. But I can't do anything until they are freed."

"How long do they have to stay here, Kell?"

"All day, if that's what it takes to get Lita's response."

Alexandra doubted whether she could maintain the trance for the length of the whole evening and night in her own world. She had only ever managed about thirty minutes before.

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Lita felt that she could never raise her eyes again. The new tribe who couldn't love her horse and her yetas had won, and all she could do was stare down at the ground. The rocks would be the last thing she would see, and then she would die, and her shame would die too.

Eoss swept towards her, extending her neck, and thrusting her long nose towards Lita's face. "Lita! Look up! Look to the heart of the mountain!" She didn't hear; although such a young child, she was already afflicted by those anxious thoughts going round and round, which civilized races suffer from all the time and the primitive people here experienced in times of stress only.

"Let me massage Lita's arms and legs," said Shaya, moving to get up. "She is not used to the cold here."

"No!" Pedro caught her arm and pulled her back. "We mustn't touch her. They will call anything a sign that we are sacrificing her."

"Let me go- she will freeze."

"Leave her, Mummy," said Robi.

Rhon let out a wail. "Why? Why do you want Lita to freeze, and why does Daddy want her to? I hate everyone." Stumbling, he tried to run away, but Pedro caught him too with his other arm. His belief that this was the only way to help them gave him additional strength.

In the end it was the numbness creeping through Lita's body that helped the situation. She became drowsy, and then she began to dream,

and in the dream she looked up towards the plateau in the middle of the mountain.

The Shaman girls were there, calling out a greeting, and as Lita smiled and answered she remembered exactly how their little village was laid out. Her physical body stood up unsteadily and she began to climb the mountain path, intending to go down the fire pit and into the caves where it would be warmer and there might be food and blankets.

“What is she doing now?” exclaimed Shaya. “If she climbs the mountain the animals that eat the telows will chase her and kill her.”

Pedro feared something worse- that the Rayan would say she was going up there to offer herself to the horse goddess. Certainly, the Rayan were all on their feet now, watching her closely, but strangely two of them seemed to relax and smiled at one another. “Can it be?” one of them muttered. “But no girl has ever done it... all have had to perish.”

Immediately Alexandra, above the scene in her astral body, homed in on one of the men, the one who had answered her thought obliquely the previous time. “What? What has no girl ever done?” she projected at him strongly.

He half-looked at her uncertainly, and in his mind, he recited the answer.

No! That was just as unfair as the witch trials where if you floated you were guilty and if you sank you were innocent- but then you drowned anyway. An innocent girl would have to try to destroy the old shamanic site on the mountain to show that she had turned against Eoss. But it would be fearfully dangerous to smash the remains; the girl would most likely fall through into the caves and be killed.

Alexandra scrutinized the ruined village, and now she could see the girls from twelve years ago standing there waving at Lita. It took Lita a long time to climb with her short legs, but she was obviously seeing the village as it had once been instead of the ruins that were there now, and the fire pit she was heading for was a shaft leading down into a warm cave instead of what it was now, a tangle of wood from broken huts mixed with tree branches and brambles. Maybe Lita was the first one who could see the Shaman girls from the past, because she was a rider.

Eoss and Kell were both hovering near, but Lita still didn't look up and see them. She was only looking up in her dream state, at the settlement on the mountain. In the distance several animals that resembled mountain lions appeared against the sky near the mountain peak, and began to descend steadily, in a loping gait towards the humans.

Alexandra dipped down and landed on the path and walked closely behind Lita. She didn't know to what extent she could touch her or hold her steady, but she was confident that if she gave an instruction, Lita would hear.

As soon as Lita reached the fire pit, Alexandra began to speak to her. "Lita! Remember me? I'm the lady with the black hair that no-one has, the lady you saw when you drew the horse."

Lita paused, and her dazed eyes focused for a moment and fixed on Alexandra. "Yes, I remember you."

"Listen, this is important. You must pretend to stamp on the branches here and kick them in. But only pretend, and don't do it too hard otherwise you'll fall into the caves underneath."

"Why?" asked Lita.

A child who needed reasons- it showed independent thought, but made Alexandra's task harder.

"You must pretend you don't like the horse. Then the four men won't hurt you or your parents and brothers. This is the horse's place, so pretend to kick it in. I'll try to show you where it's safe to stamp your feet."

The wind was whipping around Lita now that she was higher up, making her sway as she walked, and as she began to step on the branches their crackling tore the air as they snapped against her legs and scratched the skin. She gave a yelp, and blood trickled down from the deepest of the scratches.

Alexandra felt her reactions speed up, as if her astral body had some equivalent to adrenalin, and she was whirling around pointing at one place after another. "Quick! There, stamp there. Be careful of that part. And there! Stamp hard there!"

Eoss and Kell flew down and tried to hold Lita steady by leaning against her, but she still didn't appear to see them while her attention was fixed on Alexandra. Alexandra also tried to steady her, but her hands went straight through her.

Calling out instructions was working though, and Lita managed to stay on her feet for several minutes while giving the impression she was kicking down the stacked-up branches and the rubble from broken huts. But the bleeding from many small cuts increased, and soon she was crying again and falling into a sitting position at the edge of the branches. "Get Mummy! Please get Mummy!"

Alexandra knew Shaya would be unable to see or hear her, and Pedro would probably hold Shaya back anyway if she tried to climb up towards the old settlement. The wild cats were much nearer now and their growls were audible as they slid down the steeper part of the slopes above the ruined settlement. Like most predators they could smell blood.

"Lita, can you get up?" Alexandra asked urgently. The child had forgotten her now and was only focussed on calling for her mother. Eoss pushed her nose against Lita's arm and ordered, "climb up! I may not be solid enough, but we'll have to risk it. Get onto my back." Still no response



from Lita- she only continued to sit with her hands covering her face shouting, "Mummy! Mummy!"

At that moment, the four Rayan men suddenly appeared below on the rocky path, approaching with long strides. All of them were smiling now. "She is innocent!" cried the senior warrior. "She tried to destroy the old settlement." The man behind him picked Lita up and swung her onto his shoulder, ignoring the blood dripping from her torn legs, and they turned and started to descend the mountain.

One of the others raised a spear which he had been carrying covertly, tied to his skins, and threw it hard at the wild cats, which scattered as it landed directly in the middle of their group.

They were soon drawing near to Pedro and the others who at first let out gasps when they saw the Rayan carrying Lita, but their expressions turned to relief when the four men were close enough to tell them what had happened.

"They're not safe yet," said Eoss, scuffing at the ground with her front hoof. "How can they survive the return journey when they are so weakened? Alexandra, can you help with that too?"

"I doubt she can," Kell cut in, "but I have taken care of that. These people have not so far been accustomed to travel outside their settlements and return with news from far away. But I made sure that happened- I led a hunter who had tracked the wild yetas further than usual to the place where the Rayan lost their tents and food. When he got back, he told the others what he had seen, and they did something they have never done before. Come and see! This was meant for the Rayan, but now the family will be included."

Eoss and Alexandra rose into the air and flew over to the place Kell indicated, and they saw a convoy of three carts coming towards Platara Mountain across the sandstone, larger than the school carts and all drawn by yetas, led by three men who held them by rope harnesses. Piled in the back were some pots of food and water and several of the blanket mats.

Eoss gave a delighted neigh. "Look, Alexandra! Next, they will build trains like the ones in your world!"

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During her Chariot meditation Alexandra blushed slightly as she asked Eoss, "would you like a rider who isn't a virgin and who lives on the Earth? If you have one rider in each world you can spend time in both of them, and do work in both."

"Well... I'll consider it," replied Eoss with a toss of her mane. "I can't spend all my time hiding from civilization- Lita's race will soon be civilized at this rate."

“And can I put the results of some of our workings on Facebook? Only in the closed groups of course.”

“WHAT?” exclaimed Eoss.

“Come on, you were created there- so I heard.”

“Only in my present form. But you’re quite right, so go ahead if you must.”

“I always have to remember when I do tarot readings that the Chariot means something different to everyone else but me,” said Alexandra. “Let’s get away from it and ride around together in dreams instead- and help those people in need who you told me about.”

“That part, definitely,” said Eoss, looking as delighted as a benevolent goddess would.

**Mount Clexa**

**by Lena Chere**

**Eoss Trilogy, volume 2**

## **Dedication**

This book is dedicated to all my fellow occultists who have inspired me.

Ethaniel's dream is based on one that I had myself, when I was young and studying eastern mysticism.

# Chapters

Chapter 1 Hostile Realm

Chapter 2 Mission to London

Chapter 3 Running Free and Running Bound

Chapter 4 Jacey's Visit

Chapter 5 Flight Across the Realms

Chapter 6 The Test

## Chapter 1. Hostile Realm

“I want to see all the wonders in this aethyr.” I recited obediently the words my master had asked me to say.

The lady to whom I had spoken was sitting at a desk in the lobby of a large building, with a sign over the door that proclaimed, ‘The Panda House.’ An interesting name-was this a zoo? I was eager to explore it and find out. Behind the desk was a hall with long tables all around the edges. The tables were covered in random objects like the stalls at a jumble sale, and at the far end was a till with another lady seated behind it.

“All right- come in. But don’t disturb anything.”

I entered the hallway and trotted around looking at the wares on the table. A shining pearl necklace caught my eye, and I leaned forward and nuzzled it with my mouth, but it was difficult for a horse to pick up, so I left it.

When I reached the till at the end, the lady who was sitting there exclaimed, “you can’t go any further! You’ve stolen a necklace.”

“No, I haven’t,” I answered.

She went to get the pearl necklace. Then she laid it down on the table, divided off a section and reached for a pair of scissors. She cut the section completely off the necklace. “Right,” she said, “these are the ones that YOU touched. You will be tried in the courtroom for stealing these pearls.”

Of course, I wanted to turn around and gallop away, but I knew I should obey Ethaniel. He had charged me with the task of investigating this aethyr prior to journeying into it himself. The thirty aethyrs are non-material realms described in the writings of John Dee, and those who study the Enochian system of magic enter into these realms one by one in trance journeys, to explore them. My master Ethaniel was a dark sorcerer who studied many occult paths, including Enochian.

I was supposed to obey him because I am his servitor. What does that mean? According to the lore of chaos magic, it means he made me- he constructed me especially to be his servant. How could that have happened? How could a human being make a horse?

Sometimes when Ethaniel is writing in his journal, I look over his shoulder and read it. There was a day when he flicked back to consult some earlier pages, and I saw something about myself.

“I caught the Night Mare Eoss and held her. It surprised me that she wasn’t black or ferocious as I expected. She was a white horse, and apparently benevolent. I cloned a servitor from her, a daughter, and then I let her go. The daughter is my Clexa.”

In most cases a servitor is given a single task to accomplish, or a related series of tasks. To give a random example, a musician might want good guitars to come his way, and the servitor has to attract adverts for guitars and information about high quality music shops. In my case, Ethaniel wanted me more as a familiar. A witch or wizard's familiar can be a small animal, like the shamanic power animals, or a junior demon.

Alternatively, it can be like me, a servitor that has been created specially and designed to help with a variety of different tasks. A servitor has to be fed with some form of energy as fuel. Ethaniel feeds me on residual energy from the many spells he performs; he is good at raising energy, and there is always more than enough left over.

Eoss is what the magicians call an egregore, independent and proud, made from the thoughts of a whole group of people. Egregores eventually turn into minor gods and goddesses. So that is my heritage; my mother is a goddess. The magicians say that in time a servitor can grow into an egregore. I knew that I could become a goddess like my mother Eoss, and then I could disobey Ethaniel all I wanted.

But for now, I had to obey, and keep on finding out information about this realm that could be useful to Ethaniel. That meant keeping the dialogue going with the inhabitants of this place, however unreasonable they were being. However, in this case I was convinced they were not real. They were thought forms, like the characters in dreams.

I reared up on my hind legs and cried out, "you are all illusions! Thought forms! Because you are illusions, you can't hurt me."

At these words, everyone froze as if they had suddenly had all the life sucked out of them, and I turned around and trotted back to the door unchallenged. I went out into the street, planning to wait a little while and then re-enter the building and try again.

I trotted around in a large circle and began to head back towards the building.

Then I spotted a van marked 'security' parked by the roadside. A man in a yellow uniform got out and began to walk behind me.

I confronted him. "Why are you following me?"

"You're a trespasser and a thief. I can't let you get away."

"But I want to see the place with the pandas. Are they black and white bears?"

"Panda CARS. Come here, you're under arrest." He leaned forward and tried to grab me by the forelocks.

That was when I pulled back and began to dematerialize, without quite returning to the physical world. I paused in limbo, part-way between the two worlds, and then cautiously moved forward again.

The next thing that happened was that I heard a bark and felt surprisingly sharp teeth grip my bottom. "That's it- a biting dog. I give up!" and I returned to Earth where Ethaniel was waiting.

"Well?" he asked, eyeing me searchingly.

"You don't want to scry into that aethyr- they're obsessed with security. They think you're stealing something if you just touch it."

"Interesting. I'll have to read the description again. Aethyr number 11, lkh."

"I'm going to the field to lie down."

Ethaniel had bought an old farm for his magical studies. I loved the extensive grounds and the pastures, and that was where I went to recover from my experience, and my dog bite.

I couldn't exactly graze, because the energies that I subsisted on were of a subtler nature than grass. But I liked to bury my nose in the green clumps and enjoy their fresh scent, and then to canter as far as the fence on the borders of the estate. That was on normal days- today, having been bitten hard on the rear, I simply lay down and rested. It was unfair of Ethaniel to expose me to that- he must have had some idea of what would happen, and he had sent me in first before visiting the place himself, like a servant who tastes the king's food to find out whether it is poisoned. I didn't want to be his poison-taster.

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Two days later, Ethaniel was on the phone. "Yes, I can do a curse for you. I charge forty-five pounds. Your sister? Are you sure, Jacey?"

I knew that name. Jacey was one of Ethaniel's tennis partners from a sports club in London, where he used to go before he moved out to the countryside and bought the farm. I thought at the time that Jacey was going to become his girlfriend; they had a strong friendship which seemed to be about to cross the border into a greater intimacy. But instead she had taken up with John, a strong and cheerful mechanic who sometimes fixed her car, and soon afterwards Ethaniel had left London.

It's easy for me to read human thoughts, and as I tuned into Ethaniel's side of the telephone conversation it became clear what was being said and felt on both sides. Jacey was distraught because her sister Myleene had recently gone off with John. She had kept Ethaniel's contact details and was sure he was the best person to help. Ethaniel could foresee emotional dramas ahead, but was anxious to impress Jacey, and this time to keep in touch. If the spell worked well she would be grateful, and they could take up where they had left off and this time start a relationship together. He ended up conspiring with Jacey to put the curse on Myleene, as she had asked.



I remembered the way Jacey looked: a rangy, toned figure and short, dark hair. She always seemed to be playing sports, and I could imagine how some men might see her more as a team-mate than a romantic partner. I'd seen Myleene as well, once or twice. Myleene was petite and sexy, also dark but in a soft, smouldering way. The plain, sporty girl and her pretty, rival sister; how familiar is this script? It was like a fairy-tale, with stock symbolism and characters which the audience recognizes and responds to, making them feel safe and normal. Will Ethaniel remember this is real life when he puts his x on the pirate map?

They discussed it for quite a while, and it seems that sister or not, Jacey still wanted to go ahead. When the telephone conversation was over Ethaniel rang off and continued to sit by the wooden phone table, his hands pressed together in a triangle formation, deep in thought and looking frequently at me.

I knew what was coming, he would be sending me to London to target Myleene. I hoped he was not expecting results too quickly because I was by no means certain that I wished to do this. I looked away and briefly pondered what would happen if Ethaniel was to decide that I was a rogue servitor. He might take me to pieces, like a jigsaw which loses its picture step by step. But my mother Eoss was an egregore, and within me was stirring the hope that I too could quickly evolve into the same; then I would have become too strong to be dismantled.

Keeping my expression neutral, I hovered in the air above Ethaniel and waited. When he did speak to me, he didn't quite look directly at me. Although I knew that he could see me well, he kept his eyes ever so slightly to one side.

"You will go to Myleene, Clexa, and make friends with her. Speak to her while she is dreaming, and gradually earn her trust over a few weeks. Myleene will ride you. You will throw her, a nasty riding accident which will be reflected in the physical world as a broken back. That means death, or life in a wheelchair."

I listened to this, partly a fevered idea and partly an instruction, and I felt no chills, no indignation, no disapproval, in the way a human being would have done. I'm not human, after all. Yet once again the same phrase ran through my mind, *not necessarily. I'm not certain.*

"How long should I be taking to do this curse?" I asked.

"We'll make it a month. I'll use the symbol of a lunar cycle- like the first menstruation, after which young girls often become interested in riding horses. Maybe it's in preparation for riding men."

Some inner knowledge – Equus, or my mother, sounded a warning that Ethaniel was twisting something into a travesty. But it was difficult to process; I was still too early in my development to understand fully.

“When will there be time for this in our busy schedule?” I asked. “There is your exploration of the aethyrs. Then, your unpleasant dreams- and we never know when those are going to happen.”

I thought back to the beginning of the year when Ethaniel had first asked me about the dreams. It was on a day when I was down at ground level, grazing and wandering around the meadow as though I was a real physical horse. He had walked up to me and patted me- although of course his hand went right through me.

“I’ve been having nightmares all this week. Do you understand them, Clexa? You should, when your mother’s the Night Mare.”

“Only to some,” was my answer, while I reflected that it must be because of all the black magic he does. I would have thought he was one of those who could do it and still sleep like a baby, but maybe it gets to him after all.

“Never mind your mother, then. I’m sure you can help. Would you take a look, when I’m asleep tonight?”

“All right,” I had replied, and from then on, I was kept busy on certain nights, chasing away the most colourful thought forms I’d ever seen.

My attention returned to the present drama. Ethaniel was standing in front of the wall- calendar and counting on his fingers.

“I don’t want to interrupt the Enochian calls. I’m doing the same sequence that Aleister Crowley did, but I’ll be stopping at the one where he got into trouble- the tenth, just so I can spend longer preparing for it. That means I’ll be taking a break after the next one, so it won’t interfere with you going to see Myleene.”

“What was up with that last aethyr?” I asked. I was aware of how irritated I sounded at the memory of the dog biting my bottom, but right now that would come in useful. Ethaniel could concentrate on that instead of probing my attitude towards cursing Myleene.

“Oh, it’s all right,” Ethaniel explained. “I’ve realized that it WOULD be all about security. It’s number eleven, Ikh- the line of fortresses on the border of the Abyss. The security is meant to protect ME, not the entities inside. You must just have pissed them off somehow, Clexa. Now I know that, I’m ready to go in.”

This was quickly becoming just as much of a hot potato as the previous subject, and I had to hope Ethaniel was unaware of my sudden desire for him to get a bite every bit as hard as mine.

“I’ll do that tomorrow,” he continued. “Tonight I’ll fix that curse and tie the energy into you. It will be helpful if you join me for the Enochian ceremony tomorrow- you can stand by to make sure it goes all right. Then the next day, you go to London.”

I lowered my head in a sign of assent and moved away to await the next day’s ceremony.

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The heavy drapes were all closed in Ethaniel's temple, and it was laid out for his Enochian ritual. By the door, as you first came into the temple, was a circle painted in white on the wooden floor, with letters and symbols around the outside.

In the centre was a large table, also wooden, based on the one used by Dr John Dee, the founder of the Enochian system. The table was draped with a red and green silk cloth and there were white candles in ornate golden candleholders burning at the corners. In the centre were the magical seals known as the Sigillum Dei Aemeth, surrounded by seven tablets of tin. An oblong obsidian crystal was positioned above the seals, clasped in a golden frame.

Ethaniel had told me that Aleister Crowley used a topaz which he held in his hand; however, his own preference was for a black stone. Also, Aleister Crowley was accustomed to sit before the topaz and see visions in his mind without going into a trance. Ethaniel preferred the alternative way of scrying the aethyrs, which is to enter fully into each one by means of astral projection. That was the reason for sending me into all of them first, and only then performing a formal ritual such as the one that was about to begin.

I positioned myself at the back of the temple up near the ceiling. I didn't want to stand down at ground level and be a horse in the temple- that was ridiculous. Better to float above the ceremony as a spirit, like the other spirits that Ethaniel would be addressing.

Ethaniel came into the room wearing a splendid robe of red and green velvet, and several pendants engraved with seals hanging from a chain around his neck. He was carrying an ebony wand and some pieces of paper, on which he had written the Enochian call backwards. By tradition, the call is spoken backwards in Enochian rites because it would be too overwhelmingly powerful if it were spoken the way Dee and Kelley had received it from the angels.

He put the papers down on the floor inside his circle. Then he lifted down a hanging bowl of incense from a stand, lit it and wafted the incense all around the temple. He returned to the circle and walked around it, making tracings with the wand, and then he stood still in the centre and recited prayers which he had memorised.

Much of Ethaniel's' magic was chaos magic, which was why he had made me- a servitor, instead of choosing an already existing familiar spirit. This ritual counted more as ceremonial magic. However, as he had explained to me, he had put his Enochian ritual together himself and there

was no identical one to be found in the grimoires, which made it very much in the tradition of chaos magic.

Soon Ethaniel came to the Enochian call of the eleventh aethyr, and while consulting the papers he chanted it in a loud voice, making his vocal chords vibrate. Then he sat down cross-legged on the floor, gave the briefest of glances up at me, and began deep breathing to enter into a trance.

The trance deepened over the course of several minutes, and then his astral body moved out of synch with the vibration of Earth and into synch with the aethyr. I drew near to it myself to observe what he was seeing, but without quite going into it.

Ethaniel's astral body landed in an area of city streets similar to the one I had seen on my own journey to the aethyr, when I had encountered the zoo building. It was like a film set with facades of houses and public buildings, but nothing behind those facades. Ethaniel was wearing a copy of the bright red and green cloak. He appeared to be alone; however, I could see a guardian figure approaching from the right, and at first it looked like a conventional angel. But then the angel suddenly vanished and was replaced by a single-decker green bus, full of passengers, heading along the road towards the place where Ethaniel was standing. So it had changed into thought forms like before. I sensed that the angel had become the bus driver, but it was a good disguise that I could only just see through, by leaning forward and almost popping my head and mane into the aethyr. I was wary of going all the way in, after what had happened the previous time.

The bus pulled up beside Ethaniel and it now looked as if there was a bus shelter there by the roadside. I wondered whether he was registering the changes to the environment, or just accepting them uncritically as he would if he was within a dream.

The driver pressed a button to open the folding door and called out to Ethaniel in a cheery voice. "Here! Climb in. I'll take you where you want to go. It's all on the route."

Ethaniel made a sign with his hands which was meant for checking who the driver was; according to Aleister Crowley's instructions the driver was supposed to give an answering sign if he was indeed a guardian of the aethyr. But he ignored it and repeated, "climb in. Everyone's waiting."

Ethaniel got in cautiously. The bus was full up; there was only one seat left and it was a small, precarious looking one next to the driver, right beside the door. He sat down on that, and the bus trundled away.

I continued to track him, while the bus picked up speed until it was travelling quite fast. As it raced along, the door gradually began to open more and more.

Ethaniel stared at the driver fixedly. "Could you close that, please? I'm sitting right next to it."

The driver didn't answer, and the door slid open wider.

"I saw you open and close that with a button," Ethaniel said. "Shut it now, before I fall out."

The driver addressed Ethaniel without looking at him, his eyes still on the road. "Your kind are not welcome here." There was an enormous jolt, and Ethaniel was flung out of the bus.

This could easily have awoken him from the trance. After all, he wasn't even lying down, as he would have been if he was asleep and dreaming. But his training kicked in and he stood up slowly, brushing off a cloud of sandy dust. He was in a desert landscape with no living beings in sight.

Ethaniel recited several prayers in archaic English and made some more gestures, including the sign of the enterer. Then he started walking through the desert. I could tell he was annoyed at having experienced the same hostile phenomenon as me, although he kept the feeling in the background, under strict control.

After a few moments, a glint was perceptible on the horizon, and as he got nearer it revealed itself to be a round lake in the middle of the endless expanse of sand. "An oasis" was the word that occurred to me. At the edge of the lake stood a bare wooden table with several plain white cups on it. I read Ethaniel's thoughts as he halted and scrutinised the cups; he was wondering if he was supposed to take one and use it to drink from the lake.

A voice spoke out of the air. "O seeker, your spirit is still at aethyr number thirteen. You have not yet learned its lessons and cannot proceed to the borders of the abyss."

"They are not a series of initiations," Ethaniel replied boldly. "Each one is self-contained- you could go through them in any order."

"You have read some books which say that. This is no book, but real life, and I say, you still have lessons to learn from aethyr thirteen. Go back."

"I haven't passed you yet, guardian," Ethaniel said, still defiant. "May I pass?"

There was no answer, but the water in the lake began to boil up. It rose in a giant tidal wave and poured over the desert, turning it all into a river and washing Ethaniel away, and this time he did wake up. He returned to his body that was still sitting cross-legged within the circle.

He didn't look at me as he recited closing prayers and banishments and left first the circle and then the temple, with his wand and his notes of the Enochian call. Perhaps there was no need to speak to me- to him I

was only a servant who was there to receive instructions, and I already knew where I was going tomorrow.

I withdrew to a slightly higher plane but continued to watch to make sure he was all right, although he scarcely deserved such solicitude. He went to his study, where he took off the cloak and draped it over the back of a chair. Then he sat at his desk and wrote a report of the ritual in his journal, and only after finishing that did he retire for the night.

## Chapter 2. Mission to London

The following morning I prepared to leave for the neighbourhood where Myleene lived, to stay there for several weeks and carry out a mission, like a heat-seeking bullet. It wouldn't take me long to fly there over the rooftops. I recalled the song 'Walking in the Air,' which I had once heard coming from Ethaniel's TV. I would be a less welcome apparition.

So many suburban streets, like railway tracks criss-crossing, the houses groomed and expensive looking. Myleene was taking a shower when I arrived outside her window, so I paused in the air and hovered. Naturally, I could read her thoughts, just as clearly as I could with Ethaniel. Her mind was replaying a conversation she'd had with her mother earlier that day, and she was on repeat, asking herself again and again if her mother really approved of her, or had only been pretending to.

It would take a little time to win her trust. It would be necessary to tread softly, to coax. Funny, that was how a human being often approached a horse, and this was the other way round.

Myleene came out from the shower and dried herself with a plump lilac towel, then lifted up her black hair and began to adjust an earring that appeared to be causing her some discomfort. It was a drooping earring of transparent crystal, hanging from a pierced ear.

Softly and yet with vigour, I sent her a thought about horse-riding dreams- so relaxing, like going on the swings when you're little. Who wouldn't want to have such dreams?

A fleeting impression crossed Myleene's mind- had she dreamed about riding in a horse race last night? A good way to forget your worries, and if you were to win...it became a daydream about prize money and rosettes, completely different from the original idea that I had sent to her.

I was already well-used to the human mind doing that. It could even be used as a kind of divination, to tell me the kind of person I was dealing with. Myleene was competitive; that was obvious because it was what had started off this whole situation with her sister. I didn't try to steer Myleene back to the original thought because that would have provoked resistance- instead, I withdrew into the background and looked for something else to take an interest in.

In Myleene's bedroom the curtains matched the chair covers; both were of a floral design with brown ruffles. I admired these for a few minutes, bumping my long horse's face against the chair back. If it had been a physical horse doing that the fabric would quickly have become

wet and dirty, but a servitor horse could do it all day long without causing any damage.

Myleene finished putting her clothes on and sat at a dressing-table stacked with make-up; she looked in the mirror and began to do her hair and face. She put on a lot of mascara.

It was difficult to get her attention when she was so preoccupied. I would have to wait until she was asleep and dreaming before I could start to establish a real relationship, just as Ethaniel had said. He must be intending it to be like luring a child into a trap; fairy tales again, the big bad wolf. But Myleene was a person and deserved to be treated like one, and if possible, spared the catastrophe. Jacey would regret it anyway, when she found out what Ethaniel was planning.

Although Myleene wouldn't notice me until night-time, I knew Ethaniel expected me to tail her during the day as well. I could follow her like a stalker, watch her every move. Whatever she was doing I could always be there in the background, waiting for her to feel that uneasy prickling feeling of being watched, constantly ready to pounce. That is power; that is control.

But that wasn't what I wanted to do. I didn't want to watch the Earth plane all the time. I'm a servitor, a spirit, and I prefer to explore the spirit world because that is my own world. I wanted to gallop across its meadows and hills, lie down in its shady valleys, stand by its stretches of sapphire-blue water with my nose and forelock trailing in the spray. I wanted to seek among its mountains and plains for a place I could call home.

I decided to follow Myleene to the absolute minimum that would be required. I didn't want to hear her conversations with her mother and with John, to see her in bed with John, in the bath, in the shops buying food, washing her clothes. It was all so mundane that I would go screaming mad.

With that thought I shot out of the window and up into the sky and didn't return to watch her again until it was mid-afternoon.

Myleene had been shopping, for it wasn't a workday for her, and she was carrying her bags across the road from the supermarket to her car. I tuned in and began to read her thoughts.

She always expected to enjoy shopping trips alone- material things, which she had always liked, plenty of time to look at them without someone else hurrying her up, and the freedom to buy whatever she fancied. Yet after the first half hour or so, she would always start to feel lonely. It would have been more fun with a friend along, even if it was only grocery shopping- they could have a laugh and go for a coffee. Or with her sister along...that wouldn't be possible now that she and Jacey were



no longer speaking. But never mind Jacey. “She should accept what’s happened and wish me happiness. If she won’t, she isn’t worth it.”

I was supposed to seize on sentiments like that and use them as fuel for crafting the disaster. Instead I took hold of it but examined it as if I was turning a stick over and over. There was something to learn here about human beings in general: their mixed feelings, their self-justification, and it was all somehow neutral. It didn’t make Myleene into a villain.

She unlocked the door of her red ford fiesta and dumped the bags on the back seat, still thinking furiously. “If I had a car-full of people, these bags would have to go in the boot. Wonder if I ever will? A man and two children in the car. John, maybe? Or isn’t he as serious as that?”

I wondered why she didn’t know.

As she pulled out of the car park, I dipped down towards ground level until I reached the grass verge. Then I buried my head in it and made grazing movements, horse-like, which was soothing even though I didn’t need to do it. When I lifted my head she was gone, and I took hold of her feelings again and wove them into the curse like I was supposed to do. But I included a brake, so that her sentiments wouldn’t trigger it unless I pulled the lever.

Ethaniel had suggested that I should watch John as well as Myleene, get a feel for them as a couple, but I couldn’t get interested in watching John at all. Maybe it was a girl-bonding thing, as I had been charged with winning Myleene’s trust. But I quickly reminded myself that I wasn’t a girl, I was a horse. Could I change my form to that of a girl, perhaps? It might work for getting her to confide in me. It wouldn’t be much use for persuading her to ride me, because she wouldn’t connect ‘girl’ me with ‘horse’ me- she would see them as two separate beings. The way she would trust a horse is totally different from the way she would trust another human being.

I was reminded of the legend of the unicorn, which Ethaniel had shown me one day in an illustrated reference book. It was part of the process of ‘training the servitor.’ He’s never really understood my mother Eoss, just doesn’t ‘get’ her, but he knows that one of her aspects is an archetype of the unicorn, so it seemed to him something relevant to teach me about.

He explained that in the legend warriors fear the unicorn, because it will fight them using its horn as a weapon. In that way, it engages with them on their own level. The only one who the unicorn trusts is the virtuous young girl, the matchless maid. In some of the legends she is a virgin. When she approaches, the unicorn becomes tame and kneels down on the ground before her. It bows its head or even lays its head on her lap.

Myleene was the opposite of a matchless maid. Ethaniel called her a whore and said she deserved what was coming to her.

Obviously, there is some sexual symbolism in the unicorn legend, with the unicorn's phallic horn and the maiden's lap. When my mother Eoss helps a human being, she has to take a little nip of sexual energy to provide fuel, and usually she takes it not from the person she is helping but from a rider, a shaman who rides on her back.

Ethaniel explained to me that the symbol of the lion and the unicorn who fight one another can work either way around and can be applied either to the left-hand path or the right-hand path in occultism. The lion can be Christ the King, while the horned unicorn is Satan. Alternatively, the lion can be the Beast, while the unicorn is the pure saviour of New Age teachings. Therefore, my mother and I can be either goddesses, or demonesses. Ethaniel wanted me to be an avenging demon for Jacey, who after all was paying him for his services. I could choose to see the situation from either side, but I felt more like the New Age unicorn.

"Maybe that is the one I'm destined to be," I murmured to myself as I licked the grass. "But I don't have a horn and neither does my mother. We are not unicorns. We are horses, modelled after the physical animal, like those Egyptian gods who have an animal's head. What we should have most in common with are horses, not unicorns. The horse has always been a servant to mankind, ridden for transport, in battle and in sport. Because I am Ethaniel's servitor I exist to serve his interests, and yet Myleene is part of mankind too, so don't I have just as much responsibility towards her?"

I found that with the passage of time it became easier for me to think rationally, and with abstractions, about important matters such as these. It was a good sign for my aim to turn into an egregore as rapidly as possible.

It was late in the night when I next approached Myleene, when she would be asleep and dreaming, in accordance with Ethaniel's instructions. Human beings have a totally different consciousness when they are dreaming. While awake, their thoughts and feelings are rooted in the physical world where their body lives. But in dreams they go to the astral plane, the spirit world, and their perceptions are so different that they often don't make any sense to the waking mind. They live temporarily in that world and act out their dreams.

Myleene was dreaming that she was walking through a shopping mall wearing a fake fur coat. A lady with very tight plaits in her hair and silver rings on her fingers was sitting in an alcove that had been made into a jewellery shop. She leaned forward and exclaimed, "it's too hot for that! And everyone hates fur nowadays."

I wondered whether Myleene was too hot under her bedclothes. The astral cord pulsates like an electric wire and often transmits physical sensations to the sleeper which affect their dreams. I materialised briefly

by her bed (not so strongly that I would have been visible to anyone) and examined the environment. There was only a thin summer duvet slung across the bed, and Myleene had one leg outside it. The bedroom felt cool to me.

She wasn't sleeping with John that night. By reading her background thoughts I gathered that this was her own small flat where she usually spent three or four days of every week. It was convenient for her job, and also delayed her making a full commitment to living with John.

I moved back onto the astral plane. If it wasn't the temperature that had influenced her dream, it must be her emotions. Again, I looked into her mind; sure enough, she had been talking to her mother the previous day about image. The image you project if you're wearing jeans, wearing fur, wearing gold... Myleene definitely was materialistic and worried about her social status. But she didn't deserve to be killed or crippled for that. Humans are often that way, especially the younger ones.

I trotted towards her, surrounding myself with a mist. In her dream she would see a beautiful white fairy-tale horse emerging from a cloud. I extended my neck and thrust my nose towards her face. I was still planning to entice her to ride me, but I wouldn't necessarily have to throw her- although there would be matters to sort out with Ethaniel if I didn't.

Myleene paused. "A horse in the mall?" I heard her think. She looked around her doubtfully, and then her mind began making up a story to reconcile it. "It's one of those fete days, with horses for the children to pet and have rides on. The mall is only covered over at one end." She created a picture around herself of a food and craft festival that she had attended the previous summer and would be going to again this year.

Now there was a fence around me which was in my way and thought forms of children queuing up excitedly alongside the stall. I was about to escape very subtly, then I realised that Myleene's type of mind would prefer a drama. So I reared up and kicked the fence over with a crash and galloped away. After making a circuit around the mall I returned to Myleene and pulled up sharp beside her, as though the bolting horse had taken a sudden liking to her and had calmed down.

She stroked my head. "Pretty mare! Are you going to be tame for me? Don't want you kicking ME over."

Gradually she gained confidence, patting me and running my silver mane through her fingers. I sat down on my haunches, and Myleene was about to climb up.

Unexpectedly, I felt something hit me. It felt like lightning, or a whiplash across my back. Ethaniel's magic spell! I hadn't realised that it would feel like that. I thought I was going to be able to choose whether to carry on or apply a brake, but I couldn't choose. This spell was compelling

me to throw Myleene. I had a second to save her- if I was sure I wanted to.

From somewhere deep within me, there welled up a long, white ribbon with a texture like silk. One end knotted itself around my neck, the other fluttered loose, and in a smooth movement I stood up and leapt away leaving only the end of the ribbon bobbing near Myleene's hand. "Catch the bridle and I'm yours!" I neighed, hiding the words in the middle of the sound.

Myleene laughed, and took hold of the ribbon. "My horse now! I caught her. Now I'll be in the showjumping, and I'll win the cup. The cup- it will up there on the mantelpiece, above the fire."

Good, she was back to thinking about winning prizes, and momentarily it made her forget that she had been about to ride me. I backed away one step at a time out of the imaginary shopping mall, which was now half an outdoor market, while the magical energy that had come from Ethaniel sparked up and down the ribbon seeking me, moving like an intelligent being that was confused.

It seemed to take forever, one backwards step after another, during which Myleene's thought forms once more began to press around her, a food and craft market mixed with a cup above a fireplace, and then the jewellery shop again. The order in which the images had appeared became jumbled, and they began to repeat and skip between one another; she watched them, distracted, and let go of the ribbon without realising she had done so.

As I cantered away, a plan was already forming in my mind. Instead of inducing Myleene to mount me, I would give her a test, something that would involve swinging through the air on the white ribbon. "If she is pure, and she passes, I'll let her go." It sounded good. But Myleene wasn't pure. She was like everyone else.

Where had she come from? I sensed that her mother had named her a while before Myleene Klass had become famous, so she can't have been named after her. I pulled that information from somewhere but couldn't take the next step and pick up her background and life story. I wasn't an egregore yet.

I still had a few weeks to solve this. Ethaniel had specified within a month, and there would be other nights and other dreams. I was still galloping and had no idea where I was heading in my flight, when suddenly I heard Ethaniel's voice ringing out all around me. "Clexa! Can you come and help?"

He must be having another nightmare; it was still the early hours of the morning. I sensed where Ethaniel was and raced in that direction, and after a few moments I was there. But something was different this time. Ethaniel was dreaming, certainly, but he wasn't in the usual dream

environment. He had returned during his sleep to one of the Enochian aethyrs. It must be possible to visit them in dreams as well, not only during rituals.

It wasn't the aethyr from the most recent ritual. Having tested them all out for him first I should have been able to identify which one it was; however, I was puzzled. Because Ethaniel had studied Aleister Crowley's visions in detail, he had seen some of the same symbols when he made his own scrying journeys, but there was also much variation because each person's mind is individual. I didn't recognise this place at all.

The setting of Ethaniel's dream was a mean street with many tattered tenement buildings which all had winding outside staircases made of metal. He was standing on a corner wearing an elaborate peacock blue cloak which fell to his feet. It could have been one of his ritual garments like the red and green one, but I hadn't seen it before. Quickly I looked around for danger, but I could see none, and there was no-one around besides ourselves.

As I came closer, I perceived that what was oppressing Ethaniel was coming from his own mind. There were waves of sadness palpable in the atmosphere, agitating it and flowing around in circles.

When I stopped beside him my hoofs clattered against the ground; it was difficult to hover here. "What's the trouble?" I asked.

"It's this cloak," Ethaniel replied. He spread his arms so that the ample sleeves flapped and hung down. "I was visiting some friends who live here, an Asian family, and I found this cloak lying in a box in the hallway and took it. They didn't see me put it in my bag. I should give it back now, but I can't. I've developed an obsession with it. I feel like if I take it back to them, my life won't be worth living."

This completely stumped me. I couldn't tell what was going on, but Ethaniel was obviously suffering. He looked like he was in despair, which was very unlike him.

"I'll see if I can find out what's up, and then I'll be back. Don't move. And when you do get over this, I suggest you exit twice. This is an aethyr. You'll have to exit first from the aethyr, and then from the dream world."

Ethaniel stared at me as if he hadn't understood what I had said, which was even stranger.

I galloped away and soon left the area. At first, I passed through mountain ranges with the higher slopes iced with snow, a facsimile of the Himalayas. There were green valleys between them but nothing familiar to me. Then I came to a vast area of cultivated gardens. At last, a territory that I recognized. This was the garden of Nemo from one of Aleister Crowley's visionary accounts- Nemo the perfected sage who beholds the face of God. That meant that Ethaniel had gone back to the thirteenth aethyr. I wondered which way I would have to head to get out. Would I

have to pass through adjacent aethyrs, all folded into one another like the skins of an onion?

I went up to Nemo, a veiled figure in a brown monk's cowl. He was standing by the edge of one of the neat flowerbeds holding an implement which looked like a hoe and weeding the border. I neighed and called out "Nemo!" and he turned his head.

"Could you help me, please?" I asked. "What's wrong with Ethaniel tonight? He's over in that direction, in a cramped street where a lot of poor people live." I jerked my head to indicate.

"This is the place of enlightenment," Nemo replied in a stately tone. "I have become the enlightened one, and to do that you must weed out all attachment. This has been explored most thoroughly in sacred writings that come from India, of Advaita Vedanta and Buddhism. In western language, attachment is often called 'the ego.' The sage must weed it from his garden."

"Do you want me to tell Ethaniel that?" I asked. It went over my head in part, but I could easily convey a message.

"He should know that is what his dream means. If not, he should not be here."

Would a dream interpretation be enough to pull Ethaniel together? I had to hope so, and I thanked Nemo and galloped away.

I knew how to find Ethaniel again, just keep the image of him and the place where I had left him in my mind. I travelled in one direction, sometimes galloping and sometimes flying, and soon I was once again beside him.

He was standing before a dusty, stained shop window in the slum town, looking at his reflection and pulling up the cloak so that the top part of it was gathered into a hood. "Most of these kinds of cloaks have hoods," he was saying to himself.

I pulled him by the shoulder with my mouth. "Ethaniel- you must remember where you are and what you're doing."

"I do," he answered shortly. "I'm just trying to distract myself from the pain of this violent attraction. I feel like I'm burning inside. It's like being in love with a person, instead of only a blue cloak. I must keep it- I can't bear to give it back. But it belongs to my Indian friends, and I know they want it back."

"But it isn't real. It means something to do with ego attachment, which the Indian people believe in. Nemo said so."

I waited for a reaction; however, Ethaniel simply said, "I've got to walk around this town and find something to do, to put off having to give it back. Let's explore, and I'll give it back later. I can't bear to let it go."

He strode away, and soon we came to a grassy recreation ground where many people and children were playing sports like football and

netball. Ethaniel joined in with the games and became completely absorbed in them, forgetting me as I stood watching at the edge of the field, and he carried on like this until he woke up around breakfast time.

## Chapter 3. Running Free and Running Bound

I hovered over a lovely stretch of water, almost like a harbour, except that this was the middle of London, the canal which flowed at the back of the tennis courts. Jacey had been coming to this place for many years, ever since her family had first moved to the area. This I learned as I tuned into her mind. She loved that skyline and knew it so well. She noticed the changes whenever something new was built or a tree was cut down.

The horizon was like a jigsaw standing on end, the cut-out shapes changing over the years, the pieces that fitted into the slots moving so they were a different size or at a new angle to one another, or even switching position to another side of the puzzle.

I hadn't expected Jacey to be sensitive. She was the sporty girl who wanted revenge. Yet she was a person in three dimensions, like her sister. Jacey too had her rights which a horse, a beast that serves mankind, would need to consider.

Originally, I hadn't intended to go near her, but my curiosity got the better of me. As I tuned in more closely, I saw that she was mostly observing and appreciating the natural environment of the canal side. She noticed rushes with rusty-red tubular flowers, which looked as if they had been made from pipe-cleaners twisted into shape. By her feet were clumps of very big leaves leaning to one side cabbage-style, and she examined those and then let her gaze rest on the sailboats that passed by heading for the local boating club, some with white sails and others with coloured ones, all blowing out behind them. The mud here smelled different from seaside mud. She would recognise it anywhere.

I tried to access her emotions, particularly those about Myleene, and became aware of a bitterness that she fancied would turn sweet when she got her revenge. Humans do say 'revenge tastes sweet.' Surely this was just a figure of speech- or was it genuinely tied in with the humans' sense of taste, attached somehow to their tongues? I tried and failed to find the place where these emotions mingled in with biscuit eating and swallowing medicine. At root it felt to me more like loneliness, of a similar kind to the loneliness Myleene had felt when she went shopping on her own. They shouldn't both be lonely. Jacey should feel spiteful, but where exactly was her spite located?

I thought about Ethaniel's spell working successfully, and Jacey becoming his girlfriend. I imagined her moving in with him at the farm, or him selling the farm and returning to London; Myleene crippled or dead, John distraught and maybe having moved on. It was an alternative reality



in which the world for those few people involved would have become a different place. That is the aim of magic, to change reality according to your will and live in the new world you have created.

Ethereal, I slipped away as suddenly as I had arrived, and went to a higher plane to roll in the grass and gallop freely across wide moors. I would await the night to approach Myleene again, and make a firm decision about how I was going to test her and what would happen afterwards. Ethaniel would be expecting results soon, so I would have to act fast.

Time passed quickly while I was enjoying myself on my own sphere, and soon night fell over London and over Ethaniel's farm deep in the Essex countryside. I trotted in the direction of Myleene's flat, and as I approached, I tuned into her.

She was missing John today. It was coming up to the time of week when she usually went to stay with him for a few days. I reflected how human beings tend to get sexually frustrated at regular intervals, and then they make rash decisions: an unsuitable encounter, a disastrous relationship, encouraging an online stalker too much, and the list goes on. I would have to be sure that she was relaxed and deeply asleep before I started my test with the white ribbon.

Before I had reached the house, I again heard a mental call from Ethaniel. "Clexa! I'm having that nightmare again. Can you come and help?" He must be back in the thirteenth aethyr, wearing that blue cloak. I raced towards the place, hoping that this time we could resolve it.

He was certainly wearing the cloak, but he was in a different location. It had scrubby vegetation, like common land at the edge of a built-up area. His astral body looked the same as his physical body, and the cloak went well with his blue eyes and his skin, which was mid-toned but on the fair side. His brown hair had grown longer since he had moved out to the farm. I wondered whether Jacey would find him attractive if she could see him. She had been alone for a couple of months, unlike Myleene for only four days, and both of them were young, passionate girls. Unless she had started seeing someone else, but I was sure I would have picked that up when I tuned into her by the canal.

"Clexa, I can't take the cloak back," Ethaniel said. "My life would be empty without it. I just want to get away somewhere, anywhere, where I can keep it. There's a border just over there- come over the border with me and we'll be free."

I pulled up, my hooves kicking up the dust, and thrust my head towards him as if I was about to nibble his shoulder. I wasn't, but that's always a good way of getting a human being's attention.

"I don't think that's such a good idea. We don't know where we'll end up if we cross it."

In truth I couldn't see a border, but I soon realised what Ethaniel meant when he turned around and began heading towards a line of low stone walls. They were strung across the land just past the nearest patch of brambles and looked for all the world like show-jumping fences. I could imagine myself trotting round a circuit and jumping this one, then a higher one, then higher still as a uniformed aide added poles to ramp up the obstacle by half a metre at a time.

It was annoying that Ethaniel ignored my advice; after all, he was the one who had called me. He crossed over between two of the walls and I followed- and then the worst possible thing happened. We became separated. Ethaniel vanished, and I had no idea where he had landed.

It must have been a border between two of the aethyrs, and I recognised my surroundings as aethyr number twelve, Loe. This was one that Ethaniel had already explored. It was here that Aleister Crowley had seen a vision of the cup of Babalon and as before Ethaniel had tuned into and seen some of the same symbols.

In front of me, stretching as far as I could see, was a great muddy swamp. A black chalice encrusted with rubies and emeralds was floating in the sky; it was the size of an island and dominated the whole landscape. In front of the chalice and to the left stood a woman in a red cloak. Her dark eyes blazed, and long red hair escaped from around the edges of her hood.

I tried to move and found that I couldn't fly. My hooves began to sink into the silt, and I felt something akin to panic. "What's happening to me?" I asked, my voice half words and half a whinny.

The woman spoke. "Behold, the cup of Babalon. Cups are receptive, and that's how you should be. His servant, his familiar. You should do as he asks. But always, you go against his wishes."

I felt overwhelmed, crushed down and subdued by her, and my greatest fear surfaced. "Don't let Ethaniel take me to pieces."

She laughed, cruelly I thought. "All dissolves into my cup, and you are soluble as well. You will lose your sense of "I." But not through Ethaniel-through life, which is much more powerful. The blood, the life, the rebirth, until you are perfect. For you, perfection might be a matchless maid."

My head was whirling, my eyes watering as if the air was full of smoke, and I couldn't process her words. "Ethaniel made you," she continued. "He is your father and your lover, metaphorically. He is your all, until a change comes, so obey him."

I wasn't going to obey Ethaniel about Myleene. My doubts had now crystallised into a firm resolve; I would find another way, one that didn't involve killing her or putting her in a wheelchair. Ethaniel was prepared to cripple her, only for having a relationship. Sometimes on Earth a horse

does cripple a man or woman by throwing them, and no-one blames the horse. They call it an accident. But they often have the horse put down in case a similar accident should occur again. Even though I was different from an earthly horse and the situation didn't compare, I still felt included in it. I felt that I partook in these animals' execution when they were put down.

This girl Babalon, Goddess to some and Demoness to others, must know what I was thinking. She must know that I was still defiant. What would she do to me?

Suddenly, I did something that I'd often seen Ethaniel do during his trances and dreams. I ignored the fact that I was at a disadvantage and instead concentrated on getting out unscathed. I reared up, causing my front hooves to shoot out of the mud with a wet thwack. I jumped forward into the air and the impetus pulled my back hooves out as well. Then I streaked away across the landscape of moorland and bracken, dominated by the indigo sky with the jewelled cup in it.

There was only one thought in my mind- the border. I must reach it and get back into aethyr thirteen. I flew onward, keeping the image of the border in my mind. At last I came to the line of stone walls again and jumped across.

Now to find Ethaniel, but he was nowhere to be seen. I changed the image I was holding in my mind to that of Ethaniel. Then I perceived that Ethaniel was awake and out of bed, shining a torch into the barn at the back of the farmhouse. Some foxes had been making a noise; finding no livestock on the farm they had been rooting around looking for food amongst the rubbish. I couldn't tell how much of his dream Ethaniel had remembered or at what point he had left the scene to return to the Earth plane, and he was focussing on the foxes and unaware of me. I decided to call it a night and lie down in my favourite place in the pasture beside the farmhouse, then return to London the following day.

In the clear spotlight beams of early morning, I cantered to the edge of my favourite pasture and launched myself into the air to fly back to London. After a few minutes I saw Myleene's street below me, and I landed on a nondescript patch of green at the corner, where I stood with my nose down making grazing movements as was my habit. The poor-quality grass would have scarcely made a meal for a flesh and blood horse.

Suddenly I felt something jump onto my back. Thin legs gripped me on either side and a voice exclaimed, "no throw means no dice, Clexa!"

As I attempted to swivel my neck around to see who it was, the rider moved off my back and onto the green in front of me, and I saw it was a small demon. It was black all over with a bald head, long limbs and pointed

feet. I sensed that it was a servant from the legion of a more powerful demon.

I assumed a relaxed manner, knowing that squaring up for a fight would be likely to bring about a fight. That seemed to work because it rapidly moved away from me and up into the air, where it hovered above the street. Really, I wanted to ask it what was happening.

Then, with a shock, I noticed something else moving through the sky, coming towards me. It was a flying monkey, its outstretched arms joined to its body by a furry membrane like the one a flying squirrel would have. At the end of the hands were long, razor-sharp claws.

“What is it?” I gasped, in my half-whinnying voice.

The demon dipped nearer to me and called out, “it’s Ethaniel’s terminator! He’s made this new servitor and sent it here, to correct the irregularity.”

So he knew then, that Myleene had been about to climb onto my back to be thrown, and I had done something to put it off. I should have realized that he would know, instead of assuming I’d got away with it. Ethaniel monitored his spells after casting them and nothing much got past him.

I’d never galloped so fast in my life, straight up to Myleene’s front door and then upwards like a ghost floating by the wall and in through her bedroom window. Quickly I took up the same position as on my first day in her flat and filled my mind with the thought of my mission. If I appeared to be complying, perhaps the new servitor would leave me alone.

Outside the window the monster vanished, but I knew he was still watching covertly from behind a cloud. The demon dipped nearer again and seemed about to speak to me. I interrupted.

“There’s no need to explain what I’m supposed to do- I know. But this whole thing is all so that Ethaniel can be Jacey’s lover. And if they do get together, they will both regret what they did to Myleene. Leave this to me.”

“Hmm.” The demon looked at me dubiously. “You want to go off and become a benevolent unicorn. Your choice, but I see a fuel store inside you. You will starve without the residual energy from Ethaniel’s spells.”

Our minds united, and I shared his next thought. “Magicians these days, they love to make a servitor. But it’s a weird thing, not exactly a robot, and they can never be sure what the outcome will be.” Then he separated from me and whizzed away.

As I am sure you can imagine, I watched Myleene dutifully all day, and every so often sent her suggestions that it would be fun to dream about riding a horse. She half-accepted them absently, as she packed her bag for staying with John, took it to work and worked her shift behind a beauty counter in a large store, then afterwards drove over to John’s house.

I passed the evening exploring John's living room. It was untidy in a homely way, with clothes and DVDs strewn on and around a plump couch in the middle of the room. At one end was a bookcase which I found mildly interesting. There were framed photos of John's parents and two brothers in front of the books and next to them a pile of men's supplements from a Sunday magazine.

Outside I could hear John telling Myleene about an annoying customer who kept insisting there was still something wrong with his car. Myleene politely murmured some sympathetic words, then began talking about how much she had missed him. "Last night I kept waking up and wanting you, all night long."

"Great!" said John. "Let's watch the film in bed. We could eat there as well, on trays."

I hoped it would be a while before Myleene fell asleep because that would give me time to work out a plan of action. I was still aware of the 'terminator' servitor watching from above the house, and I wondered whether he was thinking rationally like I was, or just itching to use those sharp black claws.

Originally Ethaniel had allowed up to a month for the curse to work, and it had been less than a week. But every magician aims for results sooner rather than later, and when he received the psychic impression about me deferring it, he would have wanted to tighten up the spell and get it over with now.

Would it be possible I could throw Myleene and there wouldn't be an accident in the physical world? I thought not. The accident would be replicated a few days later and would probably involve her car. The imperative was still to avoid throwing her and test her instead, but if I did that the other servitor would lay into me, and maybe attack her too. I found myself hoping that Ethaniel would have his recurring nightmare again and call me, giving me an excuse to leave the scene.

I carried on waiting in the living room. Myleene didn't come back into the room, and John only came in once to fetch a couple of DVDs. If only this situation was a film, instead of real. Now that I'd seen John, I could imagine him as a character in a love triangle on one of those DVDs - he was tanned and muscular with a handsome face.

Half an hour after midnight, Myleene had just fallen asleep. I was thoroughly bored by now with John's house, and weary of pondering different strategies without success. I moved towards the place where Myleene was emerging into dream consciousness in her astral body. But I filled my mind with the image of Ethaniel, to see if he was about to call me away.

Ethaniel wasn't in bed yet. He had been performing some minor spells and was putting away his journal and some ritual items. There was

energy left over from the spells, sparkling and gyrating in the temple room, and I automatically drew it in as nourishment as I had done so many times before.

Quickly I returned my attention to Myleene and began dancing around her in a weaving pattern. She followed the pretty horse with her eyes, smiling. I pretended to be a flamboyant show-off and continued the dance for much longer than was necessary, sporadically eyeing the sky above the house where the monster was hiding. At last I halted. "Would you like to ride?" I asked, bucking very slightly and subtly in the hope that this would make her hesitate.

Myleene was now fully identified with her astral body, the emotional body that expresses what a person really feels, and she answered confidently, "what I want is to show-jump. To win. With everyone I know watching, to see me take that cup."

How fortuitous that she mentioned showjumping. I remembered the low stone walls that had made me think of jumping fences on a circuit, and a daring plan came to me, much better than the ones I had been ruminating on all the evening. I would take Myleene to the thirteenth aethyr. Maybe Nemo, or someone else there, could help me. After all, they had directed Ethaniel to renounce his worldly desires. Ethaniel had once told me that the aethyrs were only for initiates and a common person would be unable to enter them. But I had to do something quickly- there was no time.

The white ribbon sprouted from my neck and fluttered towards Myleene's hand. "Catch hold, Myleene, and I'll take you to the show-jumping circuit."

She gave me an odd look when I addressed her by name, but she seized the ribbon and let me lead her. I led her first along the street for some paces, then through the air, then edge-on across the veil into the other dimension.

Myleene landed with me beside the stone walls, on the aethyr thirteen side of the border. She glanced once around her, then swiftly lay down on the ground and entered the third stage of sleep- deep or dreamless sleep.

Human psychologists have classified the sleep cycle into three phases. Falling asleep, in which the human starts to see and hear dreams, is the hypnagogic state. The next phase is REM sleep in which the human has rapid eye movements and observes dreams. The third is deep sleep in which there are no dreams. Magicians associate dreaming sleep with the astral body and deep sleep with a higher mental body. Because Myleene was an ordinary person and not an initiate, she was unable to respond to this realm, so she retreated from it into a more profound state of rest. Back on the Earth plane where her body was sleeping in John's

bed, her brain waves changed to the pattern characteristic of the third stage of sleep.

Just then the flying monkey servitor appeared above me, high in the hazy clouds of the thirteenth aethyr. He was hovering like a vulture waiting to strike. He shouted out in a voice that sounded like iron filings grinding together.

“Irregularity! Your programming is faulty. She cannot ride you in dreamless sleep- she needs to be dreaming. Take her back to the plane where she dreams, or I destroy you.” He began rushing towards me, his claws pointing forwards and his mouth open, showing pointed teeth.

It was at that moment that I at last heard Ethaniel calling, from a point deeper into the territory of the aethyr. “Clexa! I’m having that nightmare again.”

“I’m on my way,” I replied, darting forward, and if I’d had hands instead of hooves, I would have made a rude gesture at that other servitor. It was unfortunate that I had to leave Myleene fast asleep on the ground in a region far from home, but I would just have to hope she would be safe there.

Ethaniel was back in the slum town where his dream about the blue cloak had first started. He was still wearing it, and it was beautiful, a velvety texture, and yet translucent at the same time. It reflected other tones and lights and brought to mind the quotation “a coat of many colours.”

He was standing in front of the flats where the family lived who owned the cloak, looking up wistfully at their window. “I’ll have to give it back. But I can’t bear to part with it. Clexa, you take it up and give it to them. It belongs to one of their children. They’re teenagers, two girls and a boy. Give it to them.” He shrugged it off his shoulders and draped it across my neck.

“I don’t know those people,” I objected. “Shouldn’t you come with me?”

“I can’t bear to- it’s too painful. You go.”

Ethaniel looked even more distressed than he had the previous time. It was no use trying to change his mind, so I trotted into the open lobby and began to step slowly up the outside staircase that spiralled around the outside of the block. It was like a fire escape, narrow and not designed for four hooves.

I remembered that they lived on the first floor, but I wasn’t sure if it was the flat straight ahead of me at the end of the landing or the one in another corridor that branched off on the left. I should have asked Ethaniel which number they lived at. But there was no way I was going back.

In the end I opted for the flat down the left corridor, and I trotted up to the door and banged the knocker with my teeth, being careful not to dislodge the cloak from my neck.

Soon a lady answered the door. She was African, not Indian, but I was not to find that out until I described her to Ethaniel afterwards. English human beings were the only ones I'd got a close look at, so far in my life.

"Would you like this cloak?" I asked.

"Oh, thank you!" she exclaimed, and after taking it from me she patted my head. "Very kind of your owner, little horse."

Then she closed the door. Actually, I'd always thought of myself as quite a big horse- although a stallion would have been larger. I stepped gingerly back down the narrow metal stairs until I reached Ethaniel. He was staring fixedly at the wall next to the front entrance, still looking very upset.

"So, did you find them? What did they say?"

"I gave it to the lady who lives on the first floor. The flat just down the corridor – I'm sure that was right."

"DOWN the corridor?" Ethaniel snapped. "Their flat's straight ahead of you as you come out onto the landing. She can't have been the right person. Describe her to me."

That was when I discovered my error, and Ethaniel became more and more distraught. "My friends' children will be frantic, looking for their favourite cloak. I might as well have kept it. This is a major tragedy- we need to get it back. Why ever did I trust you with it? And why can't I control my feelings for it? If I didn't have this obsession, I would have gone myself."

He began to cry. There was something very unsettling about seeing a grown man crying in a sub-realm, miles away from the Earth, and especially so when the crying became so hysterical that he woke himself up.

I at once offered to stay near him for the rest of the night and go back to London in the morning. Subdued, he agreed.

I promptly went and lay down in the yard behind the house which was much nearer to the main building than my favourite pasture. As soon as Ethaniel took his eyes off me and began trying to drift back into dreams, I pushed my head and neck into the aethyr, which I had learned to do expertly now, and nudged Myleene back through the veil onto the astral plane. She slid through like a letter into a post-box and landed with a soft thump on a patch of grass on the astral plane, where her dreams recommenced.



## Chapter 4. Jacey's Visit

Ethaniel slept in late the next day. I hung around the farm, mostly lying down in the disused barn. I hoped I could hide out here for a few hours, if possible until the evening-John and Myleene would both be at work until then. Angels and gods can cloak themselves so that they are not seen, and their thoughts are not heard, and beings of lesser power find this much more difficult to do but I tried as best I could.

When Ethaniel finally emerged from the bedroom, he went into the kitchen to make bacon rolls and afterwards stayed there, doing various mundane tasks and sorting out his meals for the rest of the week. As he worked, he began saying an affirmation to himself repeatedly, in the present tense. "I face up to my dreams. I face my fears."

Ethaniel wasn't stupid; he knew that if he kept calling me during the night it would interrupt my mission and prevent me completing it. If it was himself that was creating an obstacle, he intended to remove it.

He had been working for a little while when the phone rang in the living room. It was Jacey.

"Ethan, it's me. How are things going?"

"You mean how is your spell going? It's coming along well. I'm expecting results any day now."

"That's good. The thing is...I'm going away for a badminton match this weekend. I could drive past your way today and stop by for a couple of hours. Have a few hot drinks with you and see the farmhouse. I'd love to see it."

Ethaniel's heart began to beat fast, but he kept his voice smooth as he said, "that would be great. You'd be very welcome, Jacey. Though you would have to excuse the mess- I don't get many visitors."

"That's all right. You wouldn't have to give me lunch- I've got some with me. Just tea or coffee. No wine, because I'm playing tomorrow."

"That would be really good. What time will you get here?"

"Not too early. About one thirty, I should think."

I was pleased about this development too- if I continued to lie low, I might learn something useful.

Ethaniel did some hasty tidying up, both of the farmhouse and his appearance, and at around the time she had estimated Jacey drove up to the farm. She looked a little subdued I thought, and as she usually did, she was wearing only lipstick and no other make-up. Her car was not as flashy as Myleene's, it was smaller and green.

Ethaniel showed her around the farm. They trudged past the fields, the grass pasted flat by a thin layer of mud, and round the outside of the deserted outbuildings. "It looks empty without crops or animals," Jacey said. "Don't you feel it's a bit of a waste not to have any?"

"I know what you mean. Good farmland's a valuable resource. This is only temporary, while I do some serious workings that need solitude. It cost me a lot of money which I'm hoping to get back when I sell it and return to the land of the living. I'm not sure when that will be, but it won't be too long."

I tried to imagine my favourite pasture full of sheep, and wheat growing in the fields behind it. Jacey's thoughts told me that she was pleased at the prospect of the farm reverting to its former use.

When they had covered the grounds, they went into the farmhouse and Ethaniel took Jacey into each room. She thought it was quaint like a little cottage, a retreat from city life. They finished the tour in the kitchen and Ethaniel made some drinks which looked to me like hot chocolate, not tea or coffee after all.

I was aware that Ethaniel wanted to broach the subject of their relationship but was not sure how to go about it. At last he pushed himself to ask, "what do you think you'll do when all this is over? Will you go back to John?"

He didn't dare look at her, and she wasn't looking at him either- she had her eyes fixed on the floor. "I'll never go back to John. That's the last thing I would ever want to do. He's a traitor- I hate him."

"That's something we both have in common, then." Expressing that sentiment made Ethaniel bolder and he added, "Jacey, didn't you ever think about going out with me?"

She didn't move or speak; she seemed to be frozen. Ethaniel got up and walked slowly over to her and put his arm around her shoulders.

"No, don't do that!"

I could see he was pretty upset about that response, but he didn't show it. He sat back down and after a moment asked placidly, "are you all right?"

"It's just.... heartbreak," Jacey said. She was still looking down at the floor. "It makes you all numb inside. Completely numb. Of course I thought about going out with you, back in those days at the tennis club. And not because you had money and could afford to buy a place like this. I genuinely liked you. But then I met John and I really fell for him. I was besotted- couldn't think about anything else.

Now he's betrayed me. Like I said, I'm numb. I can't think of going with anyone else yet, not even you. Maybe in a few weeks' time, when this spell you're doing has worked. It sounds terrible to say I'll do it when my sister is dead or hurt. Like I'm sick or something. But it's really about

splitting them up. I know John would never leave her unless she was in no fit state to be with him. I want them to split up.”

“I can understand that. That’s what magic is about. We want something, and until we have it, we feel stuck. Numb’s a good word for it. Then when we get what we want, we can suddenly move on with our lives. That’s how it’s supposed to be.”

Now Jacey looked at him. “Yes, that’s it exactly. That’s exactly right, Ethan. But this magic thing- you’re really deeply into it, aren’t you? I don’t know anything about it. Wouldn’t you prefer a girl who was into it as well?”

“Yes, I am really deeply into it. It’s the most important part of my life, and you would have to accept that. But it works with other couples- I’ve seen it work. People I know, friends of mine.”

“All right, I’ll think about it. I’ll let you know in a few weeks, when this is all over.”

So, a lot of information for me to process, but unfortunately it wasn’t at all helpful in my dilemma. It only confirmed what I already knew about the emotions that were in play. It was impossible for me to please everyone, for they all had different and conflicting desires.

I thought that at least my attempt to hide was working, and I was off Ethaniel’s psychic radar. But that assumption proved to be false. As he was returning from walking Jacey back to her car, Ethaniel poked his head casually round the barn door and said, “back to work, Clexa! You heard me promise Jacey. It’s not as though you’re a physical horse- you don’t need to rest in a stable after all that running around in the night.”

“I was just leaving,” I replied, offended by his sarcastic tone. Then I started back to London, but this time instead of flying I travelled at the pace of an ordinary horse and clopped along the streets and country roads. In case the terminator was watching, I filled my mind with the thought that I was doing this because I didn’t need to be there yet; it was too early. Let him chew on that. It must have worked because there was no sign of him during my journey.

## Chapter 5. Flight Across the Realms

It was a quarter to five in the evening when I homed in on Myleene at the store. She stole a furtive look at the clock on the wall; Friday night, nearly time to go home, and she was looking forward to spending the weekend with John.

Human beings have a strange concept of time- the way it races when they're in pleasant surroundings enjoying themselves and drags painfully slowly if they are imprisoned or suffering unpleasant experiences. Sometimes they long to hold onto the present moment, but it tears away from their grasp.

The socialization process they go through while they are growing up teaches them that it's best to try and enjoy their work as well as their leisure time. If they don't, they will be unhappy during the majority of their waking hours. Myleene had assimilated this message as they all do, and always tried to be perky during her time at the store. But now that the weekend was finally here, she wanted to get on with it as soon as possible.

On the way home she drove a little fast, a little carelessly. This would probably be the cause of the accident in a few days' time, if I was to throw her according to plan. It was what magicians would call a 'path of manifestation,' the route the magic takes to manifest in the material world. Mechanical failure of the car was less likely, since John was a car mechanic and regularly checked both his car and Myleene's. So many factors have to come together for an incident to happen, and human beings, not seeing the hidden causes, call it an accident, a tragedy that could have been avoided.

A protecting angel would whisper to her to slow down and pay more attention to the road and the other drivers. But the appropriate action for me would be to encourage her to drive impatiently, and especially to continue doing so tomorrow.

I thought of the demon who had jumped onto my back a couple of days before. It sounded like something he would do, and I wondered what his role was in all this. Had Ethaniel made an appeal to this demon's chief, to get the magical working back on track? If so, the demon might come back at any moment and start encouraging Myleene to be careless, and it would be unwise of me to interfere- especially with the terminator watching. On the other hand, the demon may simply have been warning me out of camaraderie, and the full weight of carrying out this curse still rested on me.

Tonight would be make or break. I couldn't rely on Ethaniel to keep calling me away. I must solve this; it must reach a conclusion tonight. I had worked out most of my plan of action. As soon as Myleene fell asleep, I was taking her to Nemo to ask for his help.

It would be too risky to take her on my back, but if I was to lead her along by the ribbon, she would go into the dreamless stage of sleep just as she had done the previous time. Therefore, I was intending to tie her up in the ribbon like a bundle, loop it around my neck and pull her along. On a non-physical plane she would float beside me; she wouldn't be a dead weight. The only part of my plan that was still fuzzy was the exact form that her test would take, and my future with Ethaniel when the test was finished.

Until then, what? Another evening of tailing Myleene, another boring stretch of tedium. Once again, I was struck by how limiting it was to be constrained by a single mission. It made me feel beaten down and oppressed, my preference for exploring higher realms discounted as an irrelevance. If my soul didn't matter then nothing did, and this world the humans had built was as dead as the unevolved stone of First Matter.

I decided to risk spending the evening in the garden. Surely that would look acceptable to the other servitor if he was to zoom in on me.

It was a communal garden shared by all the residents in the block, which appeared to be a private block. No social housing for John, who saw himself as skilled and upwardly mobile. That invited speculation about what lifestyle himself and Myleene would have, should they settle down together. Her frequent conversations with her mother about presenting a successful image to the world suggested that she would make an ambitious wife.

All those preparations for the future that would be wasted if she were to be suddenly killed or crippled, like young animals who are primed by nature to prepare for adult life, yet are often slaughtered by human beings long before they reach it. Earth is a planet of much wasted potential. It's no wonder that when my mother grew into an egregore, she went to a more primitive parallel world. Would I do the same, I wondered? Maybe I would prefer a magical other world like one of the aethyrs, where I would be heading later tonight.

The garden consisted of a neat lawn, sparse from frequent mowing, and fat square white-stone tubs around the edges and at the corners, full of cultivated flowers. I trotted around the perimeter a few times and then stood with my nose in some dock leaves that were poking through the wooden fence that divided the flats from the next house. The dock leaves smelled a little different from those that you would find growing next to stinging nettles in a woodland. The natural remedy next to the nettle, as

some humans say. But the city chemicals had filtered into these dock leaves and changed them slightly.

The horsey part of me was happy to spend a few hours doing this, alternated with trots around the garden. In the same way, I can imagine a servitor cow would find it congenial to be in a pasture for many hours chewing the cud. Chaos magicians don't seem to make servitor cows very often, although a few have made a cow of plenty, associated with wealth in ancient civilizations.

Eventually the sun set, and the garden gradually darkened. Now a real horse would lie down in the field or go into a stable to spend the night. As that wasn't appropriate for me, I returned to hovering spirit mode and rose up some way into the air above the garden. Ethaniel's terminator was hovering too, though much higher up in amongst the clouds, and I hoped my behaviour looked normal to him.

Eventually the lights clicked off in John's bedroom. I had self-programmed to respond to those faint clicks because there were a number of centre lights and lamps in the house, and they all had to be off before it meant that the human beings had definitely settled down for the night.

Even then, John and Myleene might be making love again. The sex lives of humans are reputed to be a subject of riveting interest, but I didn't want to watch, and who knew if I could ever have a sex life of my own? The way I had been cloned from my mother was asexual, and she herself was alone and self-sufficient apart from humans riding on her back. True, she would take a spark of sexual energy from the rider to fulfil someone's request, but she took it by energy manipulation and not by making love to them.

So I remained outside the bedroom and tuned into Myleene's astral body so that I would know when she fell asleep. I prepared to manifest the white ribbon and tie it around her waist. At last Myleene began to dream. "Strange...a horse is tying me up and leading me along. Shouldn't it be the other way round, me leading the horse?"

Simultaneously, I also picked up the other servitor's thoughts. "Irregularity again! She won't mount a horse that does that to her. I must adjust, and if the horse resists this time, it must be terminated."

Why was he so much more like a robot than me? Ethaniel had named him after a fictional robot, but that couldn't be the whole story. No time to philosophise about that now- he was rushing towards me, and I had to flee instantly.

I turned edge-on to the planet Earth and plunged through the veil into aethyr thirteen. As I had predicted, Myleene fell into dreamless sleep the same as the previous time, and I pulled her along like a kite attached to the ribbon.

The other servitor was right behind me, and I had no time to look for Nemo. All I could do was gallop at my topmost speed. The scenery of the aethyr flashed past, and it looked totally like an Earth landscape. It must be drawn from the human mind, in the same way as dreams and the cyber-scenery in computer games.

I passed a lake with that oily navy-blue sheen in the middle that means deep water. Yet at one end it gradually tapered away, fading to marshy puddles on the grass. Then came impenetrable thick bushes and patches of woodland, the ground brown under the trees and thick with twigs. It was all drawn from nature. So far, only cities were missing. Strange that while fleeing for my life I should be wondering what the criteria would be for a city to appear on this dimension. Conflict must be one of the catalysts for reasoned thinking.

Was he gaining on me? I reminded myself that Myleene had no weight here and tried to accelerate, but I was already galloping at my maximum speed, and at this rate I would soon come up against the border between aethyrs thirteen and twelve. Babalon, who ruled in aethyr twelve, had been on Ethaniel's side last time and would be again this time.

Suddenly the answer came to me. If there was a border between aethyrs thirteen and twelve, there might also be a border with aethyr eleven. If I could lead the other servitor there, those guardians of the place who were obsessed with security would treat him as an intruder. If I was lucky they would lock him up, but I would have to make sure of appearing benign and non-threatening myself.

I pictured aethyr eleven clearly in my mind and willed myself to head in its direction. The immediate result was that I doubled back and made a U-turn, which took the other servitor by surprise and made him overshoot in the original direction. That gained me some time, and soon after he had managed to resume his pursuit, the border came into sight.

This border took the form of a high stone wall which resembled the outer ramparts of a castle. It was too high to jump, so I slowed in preparation and on reaching it I floated up to the top and then over it, with the sleeping Myleene bobbing by my side.

As we landed, I saw serried ranks of angelic guards, lined up at intervals all along the wall. Quickly I recalled what Ethaniel had said about them, that they were guarding the way to the Abyss.

I decided that if they challenged me, I would tell them it was the people of the Abyss who were trying to kill Myleene. If that didn't work, I would sing, which I know aligns you to higher spheres. But for the moment they were ignoring me, so it was best not to anticipate. Keep it simple.

I nudged Myleene onto the grass and gently licked her arm and shoulder a few times. I wasn't going into the full matchless maid

syndrome; she was not really a character from that myth, and neither was I. But I did focus my mind on my desire to save her, which was genuine.

The other servitor came sailing over the wall, his mouth open and claws pointing straight out in front of him. Quickly I launched into the air and moved away from him, pulling Myleene along with me. As I had hoped, one of the angel guards confronted him and demanded, "what's your business, intruder?"

"Don't stop me!" he rasped. "Irregularity! Need to correct it."

Two more of the angel guards came over and stood in front of him, and the first one exclaimed, "you're in battle mode! That is not allowed here, and I must ask you to disarm."

"Don't stop me!" the servitor repeated, his voice rising to a scream, and he attacked the angel guard.

At once, they all set on him. I knew that if he stopped fighting, they would too. But he didn't stop, and they cut him to pieces with their swords till there was nothing left, while I sat back on my haunches on the grass and relaxed.



## Chapter 6. The Test

There was no need to go back the way I'd come in. I simply dived straight back head and mane first onto the astral plane, with Myleene in tow. As she began to wake back into consciousness I threw the white ribbon up into the sky, which was blue and cloud-flecked like the sky on Earth.

I funnelled all the energy from Ethaniel's magic spell out of myself and into the white ribbon. It was a bit like that first time when the power had sparked up and down the length of the ribbon, except that this time I found I had learned to do it in a more permanent way so that it wouldn't return to me. If she passed the test, I would no longer feel the compulsion to throw her, and she would be free to go.

If she failed, she would still have the accident. I couldn't do anything about that, it was built into it, but at least I could give her a chance.

As the ribbon floated, I changed it so that it was shaped like a swing hanging in the sky. By now Myleene was fully aware and she stood looking up at the swing, shading her eyes with one hand as if it really was the earthly sky. I chanted a rhyme that came to me:

“Come and swing on the swing, Myleene!  
Catch the ribbon and climb up here-  
The ribbon breaks if you have any fear.”

I was counting on her competitive personality to carry her through. But then something unexpected happened. A great reservoir of terror revealed itself from her subconscious. Underneath all the competing with her sister Jacey which had gone on since childhood, underneath the competing with her colleagues at the store which had led to her being promoted twice, was all this internal fear. As soon as I invited her to take the ordeal, it bubbled up to the surface.

I thought she was going to shriek or start crying. But she did neither. Instead she turned to me and spoke in a bossy tone, as if I was a child and she was a slightly older child. “I'm not doing THAT. It's dangerous. How could you ever think that I would do something as stupid as that?” Looking very angry, she turned her back on me and walked away.

I realized that she needed an easier test; just as when a horse is learning to do showjumping, you can lower the poles on the side of the jump until it is a height that the horse can manage. However, what I had just done, downloading the magic into the ribbon, was right at the limit of

my newly learned abilities. I had no idea how to reload it and add new instructions.

Myleene entered into normal dreams, and I stood there for what seemed like a long while wondering what to do next, while my swing shimmered in the sky. Then came the sound of Ethaniel's voice. Despite his positive affirmations of the previous day, he was calling me once more.

"Clexa, I'm having that nightmare again! Come and help." I raced away leaving the swing in position, for it would be an easy matter for me to find it again.

Ethaniel was standing in the entrance foyer to the block of flats where the Indian family lived. He looked pleased to see me, having forgotten his mood the last time he had spoken to me in the barn.

"Clexa, I've got to get the cloak back and return it to its rightful owner. I think it's one of the teenage girls. It's a sort of unisex garment. But seeing the cloak is going to bring it all back again- my obsession. I can't bear to give it to her, and yet I have to. She should at least be happy, wearing it, even if I'll never be happy again."

That was extreme, but this time I realized something. These feelings came from his deep subconscious mind, the same as the fear that had bubbled up in Myleene. His experience when he explored this aethyr was supposed to resolve something, but it hadn't yet, which was why he had heard the voice saying that he had still not learned the lessons of aethyr thirteen.

"I'll show you which flat I took the cloak to," I said. "I can climb that staircase again, provided we go slowly."

Ethaniel nodded and motioned for me to go first. As I was picking my way along, it occurred to me that the lady I had spoken to last time and had given the cloak to might not be at home. But then I remembered that this was a dream, even if it wasn't taking place on the usual plane for dreaming, so the symbolism would fit in with the story and would probably lead to a point of resolution at the end, as dreams often do.

Ethaniel knocked at the door I indicated, and sure enough the lady answered. I almost felt self-conscious about being a horse, incongruously calling round to visit her for the second time, even though it was a dream.

"Remember the cloak I gave you?" I asked. "I'm sorry, but we need it back. We have to return it to the family it belongs to."

She looked quite unconcerned. "That's all right- I'll get it," she said, and she opened a door that was facing us at the end of a short corridor. The cloak was spread out on the bed, and it looked like she had been sleeping on it. She scooped it up and gave it to us. "Here you are."

"Thank you," Ethaniel said in a slightly choked voice. I was aware of his shock that she had been using the cloak as a bedsheet, but he didn't want to say so to her. She closed the door, and we retraced our steps until

we were in front of the flat where the original family lived. Ethaniel knocked.

It was one of the young girls who opened the door. "Oh, hello, Ethaniel," she said. "Good to see you again."

"I've actually come to return something to you," he said. "I borrowed this cloak. Which of you does it belong to?"

"Oh, it's mine," she answered. "I didn't notice it was gone."

"Well, here you are, have it back." Reading his thoughts, I saw that he considered this to be a moment of triumph, and yet at the same time it caused him unbearable pain.

She reached out to take it and then came a huge shock- it transformed in her hands into a completely different garment. Not an attractive one either; it had turned into a dress made of a coarse white cloth with ugly red and yellow patches that clashed with one another. The girl gazed at it, speechless, and Ethaniel sank to the floor looking stunned.

"This is a tragedy!" his thoughts cried out. "My attachment has destroyed it. Now she can't have it and I can't have it either. Everything is desolation."

The girl looked more surprised than anything, and all she said was, "What did you do to it?"

"Well, I liked it very much," said Ethaniel. "I became very attached to it." He kept his voice level, trying not to show his irrational feeling that life wasn't worth living without the cloak.

"But... what did you do?" she repeated. "You must have done something."

He didn't reply, and I felt the shame rise up and swamp him like a wave. It came from a deep place, and it would most likely take years or a lifetime to sort this out. So, was Ethaniel right that the aethyrs were not a series of initiations, and you could move onto the next one without dealing with unfinished business? I couldn't tell, but it looked as if the answer was no.

As the girl walked away with the ugly dress draped over her arm, I risked the comment, "perhaps you should review the aethyrs you've been through, Ethaniel. See if there are any feelings that need closure."

The hallway was empty, and the dream appeared to have ended after reaching its denouement. Ethaniel looked at me searchingly, and it was the first time he had ever looked me right in the eye.

"I WILL review them," he said. "This is as good a place as any. Come on, let's go outside."

We closed the front door and went downstairs, and when we got outside Ethaniel sat down cross-legged on the ground. "I'll meditate for a few minutes on each one and see what feelings come up. Then when we're back on the Earth plane I'll do it again, as many times as necessary."

That was one of the times when I got a glimpse of his self-discipline, which was impressive, regardless of other matters that we thought differently about. Right here in aethyr thirteen, he began to tune into the others that he had visited one by one, without the benefit of his usual temple ritual. He even managed to stay in each one for roughly the same number of minutes.

I didn't look too closely at what he was experiencing. After all, this was about his own personal growth. But my attention was caught by a wordless exclamation of anger when he came to his encounter with the bus driver who had thrown him out of the bus in aethyr eleven.

Momentarily I peered in, and that was when I saw it. Next to the road was the bus stop we had seen before with the bus shelter standing beside it. The grass and trees beyond the shelter were reflected in the glass, just as they would be on Earth in certain lights, but here greatly exaggerated so that it looked like a mountain rising up from the pavement. That was just what I needed for making Myleene's test easier. If I could create an illusion like this beside the swing, it would look as if the swing was at the top of a hill instead of hanging in mid-air, and she wouldn't realise that she was soaring into the sky when she went up to it and climbed on.

Quickly I calculated how much of the night was left. It was around four in the morning and Myleene should still be asleep. I had to hope she wasn't up drinking coffee and looking on a laptop; you could never tell with human beings. But she had been at work the previous day, so would most likely be too tired for that.

"Will you be all right if I go now, Ethaniel?" I asked.

"Should be- I've finished the exercise, as the eleventh was the last one I did. I'm not sure now if I'll be doing the tenth. Don't want to flip like old Aleister, and if I have any more nightmares like this one I just might. Let me see if I can get back to my house all right."

He stood up and exited to the astral counterpart of his house, and although his movement through the planes was smooth and graceful, I suddenly thought that it looked clumsy compared with the way I moved. Artificial spirits so soon outstrip their creator. That's because they take more from already existing spirits than they do from the human being, and sometimes they even become a new manifestation of an existing spirit.

Ethaniel didn't wake when he reached his home; he sat down on the nearest soft chair and let himself doze back into the dream state. He would be fine now, so I launched myself into the air and began to fly back in the direction of the ribbon swing, which I held in my mind so that I would find it.

Myleene had wandered a little way away from the swing, but not as far as I expected. She was dreaming about packets of birdseed and whether it was the 'done thing' to put out birdfeeders in the gardens of

high-class apartment buildings. I soon saw what had put this idea into her mind. The swing had attracted the attention of three blue-coloured celestial birds who were pecking and pushing it and chattering among themselves about whether it could be used as a healing resource for jaded humans.

“Excuse me, I’m using this,” I said. “You can have it afterwards, if it’s still here. It may break up.”

The birds abruptly went silent and stared at me, for long enough that it was obvious I wasn’t the normal kind of horse that they were used to. Then they rose in formation like a migrating flock and flew away.

While Myleene was still occupied with her dream, I put up a seat sheltered by a glass cover. It was based on the bus shelter, but my aim was to make it fit in with the surroundings of the garden, so it became an ornate white garden seat. The glass of course was not supposed to be seen- it reflected an illusory grassy hill with trees and the swing at the top. It occurred to me that she might remember the horse that had said something annoying to her before, so I subtly altered my colouring and became a chestnut and roan horse instead of white.

“Come and swing on the swing, Myleene!” I chanted, pitching the chant so that it pierced her illusion and made her look at me. I jerked my head in the direction of the swing.

She thought about it for a moment. “I was going to make a bird house and now there’s a swing as well. They both improve the garden. But I’m going to check with a few people if it looks too common.”

She was really asking for it. If I saved her now, she would only get herself into trouble again. But I was sticking with my decision. What is it they say? *Not on my watch.*

“Come and swing on the swing, Myleene!”

Gradually a smile spread over her face, and she started to move up what she thought was a hill, but in reality, she had left the ground and was floating into the sky.

When she was right next to the swing, I chanted the rest of the spell:

“Catch the ribbon and climb up here.  
The ribbon breaks if you have any fear.”

She looked down. “That’s all right, the ground is only a little way below,” she thought. She grasped the ribbon at the side and pulled herself onto the seat, then swung on it for some minutes, while the two top ends of the ribbon dissolved into silver stars like a firework. The stars raced and flowed around in circles, going faster and faster with each rotation. Finally, the whole swing became stars. They whizzed in random directions and then vanished. As I had predicted it broke up, ending the magic spell.

Myleene thought her perch had become slippery and had slid away from her, but as she believed she had hardly any distance to fall she jumped down and floated back down the hill to the garden in her dream.

So now we were both free. There was no need for me to throw her, and both of us could go wherever we liked. But what was going to happen about Ethaniel and Jacey? Would they get together in the end? Would Ethaniel try another spell against Myleene? What would he do if I never returned to him?

As I jumped into the air I became an egregore, a Horse Goddess like my mother. I wanted to follow this up some more and answer those questions I had just asked, but I couldn't. Like a caterpillar spinning a cocoon, like a baby being born, a natural process was in progress, and nothing was going to stop it completing its cycle.

I plunged into a deep inner plane where I had to go through a series of initiations something like the labours of Hercules. I may have thought I had just completed my ordeals, but really, they had not even begun, and I was unable to pull myself back into a place where I could interact with Myleene and John, or Jacey and Ethaniel. I was miles away on a different vibrational frequency.

They would just have to make it without me.

**Silver Manes**

**By Lena Chere**

**Eoss Trilogy, volume 3**

## **Dedication**

This book is dedicated to Archangel Raphael and Asmodeus.



# Chapter 1

Arran was lying in his garden hammock, one afternoon in late June. He was listening to 'Wild Horses' by the Rolling Stones- a hint of lovers who hurt one another. Instantly, he was off through a portal.

This had happened to him time and time again. He was a crazy astral traveller, and it was all involuntary. One minute he would be dozing peacefully, his eyes half-closed, and the next minute he would find himself travelling away from the Earth to exotic places on the inner planes.

He saw a herd of wild horses galloping across a field of tangled grass, and he knew they were the horses from the Stones song. But something was wrong here. There was an evil atmosphere which he recognized as *destructive love*, and it was pervading everything- the woods and hills and whatever was beyond the horizon. It was warping all his sensations. Usually an astral atmosphere contains emotion, the flotsam and jetsam of human feelings, but this emotion was distorted, refracted into sadness.

The rippling waves of destructive love were funnelling down from that plane to the Earth, into films, novels, poems and television serials. That theme had such a wide appeal. So many were deeply stirred by the varied permutations of it: couples who fight, couples with a sado-masochistic relationship, adultery, murder of spouses, unrequited love.

Arran glided forward in a sinuous movement with arms extended out in front of him, as if he was swimming. He didn't want a destructive relationship for himself, in fact he wanted to avoid one at all costs, but he did want to watch these horses.

Most of them were darker colours, but two alone were white so that they caught his eye, a mare and a smaller filly beside her which must be her daughter, so similar were they in appearance. Their manes and tails were a distinctive silver, bright as if reflecting a source of light.

The horses turned in a sweep, slowed down and halted as they reached the border of the grass where it met a sandy path.

"Lovely horses, who are you?" he asked, his voice barely above a whisper, looking especially at the two white mares. He wasn't expecting an answer, but the larger mare opened her mouth and human-like words came out.

"I am Eoss. I was made to help human beings like you, but you're the only one I've seen here in this region. This is my daughter Clexa, and it's the first chance I've had to spend time with her; she was taken away from me immediately by her father, the wizard. When I say her father- he didn't make love to me, she was born from the four elements."

“I’ve heard your name,” was all he said, and his mind cried, “where?”

Meeting these horses felt like coming home, and he no longer cared about his body beyond the portal. Let it sleep. It must be safe; this had happened many times before and it had never yet harmed him. He could follow the herd for hours, living temporarily with them.

“We will not be running with the horses here for long,” Eoss continued. “We don’t much like destructive love. Clexa and I would prefer a realm where we can heal people and save them from danger. But your destiny, I feel, is here.”

An overwhelming sorrow washed over Arran. The two mares were going to leave, and then he would be left alone in this maelstrom of cruelty. He must wake- wake as soon as they left. At the edge of his vision he spied the shape of a black demon, its body hairy like a gorilla and blazing red cinder eyes, and as he registered it, the demon looked pointedly in his direction.

He became afraid and pushed forward, still gliding but now with jerks, and he found himself brushing up against the black neck and dark brown mane of one of the stallions in the foreground.

Like the mares, this horse could speak. “I am Peridot,” he said. “I live here, in this realm. Get up on my back and I’ll take you away.” He nudged Arran’s arm with his nose.

Over to the right-hand side of the glade, Arran could see the two mares beginning to slip away, and he gave himself the command “wake!” But it didn’t work, and he remained in his trance.

In a panic he climbed up onto the stallion’s broad back, and the stallion galloped away. He had never done bareback riding before, and even conventional riding with a saddle and bridle he had only done a couple of times when he was a schoolboy, and a friend whose father was wealthier than his had taken him riding.

They remained in countryside, and they galloped through woods, plains and valleys. It was verdant and bright, although Arran couldn’t see the sun. But the atmosphere still had that sharp and bitter taste to it, which belied the pastoral look of the place.

As they sped along, Arran was wondering if he should see a therapist of some kind. Was it natural to keep sliding through portals and onto other dimensions? Now he was trapped here, fleeing at speed through an unfamiliar land.

At last Peridot stopped in a flowery meadow and lay down, and Arran rolled off his back onto the grass. The scent of the grass and feel of the blades against his chin reminded him of the Earth, and he could feel himself waking.

But just before he did, a bridle flew across the glade from nowhere, spinning and twisting, and landed right in his hands. It laced itself firmly

through his fingers and palms right up to his wrists so that he almost expected to be still holding it when he awoke, but he was not. However, there were words echoing in his mind. "Now I'm your horse forever."

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It was evening, and Arran was sitting cross-legged in his temple, meditating. The meditation he was doing was the one he had been taught by the Kabbalist occult lodge Chesed, named after the fourth sephira of the Tree of Life, chesed or 'mercy.'

Arran had belonged to that lodge for a brief time, a couple of years, and then he had left. It was where he had met his ex-girlfriend Clara who he had recently split up with. Clara was still a member, but their parting of ways had nothing to do with the lodge- their feelings had simply waned. Arran was sorry that the lodge hadn't been what he was looking for, and he was sorry it hadn't worked out with Clara.

They had got together at one of Chesed's renowned parties, a New Year's Eve party the year before last. Only a year and a half ago, and yet it was already over.

He was still doing this meditation several times a week, because it suited him. He didn't really want to take what he needed from various groups and then move on; he longed to find one that he could stay with and be loyal to, but there was no sign as yet of this happening.

As he travelled along the familiar mental pathway, an unusual picture intruded on his consciousness. It was the realm he had seen in his trance the previous weekend, and he felt himself being sucked in. It was an intrusion, which didn't belong in this meditation.

He projected the thought, "No! I don't want this. I want the silver manes- let me follow them."

He was pleased with himself- what a stroke of genius. Any time he got trapped in this particular astral sphere, he could call out those words. *I want the silver manes- let me follow them.* It was striking enough to remember and could act as self-hypnosis, to save him from the pain exuded by that place.

But he had rejoiced too soon. The next thing he saw was a great white lion standing just yards in front of him, and like the mares, it had a shining silver mane that flowed over its shoulders. From somewhere out of sight a voice spoke. "The being you ran away from also has a silver mane, for this is another of his forms. If you call you may get the mares, or you may get the lion. Look within yourself."

Arran nodded politely, for these hidden guides mean well; but he was displeased, and he ended the meditation and moved himself gently back to the waking state. Best to attend to concerns of the material world for a

while. There would always be something to attend to there, you could count on that.

He opened his eyes in his private temple, which was in the garden shed. It was a good place to hide it. So long as his meditations and ceremonies were quiet ones, no-one would ever suspect what the shed really was, and visitors to the house would know nothing of his magical studies.

He put out the candles and incense and shook the ash residue into a small bin in one corner. He rolled up his rug which was of hard fibre like a yoga mat, and pushed it back against the wall revealing a plain stone floor. Locking the shed he walked back up the garden, past the hammock which still swung idly. He only left it out like that during the summer months.

Back indoors, he checked his mobile phone and there was a voicemail message waiting for him from Clara. "Hi, Arran, could you lend Jez some beginner's books about Chesed?"

He frowned. *Who do they think I am, the loser who hangs around with my ex and her new man? And I haven't got any beginner's books - I gave them all back. Hang on, I'll look.*

Clara's new boyfriend Jeremy, or Jez as everyone called him, was very keen to find out about Chesed's system of teachings. They weren't a secretive lodge, and they didn't forbid those who had not yet joined to study the materials. But it was rather insensitive of Clara because of the amount of contact the three of them would have if he were to become a mentor to Jez. The emotional atmosphere would be too intense. Of course, she was only trying to save Jez money. He sent back a non-committal text, promising to go through his books and see if there was anything suitable.

As he flicked through his collection, glancing at the information written vertically down each spine, he thought about an esoteric conference he had attended in London several weeks before. The speakers all had something of worth to say, but it surprised him that he was still so much the unfulfilled seeker, listening eagerly to each one in the hope of finding some new teaching to embrace and then deflated as each one disappointed him.

The only high point had been his conversations with the girl in the row behind him, Julie. She was slim and dark, a complete contrast with Clara who was slightly plump and rosy with thick, chocolate brown hair. He loved Julie's appearance, and also the way her mind worked; she had an intriguing way of looking at life. Arran's home was in Chelmsford in Essex, and it sounded like she didn't live too far away from him. He very much wanted to see her again, but he hadn't quite had the courage to ask for her address and had instead asked her to add him as a friend on Facebook.

Since then he'd been keeping an eye out for further suitable events, in the hope that he could book into one of them and ask Julie to meet him there. That's what he would rather be doing now, scanning psychic magazines and internet sites. But it wouldn't do to jump at the first one he saw. He always chose carefully the workshops he attended, and if it turned out to be rubbish, Julie wouldn't be impressed.

Arran couldn't find any beginner's books. He had definitely given them all back, mainly because they had originally given him a bundle free of charge. He was about to phone Clara, and then decided it could wait. He would tell her tomorrow when he came back from work.

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It was just after midnight, and Arran was about to go to bed after a busy day at school. He was a teacher in secondary education, and it was hectic this time of year with the summer exams. He had finished all his tasks for the evening including the phone call to Clara, and was just starting to undress when he distinctly heard a noise coming from the garden shed, which was worrying. His temple!

Arran grabbed the nearest item, a trowel which was standing by the back door. He didn't want to be on an assault charge for waving garden tools, and yet he had to protect the temple. He rushed over and pulled at the door handle of the shed, which was supposed to be locked, but if there was anyone inside, they would have been able to unlock it from there.

It swung open. In the dark interior Arran could just make out the figure of Jez, and behind him a window that had been forced open.

"Jez, what are you doing in there? Get out!"

"Where's the power charm?" yelled Jez. Arran was horrified to see his altar items all in a scattered pile where Jez had been rifling through them. "You tried to put me off coming here. But I know you've got it, and I'm taking it- I can make better use of it than you would in a million years."

"I haven't got a power charm. Leave my magical things alone! You're not allowed to touch them." Without realizing what he was doing, Arran raised the trowel in the air.

"So you're going to kill me, for the charm and Clara. No, you don't."

A thought went swiftly through Arran's mind. Jez was imagining himself to be a character in a myth, and had completely lost touch with reality. He lowered the trowel, but too late to stop Jez running forward and grappling with him. As they struggled, Jez somehow pushed him into the shed and then hard against the wall.

Arran had always thought the shed was pretty sturdy, yet now it began to topple. Then everything was out of control as the cracking and crashing grew steadily louder. He was shouting "Stop! Stop!" and Jez was shouting

something else that he couldn't make out; he had dropped the trowel and was pulling at the sleeves of Jez' jumper.... then nothing, as the shed cracked down the middle and fell on top of him. A few minutes later, Jez could be seen dragging himself from the wreckage and running away.

## Chapter 2

“Arran!” He came to and felt someone holding his hand. Memories began to creep back, and then relief. He was safe, probably in a hospital bed. But when he opened his eyes, he wasn’t lying down. He was sitting up in a patch of woodland, and the person holding his hand was an angel.

Arran gave a sob. “I was hoping I was in hospital, getting better. Why have I died so young?” He was only twenty-seven.

“Ssh- you haven’t died,” said his companion. “You ARE in hospital. You’re in a coma, Arran, and it’s a vulnerable state to be in; more so than those trances you go into when you have an afternoon nap. You need to take care.”

“Thank you. Then I will recover? When?”

“It will take a few months.”

“A few months! But I can’t stay here all that time.”

“You’ll have to, Arran. You need to accept it.”

“What about Jez? He’s mad! I don’t think Clara’s safe with him. I’m going to make sure he’s on an assault charge for what he did- he deserves to go to prison. And why did he think I had a power charm?”

“He meant the bridle,” the angel explained. “Jeremy paid someone to evoke a demon for him, so that he could ask it questions. His questions were nearly all about you- whether you were trying to get Clara back, and what magical powers did you have? The demon told Jeremy and his friend about the bridle. It CAN be a power charm, in the hands of someone who can go instantly into a trance and call his horse. But neither of them grasped what it was, and they also didn’t realise it was a thing of the spirit world, not the material world. That will be a problem. However, you have a more immediate problem than Jeremy- Peridot. He will expect you to put the bridle on him, and journey with him for as long as you remain here.”

Arran shook his head. “I don’t want Peridot, or the realm he belongs to. I want the silver manes.”

But the angel had vanished without saying goodbye, and Arran remembered that the white lion also had a silver mane.

An interval of numbness followed, with only the faintest glimmer of awareness of his damaged brain, and his astral body which could function perfectly well without his physical brain, but was jarred by the shock it had sustained. Gradually the sensation of touch returned, and Arran could feel the bridle laced around his hand, just as it had been at the end of his trance that afternoon the previous week, when he had been lying in the hammock.

Then his sight came back, and he was still sitting in a woodland area, slumped against some bushes, but the quality of the locale had changed. It was as if time had altered, and he had fallen asleep in Victorian times and woken up in the twenty- first century.

But no, it wasn't time: it was higher and lower planes, a feature of the astral world. He had passed from the higher plane where he had spoken with the angel to exactly the same place on a lower plane. As the atmosphere seeped into his consciousness, he was horrified to recognize that realm again that he kept being drawn to, where he had met the horses.

Then he heard the sound of approaching hooves, and Peridot came into view. He hadn't left it long then, before coming for him.

Peridot flicked back his ears and neighed in welcome. "My rider! I'm happy to see you. How fortunate that you're going to be here for a while. You'll have the chance to learn everything you need to know, and you might as well start now. Climb up and put the bridle over my head, and we'll ride."

Arran wasn't sure he could do that even if he wanted to; he was still shaky. "Where will we be riding to?" he asked.

"Many places I hope, but not all unfamiliar. We will be going to the Earth plane at times. Perhaps even to your own house- let's go there first, to help you get used to this."

That was an invitation Arran couldn't refuse, feeling as he was the loss of everything that was familiar. If only he could have his life back, but the angel had said he would have to wait for months.

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When Arran was a student, he had a large cardboard box in which he used to pack all his books to take home for the summer holidays. The box had a distinctive design on it of horses painted red, each with a rider who carried a trumpet. He used to call it 'the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse box.'

He was surprised to see that same design at the head of a piece of notepaper that lay on the table beside his landline telephone. On it a message was scrawled: "be careful of Julie. She cheats on her men." Who could have written that? Underneath it was another picture, a bugle this time, as if one of the trumpets on his box had been twisted and bent double.

From the ceiling of the room, pulsating waves of energy were being funnelled down and were pouring straight into the picture of the bugle, where they collected and were stored. It was destructive love again,



flowing to the material world and becoming embedded in it through symbols, anagrams, images and stories.

Arran studied the paper, with the flood of strange knowledge it imparted, and reflected that he would just have to be sacrificed to destructive love, because he was still planning to arrange a meeting with Julie as soon as he returned to his normal life.

He would be sacrificed like a lamb...the Lamb and the Four Horsemen...but already he was off-track, because that was a symbol of light, while the destructive love motifs are dark ones. They flow like an oil-stream into dark fantasy, dark-themed video games and dark films in which they take on the disguise of everyday life, therefore becoming undetectable. Art was full to bursting with them, and the bugle held more and more in its winding shape, like an intestine.

He began dreaming, a dream of story borders, in which each story must be enclosed by boundaries that are themselves a story. A storyboard, becoming story borders, stories within stories, and then it all blossomed into hypersigils of which the authors are very often unaware as they write them unintentionally, channelling the constant flow.

Now he was starting to sense the strong connection between archetypal symbols in general and the astral realm that Peridot belonged to. It was a bond always understated, implied by secondary clues which the observer must work out for himself.

Peridot snorted, horse-like but also a show of approval, as Arran jolted awake on his back and leaned forward, the bridle clasped in both hands. "I brought you here, like a ghost of Christmas Future, to get the warning message on your phone pad. But you're like all the rest. It won't make any difference, will it? You'll still pursue her."

Arran was wondering if it would be better to concentrate on Clara, not because he was unwilling to let her go but because she was with an unstable man and could be in danger. He debated this in his mind for a while, putting off the moment when he would have to face what was written on the notepaper. In the end it appeared that the better option was to leave Clara alone- let her make her own mistakes, and learn from them.

Again he thought of Julie. At the moment his greatest fear was that she might try to contact him, and when there was no response, she would think he didn't want to know. She wouldn't find out he was in hospital, and wouldn't wait for him.

Was it so terrible, a girl who has two or more lovers at the same time? It could be seen as liberated, modern dating, polyamory. Unless you start wanting it to be just the two of you, and that often happens because it's human instinct. Also known as falling in love. Once they were in love her unfaithfulness would cause fights, and there would be other practical

considerations too, like the possibility of catching a venereal disease from one of her other lovers.

Anything can be 'destructive love' if only one of you wants it to happen. You have to take time to get to know a girl, to find out what she wants. But who does? Everyone he knew rushed into relationships- like himself and Clara on that New Year's Eve. It seemed harmless enough, and yet indirectly, it had led to his present predicament.

Peridot shifted restlessly. "Are you going to spend all day talking to yourself in your thoughts? Human beings do that constantly. Look around you and learn the wisdom of this experience. If you find yourself sitting on a horse, it's natural that you will begin to follow a line of symbolism from the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. If you were doing something else, say hunting with a falcon on your arm, you might follow the line from an archetype of a bird of prey. The lines soon become seams, underground and unseen, lava threading through the rocks, till it bursts out suddenly, in something like a picture on a calendar that thrusts itself into your face, and you say *synchronicity*. Or maybe you say, *what horror is this?*"

Arran could barely keep up with Peridot's words; he felt vulnerable, a feeling being not a thinking being. Could it be the concussion, or was this what he secretly yearned to be? He had been brought up with the idea that men must always be the rational ones.

Peridot went straight on. "You have no inkling yet of what you could use me for. I am a Wishing Horse. Like Eoss, I can travel around with a rider and grant petitions. We would need a spark of power, but you're a magician; I'm sure you could come up with something. An offering, or maybe lighting candles."

"Even if I wanted to be a god, no-one's ever heard of me. And I'm only here temporarily." Arran could feel his rational faculties returning, and suddenly they were sharper than if he was awake on Earth.

"Not YOU," Peridot replied scornfully. "ME. Some pray to Eoss as a horse goddess, and she grants their requests if she wishes. I could become known, and be a horse god."

"Is there such a thing as a horse god? Epona perhaps, and Pegasus. But there's no religious cult attached to them in modern times."

"Don't be too much the scholar." Peridot shook his neck hard and pulled abruptly back from Arran's living room, and returned to the woodland where he lived. As it solidified around them Arran felt first a sense of peace from the greenery and trees, then a disquieting jab as the emotional atmosphere hit him. The bridle had never left his hands- it was as if it was holding him instead of the other way round.

Where was the angel who had held his hand when he first arrived? Where was Eoss? Peridot gave him a look, and Arran realised he could read his thoughts.

“Eoss is the original Wishing Horse, a unicorn without the horn. She is known as the Night Mare; people are always surprised that she is white.”

“And the lion- why is he white?” Bolder now, Arran returned Peridot’s stare.

“He isn’t really a white lion. White stone. You changed that when you called out *silver manes*.”

Arran reached mentally for the meaning of this, and got lost. Never mind, he preferred to keep to the subject of Eoss, and there was no point in scheming silently because Peridot would hear him, so he spoke his idea. “Why don’t we find Eoss, and she can teach you how to be a horse god? She has the experience to do that.”

“She is in other pastures.” He fell silent and began to trot.

So Eoss had gone with her daughter to that place of helping and healing that she had spoken of before- Heaven, presumably, while Arran was here, in a sector of Hell. He didn’t know why this had to be, or how to get away, and if he were to make an escape plan, Peridot would hear his every thought.

## Chapter 3

“Have you ever read a story, and found yourself in it?” Julie asked. She was sitting in a café with her date Clayton drinking milkshake, one of her long legs wound around the chair leg like a child. Julie had an oval face with smooth, pale skin, a cascade of black hair and blue eyes, an unusual combination which is always striking.

Clayton raised an eyebrow. “What do you mean?”

“The main character corresponds with me. She looks like me and thinks like me- and what happens to her is another version of what’s been happening to me.”

“Sounds crazy. Which story was it?”

“It’s called ‘Silver Mine.’ It’s about a mine that’s full of strange things like toys and living skeletons. But the mine’s the only fantasy thing- everything else in the story is realistic. And the main character’s adventures are just like my life over the past year. She’s even called Tisa. You think I’m a teaser, don’t you?”

Clayton put down his drink and nudged her arm playfully. “You’re mad. And you ARE a teaser. But you don’t tease me anymore.”

She smiled at this reference to their casual affair, which was starting to peter out now, but still ongoing.

“You’re not taking this seriously, Clay. I’ll have to ask Jen; she’ll know what I mean.”

His sister Jen was a tarot reader, and it was her who had introduced them to one another; she held a weekly tarot group at her flat which Julie attended.

As it turned out Jen did have a lot to say about this subject, when Julie asked her about it over coffee at the end of the group session.

“It’s like when you choose the first card in a reading and that one represents you, the querent. The card will have a host of associations: numbers, colours, astrological positions and all sorts of things. That archetype is what is most affecting your life at that moment, and you might see it in other places as well, like books and films. Anything that counts as art. You could do a divination from the work of art instead of from the cards, and get the same result.

Also, there are sigils- words that look the same when you take out the vowels and repeated letters. And anagrams too. It’s like gematria, only with words instead of numbers. You can actually use either one for correspondences, but most people find it easier to use words. No maths to do then! Remember, all of creation comes from the Word, and names

especially have power. So you're right to look at the double meanings in character's names."

"I knew I was onto something." Julie held out the book 'Silver Mine' and let it flop so that it fell open. "So I could do a reading for myself, right from this book."

"Yes, but it would be more personal than the tarot. Associations you recognise, that mean something to you, but they wouldn't apply to someone else. It has to do with when you read it, what's happening in your life at the time."

In the spirit realm that surrounded the two girls the words floated and meshed in with one another: Silver Mine, Silver Moon, Bitter Moon, Moon Sliver, Sliver....

Clexa the daughter of Eoss drew near to Julie, separated from her only by the veil. "My mother says it's time I had a rider. I used to flinch at the idea, because the wizard tried to make a girl ride me and be killed by it. But I have to get over that now. You, Julie- will you be my rider?"

Julie heard nothing consciously, but she looked up pensively and tightened her brows as you might when registering a faint whisper just below the audible range.

That night in her dreams, she saw a pretty white filly standing before her half-rearing, waving one hoof in the air, and this time she heard the question clearly. "Julie, will you be my rider?"

She answered with a question of her own. "How come you can speak?"

"Follow me and I'll show you something," the filly replied. She turned and led the way along a stone path to a silver and white temple with a dome and a sharp spire. Around the outside grew lilies woven together several layers deep.

Julie went up to the door, a thick and heavy structure engraved with curly flowers in a trellis pattern. She took hold of the curved black handle which stood out against all the white, and turned it.

The door opened slowly to reveal a stone interior and a thick-pile white carpet on the floor. The wall at the front had a large window and below the window was written:

*The veil is a fence which horses jump in both directions, so it means joy as well as sorrow.*

On the right-hand side of the room was a table with a book lying on it entitled 'Spell Book.' Julie walked up to it, her feet sinking into the soft carpet, and opened it. Inside the book was just one page, where she read:

*"I call the horse and the rider. Please grant my wish."*

*That is all you need to say. Light a candle, and bring an apple or sugar lumps for the horse.*

“Human beings have written grimoires a thousand pages long,” said the filly, “however, we prefer to keep it simple.”

She stretched out her neck and Julie patted her nose. “But if I’m riding you, won’t I be part of the spell?”

“I don’t know whether to be pleased or sorry that you keep asking questions,” said Clexa. “Just try it. It doesn’t mean that YOU are the goddess. I’ve noticed the more ethical humans have a horror of that, but there’s no need to worry. The goddess is me, a Wishing Horse.”

“All right,” said Julie. She didn’t realise it was a dream, so she was surprised how easily she sprang onto the filly’s back. There was no saddle or bridle, so she wrapped her arms around the horse’s neck and felt the mane tickle her fingers as it flowed over them. “What’s your name?” she asked.

“I’m Clexa,” said the filly, and then she turned round and began to trot towards the door of the temple. As soon as they were outside, she launched into the air, and they were flying. What an incredible feeling—height, dizziness and yet no wings, just as there were no saddle or bridle. A while later, which could have been minutes or several hours, Julie woke with the thought that she’d had a flying dream, and she really must try to do astral projection from these dreams because so many of the people she knew had managed to do that. The other details had gone from her mind.

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“Do you hear that prayer?” Clexa asked Julie. Once again Julie was riding Clexa during her sleep, leaning forward with her forehead nearly touching her and her arms wrapped around the filly’s white neck.

“No, I don’t,” said Julie, but then she did.

*“Please God, help him. Someone, please give him some healing.”*

“It interests me for two reasons,” Clexa continued. “One is that it starts with God, but then it goes on to ‘someone.’ If it was just God all the way through, we would have to ignore it and let God answer. But it changes to ‘someone,’ which means a creature like me can answer the prayer. The second reason it interests me is that there is a current of connection flowing between us. This man who needs help is connected to one of us. It’s probably you, but there’s an outside chance it could be both of us. So I say we home in on this one.”

“All right. But where’s the current of connection? What does it look like?”

“You’ll learn to sense it eventually. Don’t try to force it.”

They moved closer, descending to the Earth plane. “We’re going back in time a bit, to yesterday afternoon when she said the prayer,” Clexa explained.

They carried on descending until Julie could see a hospital corridor with a door leading off it, and a sign saying ‘Multi-faith Chapel.’ They entered, and it was a plain room with nothing but wooden pews and a table at the front which bore no religious symbols. A woman was sitting in the front pew, her eyes closed, and hands clasped together like a child praying. She wore a neat blue jacket and her hair too looked meticulously tidy, in a severe ponytail.

They hovered in the air watching her in silence, and after a short time she opened her eyes and stood up with a sigh. Clexa followed, gliding along just below the ceiling, as she walked slowly out of the chapel, along several corridors and into one of the wards. The signpost by the ward said, ‘Head Trauma.’

She went to the second bed from the end and sat down in a chair beside it. The man in the bed lay motionless, his head bandaged, and various tubes attached to him on either side.

Julie looked at his face. It was a little bruised, but she still recognized him. “Why, that’s Arran! I talked to him at a conference about a month ago, and we were going to keep in touch and be friends.”

Julie was aware that he had been giving her the eye and most likely wanted to be more than friends, but she didn’t want to talk about that to Clexa. It had occurred to her that possibly Clexa could read her private thoughts, but Clexa had given no indication of that and merely answered politely when Julie spoke, as if this were waking life in the physical world.

“That’s the connection, then,” said Clexa, “and it IS to both of us, because I recognize him too. My mother and I came across him when he was in a trance, visiting an astral region far beyond the Earth.”

“So, can we give him healing?”

“Of course. We need a spark, but we can defer that till afterwards. When that woman goes to sleep tonight, I’ll ask her for an apple. If she won’t give it, I’ll have to take a bit of energy from you. Is that all right? It will feel a bit buzzy, but it won’t hurt you.”

“Ok. This is so amazing. I wish I could remember it when I wake up.”

“It’s better you don’t- safer. That’s the way my mother taught me. She used to live in a place where girls were persecuted if they remembered.”

“I don’t think that would happen where I live. But I’ll leave it to you, Clexa-just show me what to do.”

While they were tapping into the healing current and directing some to Arran, a nurse came over to check some readings.

“How is he?” the woman asked. “I’m Lynn, his sister. I’m the only close family he’s got.”

“Please try not to worry,” she answered kindly. “He’s stable. We should know more tomorrow, when the results come back from the latest CAT scan.”

Lynn thanked the nurse and held Arran’s hand for a while. Then she leaned back and closed her eyes. Clexa hadn’t expected her to sleep until later, but she nodded off briefly, despite the hard, upright chair she was sitting in.

At once Clexa spoke to Lynn’s astral self, in a soft whinnying tone. “Would you give me an apple for helping your brother? I’m a horse. I like apples.”

At once Lynn was watchful, suspicious. “I’m not allowed to do that. We must worship only God. Why do you say an apple- are you Satan?”

“I told you, I’m a horse. Just a little offering? But it’s all right. If you won’t give it, the healing is free.”

Lynn jumped and awoke, a troubled look on her face.

Julie watched the exchange, intrigued. “That’s funny. Arran’s an occultist like me, but his sister belongs to one of those patriarchal religions.”

“Yes, so it seems,” said Clexa. “You’ll have to give me the spark yourself, then. Don’t go telling people I bit you. Or raped you- my mother says it’s a sexual energy.”

Julie laughed. That shouldn’t be a problem; she had plenty of that kind of energy to spare. But all she said was, “unbelievable! I’d so love to remember this.”

On the mythology course, a module in the teaching degree that Arran took, one of the students wrote, “every apple has a star at its centre. The star is the pentagram which all of nature is built on, and it mirrors the form of the human body with the head and four limbs.”

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Julie started following Cerys Johnson, the authoress who wrote ‘Silver Mine’, on her website and on social media. It sounded like Cerys would sympathise with her identification experience, or at least wouldn’t call her crazy, so she sent her an email about it.

Two days later she received a reply:

*Hi Julie,*

*I was very interested to hear about your identifying with my character Tisa and having the same experiences as her. I’ve had the same kind of things happen to me, and also other synchronicities.*



*When I was halfway through writing the manuscript for 'Silver Mine' I watched some episodes of an old TV serial that I'd always meant to look into but hadn't yet got round to. One of the episodes had a character and a symbol from 'Silver Mine' in it. I don't believe it was a coincidence. It was archetypes- that's how they work. I notice it especially with characters' names."*

There are people who say that there are no new stories in the world, or only one story, the quest of the hero, or only seven basic plots. But this was different, Julie knew it. This went to the root of the collective mind and the origin of language. If you write a story about Freya, have you created a new Norse myth that could be added on to the Edda? You could have simply plundered someone else's written tradition in search of ideas, but if so, why is there the synchronicity all around you?

Julie was a first-year student majoring in psychology. She hadn't come to Jung yet; he was to be covered later in the summer term, although in outline only as it was still only the first year of the course. But this was such an exciting line of investigation that she began to read extensively about Jung's theories now. She wanted to concentrate especially on him, and to choose more myth and literature options as well. It was fascinating, the way his research had soon led him into subjects like alchemy and spirit guides. They were linked intimately with the archetypes, which meant that she could include her private interests in her studies, and both would be enriched.

As she was to find out, the archetypal story doesn't coincide completely with your own life. It's a rough fit, an ellipse on your circle, and if you try to analyse the symbols too literally you become confused. They branch out in a myriad of directions all at once, and you catch faint echoes of many half-remembered myths chiming for attention yet too far away to grasp. Many events and sequences would take on a new meaning if you could only finish processing the stream of data before it races ahead, dissolving as it goes.

The names always carry the current the most strongly, although they are not identical to your own name but something more subtle, like Bianca for a pale lady, or a name from a well-known legend, such as 'Aurora.'

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Julie frowned as she read the text message from Clayton. He was always cancelling these days and she was pretty sure he had cooled off completely. Well, she wasn't hanging around for him- she had plenty of other pots on the boil. Just this week she'd run into Billy again, and promised to catch up with him. She punched his number into the phone.

“Hi, Billy, how’s it going?”

She wasn’t aware of Clexa, hovering by the ceiling.

That night on the astral plane, Clexa turned her head to look directly at her as she climbed onto her back. “What were you doing earlier on just after your dinner, when I came into the house? Who were you talking to?”

“I was just...phoning Billy.” Julie gave Clexa a sideways look- surely she wasn’t going to act like a substitute mother?

“What about that man Arran? I sensed a very strong current of connection between the two of you. I think you should wait for him to get out of hospital.”

“But Clexa- you’ve got to realise, you’re not letting me remember these trips when I wake up. When I’m awake I don’t remember Arran being in hospital and us giving him healing. I just think he never bothered to contact me.”

Clexa pulled up. “You’re right. I never thought of that. Well, we can’t have that. I’ll have to let you remember just the one thing, that Arran’s in hospital and we went one day to give him healing.”

“Couldn’t we go again?”

“His sister hasn’t prayed like that since, asking for ‘someone’ to help him. She says God every time now. But there are many others we can help, and I think this is going really well. That’s why I’ve been keeping near to the Earth, near you and those we’re helping. It means I won’t see my mother for a while and I miss her, but these journeys are more important.”

So it was that Julie remembered a vivid experience of astral projection, a healing mission to Arran in hospital. It was exciting, inspiring; maybe it wasn’t so far out of reach after all to aspire to be a light worker. But she hesitated to visit him. She barely knew him, and in intensive care, only close family are allowed anyway.

She kept him in mind as a potential boyfriend in the future, if and when he should recover his health and get in touch with her. But in the meantime, there was the one-night stand with Billy.

## Chapter 4

“Are Wishing Horses real?” An article with this title was beginning to be shared all around the internet. How did it start? That was what Meg wanted to know.

She had adopted the name ‘Meg’ because one of the three Furies was called Megaera, and subsequently to her surprise she had discovered that Hercules’ first wife was Megara. What difference did that pesky ‘e’ make, and did it mean she would have to change her name again, because people were confusing the two?

Sometimes there is a great deal of significance in the vowels and doubled letters that are removed from sigils, are absent in Hebrew, and cannot always be heard in speech. Like the double a in ‘Aaron,’ the legacy of loving Jewish parents, sadly departed, who wanted their son to have a High Priest name. Replaced with the double r in Arran, which he had chosen because it sounded more secular.

Meg’s search led her to the world of gaming, as searches so often did. One of this year’s new video games had a Wishing Horse in it that the player has to tame. Once it has been tamed you acquire ‘the power to have your wishes granted’- although only on that level of the game. Before you leave the level, you can unlock wings and a horn. The horse ends up resembling the offspring of Pegasus and a unicorn, and then it can grant you bigger wishes.

So, it was happening again- it would start with her seeing something in one of her trance visions, just as she had seen a Wishing Horse, and then it would appear in a more concrete form, like the game.

She was keen to know more about it, how these pulsating and scintillating symbols descended and created ‘*as above, so below*’ in the world around her.

Meg lit a candle and tried purposely to pass into that trance state, repeating many times in her mind, “I call a Wishing Horse- please come to me, Wishing Horse.”

After about fifteen minutes she lost touch with the physical world, and all she could see was a mountainous landscape where a dark horse cantered along the lower slopes. There was a man riding on its back, and they were heading towards her.

Now she could see that the horse was a large black stallion, his dark brown mane unkempt and flapping over on one side, his flanks taut and strong. He halted, tossed his head arrogantly and spoke.

“I am the Wishing Horse. Just name your desire, and I’ll tell you the price you have to pay.”

Meg stared back at him, deliberately looking him right in the eye. She said nothing, but her look sufficed.

Then the rider spoke. “It isn’t my idea to demand a price. Actually, none of this is my idea. What I would really like is for you to give a message to some girls, tell them I’m OK and I’m going to wake up. My ex Clara, my sister Lynn, and another girl called Julie. Do you think you could do that?”

Meg was surprised. She’d had her brushes with mediumship in the past, and this was how the dead spoke when they were bewildered and couldn’t get a grip on what had happened to them. Why would the Wishing Horse have a departed spirit with him?

“Are you sure you’re going to wake up?” she asked carefully.

“I’m certain. It’s only a temporary coma. But could you try to find the girls I mentioned, and tell them that? You can find Clara in an occult lodge; it’s called Chesed.”

“Chesed! I nearly joined that. But there was too much emphasis on the column which has Chesed in it. If you know what I mean. Why are you letting your horse strike bargains with people?”

“I am not HIS horse,” snapped Peridot. “He is MY rider. If you didn’t realise Wishing Horses have a rider, you’re not such an expert on them as you pretend.”

“This is insane. No-one will ever believe this. I’ll look out for Clara and the others, but no promises. Goodbye.” Meg exited from her trance, and carried out a banishing ritual to send the spirits away.

The conversation between Peridot and Meg looked very different from Arran’s side. What he saw first was a portal suspended in mid-air which opened up in front of Peridot and himself as they rode across the foothills. On the other side of the portal was a room all composed of wood. There was wood panelling on the walls, two or three dark rosewood bookcases and polished floorboards with a large rush mat in the centre. On the shelves were numerous books and all kinds of magical paraphernalia: crystals and bunches of herbs, wands and ritual daggers and stacks of paper with seals painted on them.

Then he saw the girl, suitably witchy- looking, with long light brown hair and a pointed face. Her inquisitive cat-like green eyes were fixed on him. She was kneeling down, and on the floor beside her was a purple burning candle. She was about the same age as Julie, but not as pretty.

When Peridot spoke to her, Arran was suddenly overwhelmed by a longing to connect with those he loved, to try somehow to reassure them. Once again he had lost hold of the rational part of himself; he was drifting, flailing, making no sense. The more he floundered the more assured the

girl sounded, until Peridot frightened her away and as she banished, she began to blur. Shortly afterwards the portal popped shut, leaving him back on the mountain slope. He had been riding across it unwillingly, not wanting Peridot to set their destination.

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Meg continued with her research into Wishing Horses, and came across the term 'Night Mare.'

"The Night Mare! Sounds like the horse Lilith rides. The big Mamma of all Wishing Horses- I must call that one!" And she did, using a more elaborate evocation than the previous time.

When Eoss entered her temple, she was puzzled. "You're white, and you look gentle. Are you really the Night Mare?"

"That's what they all say," replied Eoss, scuffing her hoof against Meg's rug like an impatient racehorse.

"I have to say, the Wishing Horse I got last time looked the part more. He was black and cruel, and there was a man riding him."

"WHAT?" exclaimed Eoss. "An imposter? He'll give me a bad name, and my daughter as well. We are helpers and healers, but no-one will believe that anymore. Just let me get at that horse! I'll knock the rider off his back. I'll tie him to a log, so he can't move."

"Well, you're showing some fire now, but it just sounds like gods having a quarrel. Not what I would call a Night Mare. To me a Night Mare means someone who would help me with nightmarish little schemes. Not that I have any, right this moment."

And she didn't- it was mostly all a pose with Meg.

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Arran didn't know where Peridot was taking him, and he didn't like the look of the terrain they were passing through. There were too many uneven rocks, and hardly any grass as they approached the mountains.

He was particularly concerned about the giant black metal spring that was moving towards them from the horizon, as it twirled around winding and unwinding, snaking across the ground. It didn't look like a natural feature of the landscape, but it was hard to tell in these distant astral regions.

"What's that?" he asked Peridot.

"It's a magic spell that Jez has cast against you," Peridot replied casually. "It's supposed to steal my bridle by hooking around it and pulling it away from you. But he reckons without me. I won't let him take it."

“I never even told you about Jez.” Arran’s voice was jerky, and his grip tightened to white-knuckle even though he hadn’t wanted to hold the bridle in the first place.

The spring stretched out, widening the spaces between the coils, and arched over Arran’s head so that now he was galloping along a tunnel, a tunnel made of metal strips like cage bars. He couldn’t see Peridot’s expression from his position of rider, only a pinched side-view of his jowl, and he could only gage from the way his mount was moving that he was still unfazed by the threat.

The spring continued to open out as they galloped along, except for one edge which compressed until it became a hook and began to flow towards Peridot’s neck. They were still ahead of the hook, but it was closing on them fast.

“Watch out!” Arran cried, but even as he formed the words Peridot ducked suddenly and plunged into a hidden stream that had been covered by long grass and rushes. On contact with the water the hooked part of the spring hissed and unravelled, and the rest of it began to slow until it rolled to a standstill behind them.

They were passing through a more rugged terrain now with deep gorges and rocky valleys, and Peridot hurried on in the direction of the tallest peaks.

Arran opened his mouth reluctantly to thank Peridot for their escape, then thought better of it and asked, “why are we heading for the mountains?”

“The mountain range feels congenial to me. And we can find a lair up there for both of us; we can wait to be summoned while keeping an eye on the landscape around us.”

“Magic isn’t all about granting petitions.”

“Quite a lot of human magic is, especially grimoire magic. The demon who rules this region is Asmodeus, one of the ones in the Lesser Key of Solomon, which is very much a petition-based text.”

So he was the white lion, although Arran had never heard that name for him before, and neither had he heard the name ‘white stone.’

“I know all about the Key of Solomon- I’ve studied it and used it,” said Arran. “But I don’t believe you are in the same league as those entities.”

Peridot tossed his head impatiently. “I’m not- I’m what you would call a familiar. From the natural wildlife of this region. But human beings love fancy new gods, and Eoss started all this, being a Wishing Horse.”

Eoss! Arran longed to find her. He remembered now where he had seen her name, on an internet website with information about egregores, modern gods created by mankind.

The sky was reddening and darkening, imitating a sunset, as they reached the first mountain, and Peridot slowed to a walk and then began

to climb. It was all jutting rocks underfoot, some of them dotted with ferns and small flowers. The sting of the emotional atmosphere was still the same as it had been in other parts of the region; Arran had become accustomed to it now, in self-defence.

Eventually they reached a natural cave in the mountainside overhung by an uneven ledge, and Peridot stopped, sniffed it a few times and then went in. Arran supposed it must look to Peridot like a cave fit for a primitive man to live in. He knew Peridot must have read that thought, but he didn't react. He just deposited Arran on the floor of the cave and lay down on his haunches to rest.

## Chapter 5

Peridot was lying down in the cave, with his eyes closed. He appeared to be in a half-dream state, not sleeping as a physical horse would, but resting with his mind withdrawn. He was wearing the bridle, looped tightly around his face, but it was evidently no encumbrance to him.

Arran began to hear galloping, fast and reckless, hooves crashing against the many sharp rocks as they approached. He crawled towards the mouth of the cave and peered out, trying to see without being seen.

A flash of silver, and he recognised Eoss. The joy that hit him almost lifted the oppression in the atmosphere. But as she drew near, he could see that something was wrong. She looked furious, almost foaming at the mouth. She rushed on them like a tornado, taking Peridot by surprise as he hastily returned to consciousness.

“So, this is where you’re hiding,” she shouted. “Imposter! Making the humans think we’re seedy horses who care only for striking bargains; bargains where the human comes off worse, of course. I won’t have it. I’m binding you and I’m binding your rider.”

A white rope appeared in her mouth from nowhere and fell around Peridot’s neck, threading in seamlessly with the bridle he wore. Eoss dragged him outside the cave and lashed him to an outcrop of rock. He seemed about to speak, but it all happened too fast, and he was unable to object.

Then there was more rope in her mouth, and she tied Arran up as well to a projecting rock within the cave, at the back. He wanted to appeal to her, to tell her that she was the refuge he had been longing for. But like Peridot he couldn’t react quickly enough, and then she was gone, galloping away down the mountain.

She had somehow managed to cut him off from Peridot completely; not only could they not see one another but Peridot could no longer hear his thoughts, which was strange because previously this had happened whether or not he was in Peridot’s field of vision. Arran tried to move his arms and shake off the ropes, but he was paralysed.

Arran began to dream—a dream within his coma. Tied up like this there was nothing else to do, no outer stimulation to prevent him from going deep within. First, he entered a room like a gymnasium where men and women were dressed in suits of leather and rubber, beating one another with whips and tying one another up with ropes.

“I’m not interested in this,” he murmured.



One of the men who held a whip looked at him hard and said, “not even now?”

Arran didn't understand him; he had forgotten he was tied up himself, forgotten everything that had happened.

“The Princess is worse than this,” the man added, and then turned away.

Arran searched for a way out of the room. He looked around the edges for a door, and at last he found one and pushed and went outside into a yard, then round to the front of the building. Before him lay rolling green meadows, and in the distance a palace on a hill. Coming towards him were two riders who looked like a Prince and a Princess. They were all golden; gold crowns and hair, flowing golden robes and skin of a hue like gold. Even their horses were a deep bay colour like sand on a tropical beach.

When the Princess saw him, she halted and got down from her horse, and her appearance changed completely. She had become a girl with a pale oval face, black hair and blue eyes and long, slim legs. She looked familiar, but Arran couldn't remember where he had seen her. All he knew was that he loved her.

“Will you come out with me tonight?” he asked.

“Yes,” she replied. “The Prince is away tonight.”

“No- I don't want the Prince away. I want you to leave the Prince.”

She looked Arran up and down critically, as if she was thinking of buying him in a cattle market. “Hmm. You are a commoner, aren't you? Do you know the story of the princess who disguises herself as a commoner and goes down the hill to the marketplace? It is one of the myths of Aladdin. There is a whole cycle of Aladdin myths. If you come to the Persian palace, we will see if we can place you in one of them.”

“I will come to the palace,” replied Arran, unable to take his eyes off her.

The Princess remounted her horse, and as the two of them turned back towards the palace, Arran followed them on foot across the meadows.

Persia-such a beautiful, exotic name. Now it is called Iran, and Persian cats are left with the burden, or the privilege, of preserving its former title.

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Clara came in through the door of the Head Trauma unit, and halted abruptly. Lynn, sitting beside Arran's bed, raised her head and looked at her.

“You don't have to hide from me, Clara.”

“I had a phone call from the doctor. This isn’t the first time I’ve visited him- I’ve been twice before. I DO care about him. This is all such a mess.”

Lynn began to cry. “His coma has deepened. They don’t know why. They’re talking of switching off the life support machine.”

Clara ran over and put her arms around Lynn. “Oh, Lynn! Don’t even think about doing that. He’s going to get better. I’ve had a spirit message.”

Lynn stiffened against her shoulder. “What do you mean, spirit message? I’ve just come from the synagogue. I was praying for Arran. That’s the only way I know.”

“Maybe this is God’s answer, sending me here to tell you about the message I received.”

Clara thought back to the Chesed party. It was noisy and crowded, held in a room made from a porch which was usually home to a snooker board. There were twiglets, crisps, beer and other drinks in cans, nearly all alcoholic. You would never have known they were serious students of the occult- everyone was drinking and smoking just like at any other party. The music was a mixture of rock and heavy metal, turned down low enough that conversations could be heard.

She had felt a bit guilty, going to a party when Arran was on the critical list. But after all she was entitled to some social life, and strictly she wasn’t even his partner anymore, although the hospital was treating her as his second next of kin after Lynn because their split was so recent. And then his accident had happened, only six weeks afterwards. No-one knew why the shed had collapsed, and so far, there had been no investigation or going over it for forensic evidence. That would certainly happen if he was to die, but the police had put it on hold in hope of him coming round and giving a statement.

She’d wondered who that girl was at the party. *Must be a gatecrasher, and look at the way she’s dressed. Why do we always attract the weirdos?*

Clara was disgusted to discover that the girl was asking for her, inquiring where she could find a member of Chesed called Clara. If she wanted a lot of sensationalism, she was going to be disappointed.

But when she had actually sat down in the kitchen and talked to Meg, she was impressed that the message appeared to be genuine. Meg had described Arran exactly and she had also known all about his accident, which no-one outside his close circle would have known.

She had been trying to think of a way of telling Lynn, but after what the doctors had said today it was vital that Lynn knew, whatever her reaction. She would be the one who would have to give permission for the life support to be turned off.

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As Arran climbed the hill towards the palace, he began to see it in more detail. It had domes of pure gold, and many glass windows overlooking balconies with patterns etched into the metal railings. Everything was sparkling fit to dazzle an observer, the domes, the windows and the moat of clear water that surrounded the palace.

The Prince and Princess were riding slowly, something between a trot and a walk so that it was easy for Arran to follow, and they didn't look back. The bay horses held their heads up high as they passed over the drawbridge. There were a few people who appeared to be courtiers watching as they approached, but no guards.

The Prince and Princess led their horses to a row of stables, where steeds with the bearing of pure-bred Arabic racehorses leaned their heads out into the stable yard. As they climbed down from their mounts a groom came running, bowed his head and led the two horses away. They turned back towards a golden gate with many round tops like bed knobs, and went through it into the palace, with Arran following.

Inside, the palace was even more luxurious. It was like the illustrations in a coffee-table book of oriental tales. Arran could see what such stories mean when they describe rich Persian silks and carpets, velvet drapes and light-reflecting floors.

Even the hallways were lined with brown velvet panels and gold fittings. Part-way along one of the halls, the Princess stopped and pointed to a heavy wooden door. "You can use this guest room," she said. "A servant will attend you."

"Thank you." Arran pushed the door open and went inside. There was a four-poster bed with heavy green curtains and a dark-wood desk and chair. The room joined onto an open area with a bath the size of a swimming pool; one end had gold taps and around the outside were gold statues of animals.

"I could get used to all this finery," Arran said to himself half-jokingly.

He sat down in the chair, and a few minutes later a servant wearing yellow robes and a matching turban came in, bearing a tray. On it were a jug of scented water and spices in jars. He placed it on the desk, bowed and said, "these are for perfumed baths. You can even eat- anything is possible here. Would you like some fruits or sweets, or a cake?"

"I would like a sponge cake please, with cream," Arran said.

The servant bowed again, went out and returned with a whole cake laced with cream on a silver cake stand, and a silver spoon. Arran ate a few slices of the cake, and then there was a knock on the door. He opened it to see the Princess standing there, still with blue eyes and black hair and long, slim legs.

"Princess, would you like to sleep in this room with me tonight?" he asked.

She leaned close to him and said softly, "You will be dead by morning."

Arran jumped. "What!"

"Unless you can tell a good story. I have been here for many years, because I have told many stories, and so I have been spared. Once you start a story, it goes on forever- it changes a little as it moves through many cultures, but at the core it remains the same. I still think the story in which Aladdin is a thief is the one for you. The thief who follows a princess from the marketplace back to the palace."

She motioned towards him, waving her arm as if she were pushing something away, and suddenly the scene changed. He had left the palace and was walking through rows of dark, narrow streets, crowded with raggedly dressed people and cheap-looking houses. The people paid little attention to him; they walked with bowed heads, only occasionally glancing around them furtively, as though they were planning to commit a crime.

It was a sordid place, dirty and smelly, a complete contrast to the environment he had just left. And he had never got his perfumed bath, or the Princess, only a few slices of cake. Was he supposed to be content with that?

After a while, the walking began to tire him, and despite the dirty pavements he sat down by the roadside. For a few minutes the crowds continued to pass by, walking around him, and then they thinned until he was alone.

He saw a book lying on the kerb face-down, and picked it up. The title was 'Al the Thief Goes to The Palace.' There was no picture on the cover, just a geometric pattern like the ones in Islamic art, dull red against a grey background.

He opened the book and read it, at an accelerated pace so that he finished all of it within a few minutes. The story began when Al set out on his journey, but it skipped over the journey quickly and was mainly about what happened at the palace. The main character was partially like himself, but not completely; there were some significant differences. He thought of putting the book back on the kerb, but instead thrust it into one of the front pockets of his trousers. Up till now Arran hadn't been aware of his clothes, but now he noticed he was wearing wide trousers and a loose shirt.

He got up and walked on a little further and then he came to a cinema on the corner. It looked incongruous in these streets, which were otherwise like a setting from many centuries in the past.

The neon sign above the entrance proclaimed: 'Playing Today: The Legend of Al the Thief.' He felt himself being drawn inside. There was no one sitting in the ticket booth taking money, so he just went through to the

interior and found that he was the only person there. He sat in the stalls before the screen.

Arran watched the film, again at an accelerated speed. This time the emphasis was different; it was all about Al's life as a thief, and only the final scene took place in the palace. But the character had become much more like himself; he recognised his appearance, his mannerisms and even his way of walking. It was disconcerting.

He got up hastily and left the cinema. The sun was setting, and he wondered where he could spend the night. The buildings he passed were dingy houses that all looked the same, and none of them appeared to be guest houses of any kind.

Abruptly he came up against a façade which he felt certain was his own garden and front door in this grimy city. There was a key in the other front pocket of his trousers, and he let himself in. It looked like the worst apartment he had ever feared to end up in, back in his student days. He retreated to the bedroom, where a games console lay on the floor, and began playing a video game to take his mind off his surroundings.

Words appeared on the screen: *You play as Al, the rider on a Wishing Horse.*

The game character looked exactly like himself, and he was standing in a cave full of gold statues and curios, with a stout brass lamp in the left-hand corner at the back.

*Rub the lamp to get your first Wishing Horse.*

Arran moved his character over to the lamp and pressed the button for rubbing it. A black stallion appeared, who looked just like Peridot.

The horse gave a nasty, whinnying laugh, and then spoke. "Ha! I'm only a familiar. What do you expect, when you're only a thief? To summon a King, you must yourself be King Solomon."

Arran put down the controller and covered his face with his hands. "I don't like this game. I don't like this house. Where am I?"

## Chapter 6

Lynn and Clara were in the consultant's office, sitting on a couch. Clara had her arm around Lynn, who was crying a little but this time they were tears of joy.

"The brain is a strange organ," the consultant was saying. "It takes a very long time to heal. That's why we didn't realise at first that Arran's brain was using the deeper coma to repair itself. It will just be a matter now of giving it time, as much time as it needs to do the job. We have the resources to keep Arran stable, however many months it may be."

"You don't know how happy this makes me," Lynn said. "I've been so worried. I couldn't sleep, couldn't eat."

"I'm sorry we gave you the wrong information before. We didn't know ourselves. It took a very deep scan to see what was going on."

"Promise me you'll eat a proper meal now, Lynn," said Clara. "You'll be fading away."

"I'll try," said Lynn, through her tears.

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Arran turned off the monitor and crawled across the littered floor towards the bed in the far corner of the room. Through the thin window he could hear intermittent shouting in the street, and he looked out, but was unable to pinpoint the source. A permanent draught blew in from somewhere, making the ragged curtains flutter.

"I must get some rest." He lay down and seemed to lose consciousness, then seemed to wake, although in a dream within a coma this would be impossible. He woke to a miserable twilight which served only to emphasize the dirt in the room without illuminating it.

Arran got up. He became aware that he was still wearing the loose Aladdin trousers and floppy shirt from yesterday and there were no clean clothes, only dishevelled rags on the floor. He went to the poky kitchen to look for breakfast, but the cupboards were all empty and the fridge slumped broken behind the door. Perhaps he was supposed to go out and steal some food. Best to put that off for as long as possible, especially in this neighbourhood where it would be the survival of the most vicious.

He returned to the bedroom and turned on the games console again, to put off leaving the house for a while. This morning's game featured the villain Saliva Man, who spits in the dust to create Wishing Horses. "*My egregores- racehorses of the finest pedigree.*" He creates three black

Wishing Horses; they will give you three wishes that you'll regret making for the rest of your life.

Arran fought him, and just as he was winning a new 'boss' appeared, Saliva Man's twin Salvia Man, drug-crazed and slashing everyone in his way to death, as he aims his knife at hallucinations. Arran was killed numerous times by both Saliva Man and Salvia Man, killed and resurrected and then killed again, and the only way to escape was to petition the Wishing Horses. But if you do that they trick you, in twisted ways so that you end up worse off than you were before.

Slowly he realised that he would have to stop playing, leave this hovel and travel back to the palace, and be the story character that the Princess had assigned him to be. He must make this particular version of it his own; bend it, shape it around his life and let it serve him in some way that he would only discover while he was on the journey.

He slammed the door of the mean house and locked it with the key. Perhaps this was his universal thief's key that had served him for a lifetime of stealing, yet when all was said and done it was only the key to a slum. There were far fewer people in the street this morning; however, those who were there were of the same type as the night before, and Arran didn't dare approach any of them for help.

The road was lined with dark-painted fences, crumbling walls and broken-down houses, and it almost surprised Arran that they were there at all, when he felt as if he was treading the squares of a board game while shaking some dice in a cup.

As he walked his mind cleared, and he became aware of the parallels between his own quest and other mythical stories. Aladdin was the main one, and the Book of Tobit; after all, this was Asmodeus' realm. But there were far more, for nearly every story can be seen as a quest, and even the Wizard of Oz was another synchronicity.

Was this street some yellow-brick road, to give courage and transform the heart and brain? His heart belonged to Julie who he had yet to win, and his brain was damaged by the accident, he couldn't yet tell how permanently. The white lion seemed to Arran to have courage; he was leaving him unsupervised and was presumably bounding around somewhere else in his kingdom, even though Arran was a volatile force from outside who could cause chaos here.

He realised that this deeper dream part of the kingdom was suffused with symbolism, while the outer part looked like mountains and forests that could be found anywhere, in any Earth-like world, and would not be out of place.

"These are my three wishes," Arran announced aloud. "To obtain the rest of the cake, the perfumed bath and the night with the Princess, and for this purpose I am returning to the palace. If I can avoid stealing

anything on the way I will, because I'm not a thief, and the three things I've wished for have already been promised to me."

He began to look for paths that would lead uphill, away from the streets and in the direction of the palace. For a while there were only more and more level roads threading through an endless dark city. Finally it began to turn a little more rural, as if he had reached the outskirts of a town and was about to head across open fields. Perhaps they would lead to the rich meadows he had seen before, in front of the hill where the palace stood.

Suddenly his way was blocked by a stable yard, with closed and shuttered stables all the way along on both sides, and at the far end a barrel full of red, shiny apples. A notice was tacked to the wall which read, "You must steal the apples that belong to the Wishing Horses."

Arran hadn't had any breakfast. He couldn't go on all day without eating or he would start to feel faint...or would he? He reminded himself that he was within a dream, so it would do him no harm to go without eating. To ask the horses for some apples would be a solution and he knocked on the doors of the stables one by one, but there was no response.

Ignoring the apples, he marched resolutely to the end of the yard and searched until he found a tiny gap at the end where he could squeeze around a wooden post and get out.

For a time it was a normal road again, and then it led into a huge cave where the trail ended. At the far end of the cave sat an old man with his eyes closed in deep meditation. He had matted hair, and his legs were twisted into a yoga pose. There was a lantern burning at his feet.

A voice boomed out, "you must steal the Hermit's lamp, for you need a light to guide you on the way."

Arran looked around, trying to tell where the voice was coming from, and he spotted an oblong radio like one of the early transistor radios, standing on a ledge on the left side of the cave. This time there appeared to be no way out, the cave was seamless on all sides.

Arran shook his head. "No, I'm NOT a thief. Hermit-wake up! Let me ask you for the lamp. Please, wake up!"

The Hermit's eyes remained closed. Then jewels and gold began to pour into the cave, as if they were falling down an unseen chute. The level rose so rapidly that Arran began to be buried under them, and all the time he could see the Hermit and the lamp, now floating in the air above the cave. The transistor crackled as the treasures started to cover it and the voice came again. "Quickly, take the lamp. Whatever you do, you will still meet the Hermit's opposite, the King with the other lamp. Better to meet him now, alive, than at the palace when you're dead."

The radio fell silent as it disappeared under the pile of treasure, and by now Arran was buried nearly up to his shoulders. He willed himself up



towards the roof of the cave where the Hermit was floating. This must be the answer, to rise above the alluring treasures and join the Hermit sage in his enlightenment, to float beside him.

At first Arran did rise, and he heard the clatter and swish of the precious stones as they slid off him and fell towards the floor. Then his toes touched a pair of gold shoes with jewels of many colours and shapes glued onto them at the front, and before he could stop them his feet slid into the shoes. The pouring stopped, and as he landed on the uneven pile of treasure and stumbled across it, he became convinced that he had stolen the shoes and failed the test.

The cave melted away and vanished and he was back on the road, treading the path in his new jewelled shoes. A winged unicorn confronted him. "So, you make your own independent steps in the shoes you have won. You will not conform to the Princess' tale of you as a thief. There is no need to find a replacement for Chesed- your own heart will show you the way. All you need to replace is your lost love Clara, by finding your new love when you wake- and beware, for the Princess has assumed her image."

Of course, now Arran remembered- it was Julie he loved, though as yet he hardly knew her, and when he last saw the Princess, she had changed herself into Julie. While he was in this altered state of consciousness there was nowhere to go except to the palace; however, his goal was to wake up and seek out Julie in the real world.

As the unicorn disappeared, he tried to ease himself out of his present altered state, back into whatever semblance of normal consciousness he had been in just before it began. But nothing happened, and he continued along the route.

It was definitely turning into countryside now, with fields and trees on either side. Slowly Arran became aware of a voice whispering in his ear. "Steal an earring from the ear of the Princess. She owes you a treasure, and something personal of hers will have the greatest meaning." It conjured up a warm image of nibbling her ear while she held him lovingly in her arms.

He reminded himself with an effort that she wasn't Julie. She was an archetype, sometimes an innocent victim, but known in her most hideous incarnation as The Little Sultana. When he reached the palace, she might appear in that aspect, and murder him. He would have to refuse for the third time to steal, and slow down his pace, aiming to awaken before he should arrive at his destination.

## Chapter 7

The little demon moved swiftly through the mountains, keeping a look out for his target. He found him surprisingly quickly, and helpfully enough, he was trussed up against a rock and unable to move.

His orders were to take off the bridle this horse was wearing, and bring it to Jez. That didn't make a lot of sense as Jez would be unable to see or touch it, but there was no accounting for the stupid things that humans were always asking for. They weren't even Jez' own instructions; it was his friend again, the one he paid, who had made the request to the chief of his legion.

The demon stood over the paralysed horse and whisked into his hand something that resembled a swiss army knife. Unlike the spring Jez had conjured up before with his spell, which had only one hook that was easy to break, this had a multitude of tools on it, and if one wouldn't work there were plenty of others to try.

Holding one of the tools against the bridle, the demon started to make yanking movements as if he was pulling out a tooth. At first nothing happened, but then there was a ping, and the bridle flew off the horse's head and neck and into the demon's hand. In the process it splintered the white rope which had become meshed in with the bridle. The rope shuddered and fluttered a few times, and then exploded into a cloud of dust.

At once the horse jumped up and shouted, "Hey there!"

But it was too late. The demon streaked away at high speed, taking the bridle with him.

Peridot shook his head, his eyes full of fire and mane flopping sideways over one cheek. Then he trotted into the cave, went to the far end, and began biting through the rope that held Arran.

When he had bitten right through it and pulled it onto the floor of the cave, Arran stirred and woke up from his sleep.

"Oh. Oh, it's you, Peridot. I was having such terrible dreams. Where's your bridle?"

"A demon's taken it, to give to Jez. How do you think I got out of Eoss' rope? A fine wizard you are- you should have defended me when Eoss came here."

"There was no time to. I didn't see what she was doing till it was over."

"Huh!" Peridot snorted, and he turned and clopped out of the cave.

Arran followed him, for now something was bothering him. "Peridot, what can Jez do with the bridle?"

“Nothing! He’s just a fool. It isn’t a material object, he can’t hold it, and he can’t command me because I didn’t choose him as my rider. I chose you, but you’re not helping me.”

“Should we try and get it back?”

“Yes. It’s not essential, but it would be useful- if you want to help me to grant wishes. But I’m not sure that you do.”

“It’s just.... that isn’t really what a magician does. You would have to be a dead magician, one who thinks he’s a god. And as for telling people that it’s your horse who is the god, not you, that just sounds wrong to me.”

Peridot snorted again. “You’ll never get it back with that attitude. Get up here and let’s ride for a while, and I’ll try and think of a plan.”

Arran didn’t want to ride, but there seemed to be no other choice, so he pulled himself up onto Peridot’s broad back and put his arms loosely around his neck. He had got used to riding without a saddle by now, but he felt insecure without the bridle and would have to start all over again before he would feel comfortable.

They travelled for what felt to Arran like a long time, through an almost deserted landscape. The only living beings they passed were other horses, in the distance. Arran wondered when they would come to some cities, or even rural areas that were more populated, and Peridot must have known his thoughts, but he said nothing.

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Another appearance on the Earth as horseman and rider. At least it made a change from the endless galloping through sparse, spiky woods and the lower slopes of mountains.

“Human beings often say they would like to be a fly on the wall,” said Peridot. “Here’s your chance to be one.”

Once again, they had materialized in Meg’s wood-panelled temple, and this time it was laid out for a reading. A round coffee table had been brought in, wooden like everything else in the room, with solid spherical feet. Sitting opposite one another on stools were Jez and Meg.

“He’s come to ask her about my bridle, and she’s the one to know, since you were the jockey holding it when she met you.”

Arran clamped his knees tightly around his saddle-less seat. “How did Jez find her?”

“Remember, she went to some of the Chesed meetings, and left her phone number in the contacts book. That was before she spoke to Clara, just as you asked her to, and told her you were going to be all right. Jez belongs to the lodge now, and all he had to do was look up the number.”

Arran was pleased that Clara had got his message, but it was troubling that Jez had now joined the lodge. He obviously hadn't told any of them, especially Clara, about the dodgy magical workings he was doing.

He pictured Jez and Clara driving to the lodge meetings in Clara's car and then walking up the garden path to the house together, arm in arm. The meetings were held once a week on Saturday nights, and the usual format was to go through the Kabbalist Cross, the Lower Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram, and the Middle Pillar. Next, they would have a meditation based on one of the paths of the Tree of Life, and afterwards questions and discussion. It was a common format amongst Kabbalist groups; however, in the case of Chesed they changed it on important dates such as the solstices and had a ceremonial magic ritual instead, which entailed a lot more preparation. That must be what interested Jez the most.

Arran watched as Meg placed some tarot cards on the table. She was dressed in her usual extrovert witchy style, a long, black cloak with gothic designs and many chunky, silver pendants bearing pentagrams and sigils. Her pale brown hair flowed loosely over her shoulders and almost touched the table as she looked down.

"The cards are only a guide," she explained. "I'm going to be tuning in psychically. You don't have to use them- if you prefer, you can just cut them and take one."

"Well, I've got a very specific question," said Jez. "I've managed to get hold of an invisible power charm, and I want to know how I could use it."

"What do you mean by an invisible power charm? Could you clarify that?"

"It's a bit like the ring in 'Lord of the Rings'- gives power to its owner. I heard about it and kept trying to get hold of it, and now I have. But it's invisible, some kind of completely astral thing, with no solid physical form. I'm not sure how to work with a thing like that."

"Well, I'd say you can't. Not really. It's probably being wielded by spirits who could easily trick you. How about you pick a card, to tell us more about it?"

Jez cut the tarot pack and drew out the Knight of Pentacles.

"He rides a dark horse, and he's clever and shrewd. But only with worldly things. He wants material treasures and doesn't look beyond that. Is that you, do you think? Or is it this charm?"

"I should tell you, Meg; the charm has to do with someone you've seen in a vision: Arran. Before it was mine, it used to be his."

Meg's eyes lit up with recognition. "Of course! He was riding on a Wishing Horse. Wishing Horses are exactly what I've been studying, for months. I see it now-the charm is the horse's bridle."

Jez leaned forward eagerly. "Really? I've never heard of a Wishing Horse. You mean it literally grants you wishes? I could ask it for anything?"

"Now you see, that's where the materialism comes in, like the Knight of Pentacles. You don't get to wish for anything you like, just because you've got the bridle. The horse might let you ride him, but so far he hasn't, so you'll have to do what everyone else does, and evoke him. There's some kind of spell- book which describes a ritual- you have to light a candle, offer the horse an apple or sugar lumps, and make your request."

Peridot pulled sharply away, just as he had that time in Arran's living room, so that Arran had to throw his arms around his neck to stay seated. A loud neigh followed, and then, "I've heard enough. She's told him exactly how to summon me, but she hasn't told him to give the bridle back to us. This is going to make it harder. I won't have him as a rider, but I'll end up having to give him something."

"Can't you make him earn it?" asked Arran, as the familiar mountain slopes reformed around them.

"Oh, he will. Idiots always earn themselves a hard time, but it still doesn't get my bridle back."

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Jez' temple was in the spare bedroom of his house. It featured thick dark purple curtains and a large pentagram rug in the middle of the floor, which could be turned round so that the pentagram was upright or reversed. Jez had also purchased some other mats, one with a Solomonic circle printed on it and another with a Solomonic triangle, and these were rolled up at the back of the room for use on other occasions.

Today he was simply using the rug with the pentagram upright, and a white candle in a golden candleholder burning on the floor at the front of the room. In a dish beside it was some chopped up apple crumble which had a very pleasant aroma.

Arran and Peridot were at the front of the room, Arran as usual seated on Peridot's back, and Jez was looking about the room excitedly because he could sense a change in the atmosphere. But he couldn't actually see them, so his gaze went straight through them.

They immediately tried to locate Peridot's bridle, but it was nowhere to be found. The little demon must have hidden it.

Jez stretched out his arms in a rather theatrical way. "Wishing Horse, I wish for all my magic spells to work," he said.

Peridot pawed at the floor and regarded Jez cynically. "That lets me out of giving you anything," he said. "Magic always works, although sometimes in awkward ways, which make it look as if nothing has

happened. It's all right, Arran, you can speak; he won't hear either of us. He isn't really psychic enough to do this."

"I also don't want to be blamed for that accident," Jez continued. "But maybe that's too many wishes. I'll do another spell for that, to make sure."

"But he WAS to blame," Arran commented.

He jumped as Peridot's neck went down, and his nose went into the plate of apple crumble. He knew it was only symbolic eating, but it certainly looked real.

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Lynn was on the phone to Clara. "Arran's coma has become lighter again. The doctors think he may be starting to come out of it."

"That's wonderful news. We could be speaking to him soon. Fingers crossed."

"When I visit him today, I'll watch him very closely- see if I can see any change."

"I'll come with you- I'm free today. Afterwards, we could go and eat somewhere. You must keep your strength up."

"All right, Clara, we'll do that. It will be nice. Relax and forget all the worry, even if we can only forget it for a short time."

## Chapter 8

As they were riding the next day, Arran began to be aware of something acrid blowing into his mouth. It affected his thoughts so that he was no longer sure where he was, and his head was spinning.

The sensation increased, and now there was no mistaking the thick smoke rushing in through his nose and mouth, choking him. He gasped and fell forward against Peridot's mane, and when he looked up through stinging eyes, he became aware that they were once again being sucked towards the Earth plane. It was a slower descent than the previous times, when Peridot had been evoked and had materialized. This time Arran felt painfully every layer through which they passed, culminating in an invisible skin stretched tight which split as they breached the veil and came down to the Earth.

Then they were back in Jez' cramped temple room. Arran could see a ritual circle with a charcoal brazier burning, standing on a metal tray, and a thick pile of smoking herbs stacked on top of the brazier. Beside it on the floor was a hotchpotch collection of crystals, more herbs, papers with diagrams drawn on them and finally at the far edge Peridot's bridle, although the latter was of course not solid like the other items. Sitting just outside the circle were Jez and the demon that had taken the bridle originally.

Jez was intoning something in a monotonous chant, and crumbling more of the pungent herbs to add to the fire. It wasn't a ritual that Arran recognised, in fact it looked like a total mess. Arran clutched his throat and waved his hand desperately at Jez. "I can't breathe!" he managed to say.

"He can't hear you," the demon said. "He can't hear me. He can't see or touch the bridle. But he thinks he knows what he's doing, and he's trying to make you forget the attack he made on you, so that you won't tell the police when you wake up. But he's doing it wrong- he's killing you."

Arran could no longer speak, but to his relief Peridot answered for him. His voice had changed to a wheedling, whinnying tone, and through his dimming senses Arran realised that Peridot was very anxious to save his life.

"Excuse me. I'm a Wishing Horse, and as you may know, we can make our riders forget anything we want them to. I'll make a deal. If you will stop choking him, I will make him forget that attack."

"I'm not choking him- Jeremy is. I suggest you throw him, somewhere that the spell won't reach. Now! Otherwise, he'll die in that coma."

Peridot bucked and threw Arran, and he soared up and then down like a golf ball that has been struck with a club. He sailed out of Jez' ritual chamber and then straight outside through a window of the house.

The minute he was gone, Peridot leaned towards the brazier and snatched the bridle. It flowed over his face like a living creature and fitted itself on. Peridot looked caged in the bridle, just as he had when he was wearing it and resting in the cave, yet to him it was the essence of freedom. With a triumphant neigh he vanished from the room.

Arran meanwhile continued to fly through the air, and he travelled like that along several streets until he landed in a sprawled heap on the floor of a synagogue, right next to the front pew.

There were no living worshippers inside, but several spirits of the dead were gathered around a man who appeared to be the Rabbi. When Arran crashed in, they rushed over and crowded around to examine him, and as he sat up the Rabbi spoke sternly.

"Your parents should have given Lynn a name from the Torah instead of you. You don't uphold the tradition."

"Er... yes, I do," said Arran. "The magic of King Solomon comes from the Jewish tradition. And so does the Kabbalah, which I practised when I was in Chesed."

"King Solomon's magic is forbidden. And the Kabbalah in groups like Chesed has been altered- it is not the original that we teach."

"I don't want to get into an argument. Thank you for providing sanctuary here. I only hope it's safe for me to leave so I can wake up from my coma." He went to the door and peered around it cautiously. To his relief there was no bitter smoke here, only an English street with people, dogs and traffic. He left the synagogue without looking back at the little group inside, and began to walk along the street. No-one paid any attention to him, which was to be expected as he was a spirit moving amongst them.

Now that he was back on the Earth plane, would it be easier for him to wake up, or was he only here because Jez' ritual had pulled him down from the spirit world?

Something would have to be done about Jez. Even if that had been a bungled spell intended only to stop him talking, maybe Jez really did want him dead. He would never talk then. But if he was to die the charge would go up from assault to murder, and Jez would likely be convicted on forensic evidence, after the shed had been examined.

It was no wonder that Arran had been drawn into the sphere of destructive love on the astral plane, because that was what had been manifesting down here on Earth ever since Clara had met Jez. Initially Jez had seen himself as a rival in love, but now it had become much more than that.



His waking from the coma would make it a great deal worse. He could only imagine what the drama would be like between Clara and Jez after he had reported Jez to the police. Maybe Clara would turn against Jez and want him back, but he didn't feel he would be able to go back. He no longer loved her- it was Julie he wanted, and Julie could easily become involved in the trouble as well.

At least now that he was on Earth, he could do some investigating. He scanned the street he was in for clues as to where he was. There were no landmarks he recognized- it was just some unspecified English town. He looked through the window of a café, trying to get his bearings. A clock on the wall showed 3.15, and there was a card calendar underneath it turned to 'Tuesday,' but no month or day of the month. In the street it looked like late September, with flowers blooming in gardens and hanging baskets, and only a few brown leaves, fluttering down or clinging to the trees in clumps.

It should be possible to get to his home on the outskirts of Chelmsford by focussing on it, picturing it in his mind. He called up a mental picture of the house.

At once he moved location, and found himself floating in the air some way above his house and garden in the out- of -body state. There was the collapsed shed, cordoned off with ropes and plastic cones but otherwise untouched. He descended rapidly until he was outside the living room window, and looked inside where he saw evidence of Lynn's tidying and cleaning, and a jug standing where she had watered his plants. This must be what the newly dead see, after they have risen out of their bodies.

He went into the garden with the idea of sitting in the hammock, but it had been taken down and folded up neatly on the back doorstep, sheltered by an overhanging edge of the roof.

He passed through the window into the living room. He glanced at the telephone and there was nothing resembling the note about Julie that he had seen next to it when he had come here before with Peridot, so its origin remained a mystery.

The school papers on the cabinet had been moved, and quite a few of them were missing. Probably the headmaster had sent someone round to fetch what would be needed back at school. There was also a Get-Well card from his colleagues on the mantelpiece. Wouldn't it be more appropriate at the hospital? Perhaps there wasn't room in the ward.

He didn't like thinking about the hospital; the prospect of going there and getting back inside his physical body upset him. It would be all right if he was barely conscious while doing that, but fully alert as he was now, he would see far too much.

Then Arran sensed a lift in the atmosphere, a presence. He looked around and saw the same angel coming towards him who he had met

when he first came to in the woodland, after going into his coma. The angel held out his hand and said, "Come- it's time to wake."

At last! His ordeal was over, and there was no need to worry about going to the hospital, because the angel would ensure that his waking was gentle. Before this he had always enjoyed dreaming and going into trances, but now he never wanted to sleep again. He took the angel's hand, and they moved smoothly through the air, towards the street where the hospital stood, in through the ceiling of the top floor, then down towards the ward, descending and descending.

Arran's consciousness became blurred as he started to slip back into his physical body. Suddenly, Peridot was there. He reared up and waved one black front hoof over Arran's head, as if gesturing with a human hand.

"Forget that Jez was ever in the shed. Forget everything that happened on that day."

Arran was only faintly aware of what Peridot was doing, but he did register that the angel stood back and didn't interfere.

Then Eoss too appeared, standing on one side of Peridot, and he shied away from her, showing the whites of his eyes.

"I was too harsh with you before, Peridot. I shouldn't have tied you up- I should have just controlled you, like the restraining angels do with one another." She put her mouth gently on Peridot's shoulder and shook it a little. "I decree that Arran will remember. Justice must be done."

In the hospital bed, Arran stirred and opened his eyes. A nurse who was passing by smiled and went over to him. "How do you feel?" she asked.

"I..." Arran coughed. His throat was too dry to speak.

"I'll get you some water, and I'll bring the doctor."

The room slowly came into focus, the stand with many tubes attached to it, plastic curtains round the bed that were pulled back, a high window on the opposite side which was letting in too much light. As he closed his eyes, there was the swish of the doctor drawing the curtains, and thankfully it went darker behind his eyelids.

Then came an examination, clips and needles being pulled out, and a few questions. Arran couldn't answer them; he remembered nothing. The last thing he recalled was the day when Clara had phoned him about the books, now three months ago.

Above the bed by the ceiling, unseen by Arran, Eoss was watching with disapproval. "I just decreed that he would remember. What went wrong?"

"He will remember, Eoss," said the angel, "but not for three years. That was the decision he made himself, subconsciously, to avoid the drama that would have happened with Clara and Jez, and Julie. The destructive love, as he perceived it. It will be so much better this way. Jez will have

left Clara by then, Arran will be settled with Julie, and justice will still be done.

Before all this happened, Clara and Lynn were enemies because of their different views about the Jewish Kabbalah and about Clara's relationship with Arran. Now look at them- best friends. It makes me think of Naomi and Ruth. They deserve to be protected from the trouble that would have happened, because they made peace."

"Oh, all right," said Eoss, tossing her mane and tail. "I should have known; we Wishing Horses always get our own wishes- in the end."

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Several months later, Arran and Julie were kissing, after spending the day together at a psychic fair.

"Julie, can I ask you something? Do you like to have open relationships?"

"Yes... at first. Why are you asking me this now, when we've only just got together? Do you have a horror of open relationships?"

"Just something I learned when I was in my coma, and had a lot of time to think and dream. That talking about it in advance will prevent destructive love."

"That's a bit intellectual. You must have been all up in your head when you were in that coma- maybe that's what a coma means. I go with my feelings, always. But yeah- talking about it can fix a lot."

**`Heather of Heather Bay**

**By Lena Chere**

**Prequel to the Eoss Trilogy**

# Chapters

Chapter 1 Heather Bay

Chapter 2 Knight's Move

Chapter 3 Spinning Wheel

Chapter 4 The Magical Current of Chaos

Chapter 5 Check!

Chapter 6 Private Site

Chapter 7 Free Time

## **Dedication**

This book is dedicated to Shemyaza.

It was published in 2023, reference the number 23 symbolism

## From The Blog of Balor

Twenty-three is the number of Eris. The chaos number! It represents entropy, the forces of disorder and increasing randomness in sequences, which is another way of saying chaos.

Those who pay attention to this number start to see it everywhere, leaping out at them. Whatever calculation they do, the total comes out as twenty-three. It's even in our genes: human beings have twenty-three pairs of chromosomes.

The twenty-third day of the month is the best time to make petitions and offerings to Eris. She was venerated as a Goddess in ancient Greece, and also today by chaos magicians and Discordians. Her symbol is the golden apple of discord marked "*kallisti*," to the fairest, which was awarded to Aphrodite by Paris. This was what led to the Trojan War.

First comes chaos, disorder and randomness, and then comes a new order. Without the forces of chaos, the force of twenty-three, everything in our world would stagnate.

## Chapter 1 Heather Bay

The magician sat before his laptop, his face and shoulders almost hidden by his abundant black, curly hair and a wild beard. He was writing the first instalment of The Blog of Balor.

I have named myself after my ancestor Balor, the hero of the giant race of ancient Ireland known as the Fomorians.

The Irish myths tell us that when Partholon, the first invader of Ireland landed, three hundred years after the Flood, the Fomorians were already there. How did they arrive there, and from where? It is not known. But it is significant that the Flood is mentioned, because some of those who lived in the time before the Flood were known as giants. Likewise, the characters that come earliest in time in the Greek myths and the Norse myths were also called giants.

The giants in Greece were overthrown and succeeded by the Olympian pantheon. The giants in Scandinavia were overthrown and succeeded by the Norse pantheon. The giants in Ireland, the Fomorians, were overthrown and succeeded by the Tuatha de Danann, the people of Dana. I have taken the name of Balor, and I have not been overthrown, nor have I been succeeded. I believe I am the greatest magician in Ireland today - a bold claim, I know, but I am hoping to prove it.

I ask the ravens as they pick worms from the peat, "are you descended from the Noah's Ark raven?" and they reply, "we are the Morrigan's." No records have survived from the time of Balor, only a cycle of myths.

Balor was said to have a poisonous eye. He kept the eye closed when he was with his kin and opened it to destroy his enemies. I understand this well. My evil eye is legendary, and I have always been a sorcerer much feared. I can also relate to keeping the eye closed when I am with my kin, as my many friends will testify.

I sit here now in solitude, in my humble home which overlooks a beautiful bay. I like to think of it as the place where my Fomorian ancestors first landed. From here I am about to launch my career as a techno -mage, anonymous and powerful on the internet. I will not say where I live, for I value my privacy. If you think you know the place, come stand outside the window and risk my poison eye.

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Heather the servitor horse had been brought to Heather Bay by the Black King, the Black Knight and the Black Bishop. She had been taken there to be broken in.



“Tis a fine day to be training a racehorse, to be sure!” cried the Irish ticket seller, as they passed through Heather Bay station. He had ‘the sight,’ as his old mama called it, and could see the astral beings.

“Oh, she’s no racehorse,” replied the Black Bishop. “She is going to be a servant. Or should I say, a servitor? She is the prototype, and her creator’s next project will be Eoss. But I’m getting ahead of myself. It’s that chaos magic time-bending again.”

The ticket-seller looked puzzled and did not reply. The Black King and the Black Knight exchanged glances and smirked. They were all for this being a playful, fun assignment. After all, they had begun as simple servitors themselves, very similar to their new horse, and had only now evolved into ‘the terrible three’ or ‘the three musket ears’ or whatever name their creator fancied for them at the time.

In chaos magic, a servitor is an artificial familiar created by a magician to serve some magical purpose. In time, and through contact with multiple human beings, the servitor evolves into an egregore and then possibly into a minor god. While it is still a servitor, it needs an energy source to survive. There is disagreement amongst chaos magicians as to whether the servitor acquires a soul, and if so, when the soul appears. But by the end of the process, it is alive-unless the magician destroys it. It is rather like a golem.

The three chess pieces preferred wherever possible to be informal, with occasional forays into an educational address when they took on the role of teachers. The Black Bishop had similar tastes to the magician who had made them for he loved studying abstract ideas, and he was usually the one to give esoteric teachings, in keeping with his ecclesiastical title.

The Black King was their leader, so naturally he was designated as the chessboard king. He had less to say than the other two, but when he did speak it was to give an overall view of events, and directions on how to proceed.

“We mustn’t scare the likes of that ticket officer,” said the Black Knight, as they moved across the fields towards the bay. He was a little shy of humans and wouldn’t have wanted to speak to the human himself.

“He’s not scared- he doesn’t care. Eyes front,” responded the Black King. “We’ve nearly reached the bay.”

The Black Bishop smirked again as he took in the sweeping vista of Heather Bay. Its namesake heather only grew up to the edge of the surrounding grassland, and then it gave way to ochre sand which drifted in heaps interspersed with driftwood, stones and blue and white shells. The tide was out, the waves lapping eagerly at the flattened sand on the distant edge of the beach. Gulls turned and cried as they glided over the calm water and seemed to float on the air currents.

Heather the servitor horse surveyed the scene with pleasure, for she wanted to graze in the field that ran up to the edge of the beach. She was designed to eat and drink like a physical horse to get her energy. After that, she wanted to gallop across the bay. She imagined kicking up the sand in clouds at the front of the beach, then the wet feeling on her hooves as she reached the flat part nearest to the sea. Her hooves would sink slightly in the sand, leaving prints.

The Black Knight immediately ruined her plans by getting out a bridle and a sturdy rope and slipping both around her head and neck. "We'll start with forty trots in a circle here," he said, pointing to one of the shorter patches of grass. "See how you respond to being guided."

Heather opened her mouth. Could she talk to him? There was a strap across her tongue, not as hard as the bits that riders sometimes use, but still restricting. She neighed, and thought, "I want to be free for a while first." He was a servitor like herself, so he should be able to hear her thoughts.

The Black Knight shook the rope. "Come on, Heather. The sooner we finish training you, the sooner I can ride you."

So there was to be no freedom even after they had finished, for the Black Knight planned to ride her. Maybe all three of them were going to ride. A Black Knight on a strawberry roan horse didn't sound right- he needed to go and find a black horse somewhere, one that was keen to be a form of transport instead of an independent being.

She reared up partially and sent a thought to him more strongly. "Can't we do this later? And can you hear what I'm thinking?"

He glared at her, although he looked more disappointed than angry. "Yes, I can hear you, but we can't do it later. We're on a schedule. You need to become part of our group now- my horse, as I'm the knight, and then there will be valuable work to do. You can lie down in the field at the end of the afternoon, or you can eat the grass. There's a lake you can drink from over there." He pointed across the grassland, in the opposite direction of the shore. "So unless you're really hungry or thirsty now, we've got to do these circuits, while you learn to respond."

Heather snorted disdainfully, and reluctantly began to trot around in a circle. The Black King and the Black Bishop applauded, and then they lounged on the sand and watched.

*They're not doing any of that valuable work now, just sitting there doing nothing.*

The Black Knight kept adjusting the rope and bridle and tried out various pulls and tweaks, each one signalling a different order to his mare. Start, stop, go faster, go more slowly, take evasive action. Heather learned them, and after a few circuits she tried communicating with him again.

“What is this work we are supposed to do, please? Is there a magician tasking us with the work?”

“It’s bigger than one magician,” replied the Black Knight. “It’s part of a whole system in which life is a giant chessboard, and the human player wants to win. The Black King gives leadership, the Black Bishop gives him spiritual counselling, and as for me...What do you associate with the arrival of a knight on horseback? When things go wrong, I rescue him and take him somewhere safe. But I need my horse in order to do that, and that’s you.”

It sounded like they might as well be joined at the legs, a plastic toy knight on horseback. Heather tried to imagine an alternative life, one that involved a lot of galloping into new territories and trying out new kinds of grass. Maybe even contact with other horses, although she wasn’t sure if she was enough like a natural horse for that.

After fifteen circuits Heather had learned the signals well, and she hoped the training would be over. But the Black Knight insisted on doing all forty circuits. The Black King was stretched out on his back on the beach with his eyes closed, letting the sunshine warm his face. The Black Bishop had taken out a diary from his pocket and was writing out a philosophical treatise.

At last the Black Knight stopped, said, “good girl,” and untied her. Heather did some grazing and drinking on the grassland, and then some galloping on the sand. She noticed how low the sun was in the sky, giving her less time for these activities. Although she could eat like a physical horse she didn’t sleep, she merely lay down at night and rested. So as the sky darkened, she lay down on the soft, rolling sand.

The ‘terrible three’ leaned against a rock and talked all night about intellectual subjects. The Black Bishop did most of the talking, consulting the notes he had written in his diary earlier in the day.

Heather entered into a reverie, and soon she was so lost in her imaginings that it was the same as if she were dreaming, because she was no longer aware of her surroundings. She thought of what she knew about physical horses. This was knowledge that had been programmed into her when she was made.

First, she pictured the horses in a stable, with hay and bran, and asked herself if they were happy. Were they bored? Did they love the company of the human beings who were keeping them there? She began to visualise other activities, like riding and show jumping, and again contemplated how the horses would feel.

Just before dawn, Heather was seeing in her mind a group of children on horseback waiting for a riding event to start. They were stroking their horses’ forelocks, patting them and feeding them little treats. They were speaking to them in soft voices. She asked herself if this was the ideal life

for a horse, or if it was better for them to be wild, despite the fact that there were very few wild horses left in the world.

Suddenly her vivid visualisations were interrupted by the feeling of her haunches being shaken. Her eyes focussed and she could see the Black Knight on one side shaking her to wake her up, while the Black Bishop was doing the same on the other side. She could just about see the Black King standing some way behind with one arm flung out dramatically in front of him. "Game on!" he exclaimed.

"Heather, wake up," said the Black Knight. "I thought you didn't sleep. There's an emergency. We have to start now- no time for any more training. Some people are playing the Chaos Chess game, and they're being attacked."

Heather scrambled to her feet, and the Black Knight threw the reins and a basic saddle onto her and jumped onto her back.

She whinnied and thought more words. "So, is one magician attacking another one? They'll have to use spells."

"No- I told you; this isn't just about the magician. A group of ordinary humans have found our magician's Chaos Chess game on the internet and have decided to play it. Now their life has become the chess game, the battlefield, and something adverse is happening to them. We must go and help."

He gave Heather the newly learned tug on the reins which meant 'start,' and she began cantering across the grass. The Black King and the Black Bishop rose up into the air and began to fly alongside them.

Why couldn't the Black Knight do the same? Heather wondered, and then her mind filled with more questions about their mission. "Are those people here in Ireland?" she sent the thought to the Black Knight.

"No, they're in London. You were made here, Heather. The name the magician gave you is Heather of Heather Bay. But his followers live all over the place. The chess game is universal- you could play it anywhere."

Heather was thinking that it was still far too early in the morning to travel, and that the human beings they were heading towards were probably all asleep. But she continued moving in the direction indicated by the Black Knight's pulls on her reins as they moved towards the Irish Sea.

The Black King looked very pleased with himself, and a smile fluttered around his lips as he kept shading his eyes and looking out towards the horizon. Heather pulled her head around and looked directly at him, and he gazed right back and exclaimed, "mission underway!"

"I expect they'll be shattered," remarked the Black Bishop. "I'll have to buck them up with an inspirational address as soon as we get there. Then we can see about their defence."

"I'm looking forward to it," said the Black Knight, sitting up tall on Heather's back.

They were across the Irish Sea now and back on land, flying over the countryside beneath them. Heather could sense them getting closer to their destination- it was a sense she hadn't realised she had until now. She could definitely feel herself tuning into the people they were going to serve, or help, or whatever their function was to be.

She hoped the fighting wouldn't be too fierce and pictured the Black Knight grabbing the reins and spinning her head around as he drew his sword. He had said they were being attacked, but it was not clear who would attack them, or why.

The whole journey took only about a quarter of an hour, and then they were at their destination. Looking down, Heather saw a tree-lined street. At first sight it looked what she had learned the humans would call "posh," yet when they got closer, she could see that the backyards were unkempt and some of the windows and curtains were dirty.

The house that she sensed was their destination was a two-up two-down affair, near a corner but not going around it, with a grey wall encircling a small front garden. She could predict the Black Knight's halting pull on her reins before he did it, and was prepared to stop.

"Target reached!" cried the Black King, leaning back on the air as he slowed his flight and puffing out his cheeks.

"Here we are," echoed the Black Bishop. "I feel there are three human beings living here, not related to one another but comrades. They are the ones who called us." The chess pieces and Heather all had similar psychic abilities, and now they felt themselves to be a team.

## Chapter 2 Knight's Move

When they had first arrived, the Black Knight had charged in waving his sword, looking for an enemy. But it had soon become apparent that there was no identifiable person attacking them. The situation was far more complex than that.

They had tried to piece it together from listening to the humans' conversations, and this was what they had learned. The landlord, who had once been a friend, had asked the three tenants to leave, because the house was going to be 'converted.' (Whatever that meant, Heather thought.) But the tenants had nowhere else to go.

They had recently started studying the Chaos Chess game that Ben had found on a chaos magic website that he belonged to, and it was his idea to declare a game. He was hoping that the game's servitors could help them with finding a new place to live, although Jamie and Cyan, the other two tenants, needed more convincing.

The Black Bishop wanted to give them spiritual pep talks, but it soon became clear that they couldn't hear him while awake, and even during their sleep they remained too absorbed in their dreams to notice him. All that the chess entities could do was observe the three tenants and try to get to know them.

Heather watched as Ben filled the kettle. He was wearing denim jeans rolled up to the knees, a fawn jumper with bobbles appearing in the wool, and glasses that were loose and were sliding down his nose. His dark hair stood out in a shock around his head, and Heather would have thought he looked like a caricature of a professor, if she had heard of such a thing. The kettle was an old metallic one which didn't even whistle or turn itself off, and the rest of the kitchen was equally antiquated. All the paint was flaking off the walls, and off the wooden chairs, which were the chunky kind with three vertical bars at the back.

Ben finished making the tea and called in the other two tenants to share it. Jamie ran in first, tall and thin with grey eyes and straggly brown hair. He had only recently come in from work and was wearing the smart suede-look trousers that he wore for work, instead of jeans like the other two.

Then followed Cyan, a pretty, sweet looking girl, wearing a smock-style top. She pushed back her layered, dark chestnut hair as she sat down at the table.

"Any luck with the rent adverts?" Jamie asked Ben.

"No- I went through the ones in the paper, then the ones online. Too expensive, or too small. The only one that was any good was miles away.

Still, I've got high hopes for this Chaos Chess. I've declared a game, and the flats might start coming to us by themselves now."

"We can't rely on chaos magic. It's too risky, we might be homeless by the time we find out it doesn't work."

"Oh, man, it'll work!" Ben protested, waving his cup in the air in front of him. "We've got to give it a chance."

Cyan sipped her tea and said nothing, but her expression was dubious.

"I've asked for more hours again," Jamie continued. "But they still keep giving them to Mandy. I haven't got enough saved for a deposit yet."

"I'm still applying for jobs," said Ben. "Maybe the chaos game will sort that out as well."

"Can you tell me more about this game, Ben?" Cyan asked. "How do you play it?"

"You go to the website, log on, and call up the chessboard. You click 'declare a game' and then it loads up your pieces. You get three servitors to help you, a king, a knight and a bishop."

"No queen?" said Jamie.

"The queen's at the back, sending you the power. It's Eris. The other three do their moves to help with whatever your problem is. We need Knight's Move for ours. So, the knight moves in an L shape -- one step horizontally and two steps vertically on the chessboard. Or two vertical and one horizontal. That allows for a two-pronged campaign, which means we get two wishes. One could be to get us a better house, and the other to have more money coming in so we can afford it."

"Sounds good," said Cyan. "You'll have to show me on the screen. Though it still won't make me believe we can get a house to appear out of the air." Heather hoped they would be moving onto the next stage of the chess game immediately after this conversation, but they didn't. When they had finished their tea, Jamie went to do some laundry. Ben played an unrelated computer game. Cyan started cooking, and later the two men went into the kitchen as well and made themselves dinner. They had all dropped the subject of Chaos Chess for the time being.

The next morning, Heather watched Jamie as he went into the bathroom and began to shave, looking into a small, square mirror which was nailed to the shabby wall.

Jamie was the one she was the most interested in, as he seemed to be the leader- at least, he was the one who paid the rent, with something he called a direct debit. But he seemed to worry a lot in case it "didn't come out" due to him having spent too much money. He was so responsible, wanting to make sure they all had a roof over their heads, and getting up early for work.

The mirror was permanently misted due to surface damage to the glass, and the rest of the bathroom wasn't much better. The walls had a white

sheen in places, but ugly yellow patches speckled in grey encroached over them. Heather had heard Cyan and Ben talking about how the landlord had painted over the damp walls without giving them damp treatment first, and the water had started to come through immediately. According to Cyan this was a bad error, and Ben agreed. "He wouldn't do that in his own home."

Of course, Jamie wasn't aware that Heather was in the room, hovering above the chipped washbasin that stood to the right of the discoloured enamel bathtub.

He pulled on a loose grey shirt, buttoned it nearly all the way up and stepped into his work trousers. He looked young, all three of them did, but Jamie's eyes had a maturity about them. He combed his mousy brown hair around his ears and then left the bathroom, looking for the canvas bag he took with him to work every day. Heather wanted so much to help him, but all this was so new to her, and for the moment nothing could be done- she would have to wait for the Knight's Move.

She swooped down to the ground and clopped across the room to examine the bathtub more closely. There was an electric meter attached to it with a slot for coins, which spoilt the flow of water from the pipes into the tap and caused uneven spurts of hot water when the tenants were running a bath. She didn't know much about how human houses should be, but that must surely be wrong.

When Jamie had left for work, she went to look for the other three chess pieces to see what they were doing. She found them sitting with their backs to the only bookcase in the flat, the Black Bishop in full flow with a philosophical speech based on what he had been reading in the books on the shelves. The Black Knight was asking questions, sparking the Black Bishop off into deeper debates. It sounded very abstract to Heather, based on his theories about the human societies portrayed in the books. She felt that practical observation of the humans was better, like she was doing.

She told them so, but the Black Knight didn't agree. "We can't follow them around like puppies, Heather dear. We're not even supposed to be here until they load up our instructions in the game. But that Ben's a bit scatty, he declared a game and then put off the next bit until he can persuade the others to join in. I presume he wants to make sure they agree with the wishes he writes. So until then we have to wait, and entertain ourselves." "Instructions pending," echoed the King, stretching out his legs and leaning back contentedly against the bookcase.

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Two days later, late morning, Cyan was sitting in front of Ben's computer as he showed her the game website. Heather and the other three headed



straight to Ben's bedroom and floated near the ceiling, hoping for progress.

But all Ben did was call up the information menu and select the king. A close-up appeared of the Black King, a tall and chunky chess piece with an equal armed cross at the top.

The Black King sped across to Cyan and hovered above her. "I'm here, charming lady!" he exclaimed. "The King in person. Which of these two fine lads is escorting you? This one? Or the one who has gone out?"

Heather had heard the three tenants speaking about how they had agreed not to date one another, to avoid "complications."

"It looks interesting," Cyan said, "but I'm still a little confused. I can only look at this for a few minutes now- I've got to pack up my books for college this afternoon. You'll have to show me the rest another time." For the four unseen guests in the room, it was disappointment again.

When Cyan did go out on a date a few days later, Heather watched her getting ready. Cyan was lucky to have that beautiful chestnut hair- it didn't need much coiffuring to look special. She literally just combed it and stuck a slide on top, and it was done. Her face and clothes took a little longer, and Heather noticed that she didn't have many clothes hanging up in her wardrobe, but she managed to find a midi length blue and black dress which looked fresh and cheerful- although it didn't match her hazel eyes. Her eyes were quite thoughtful tonight, and Heather was only just learning to read Cyan's emotions. It was happiness and anticipation this evening, but mixed with some apprehension in case anything should happen to add to the instability of her life.

Her boyfriend was late, and while Cyan was waiting, she busied herself checking the biscuit barrel in the kitchen to see if it needed re-stocking with biscuits. Heather was puzzled as to why she did that- it didn't seem appropriate.

The Black King was hovering over Cyan again, looking concerned. "You could take the Bishop's Move, my dear. A bishop isn't all about religion- it can be love. After all, a clergyman officiates at a wedding. The bishop moves diagonally. He can sidle up to the man you want and fetch him back for you."

Cyan of course didn't hear or react.

"Why are you wasting your time speaking to her when she can't hear you?" Heather asked the Black King.

"The boy understands, the one who declared a game. Soon she will understand too."

Cyan's boyfriend arrived to pick her up, and she left. Jamie was out as well, and Ben was still very unlikely to do the next stage of the game without them. So the three chess pieces went up to talk and poke around in the sealed-off attic at the top of the house. Heather went to graze in the

untidy patch of garden outside the front door, and then lay down to rest for the night.

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Friday evening was the time Ben had chosen for the Knight's Move, when all three of them were free to take part. They were gathered around Ben's computer with the Chaos Chess game up on the screen, and once again the four invisible entities were in the room as well.

"Aren't we sad," said Jamie. "Nowhere else to go on a Friday night."

Cyan laughed and Ben smiled. Then he said, "Let's be positive. Remember we have to formulate our statement of intent, and it must be a positive statement. It has to say we've got our new flat already."

"Oh, it doesn't have to be true, then," Jamie said.

Cyan laughed again.

"No, that wasn't what I meant. We're saying we want a new home. But we've got to make it more immediate. One way is to put it in the present tense. 'We get a new home.' Is that okay? Shall we make that our statement?"

They both said yes.

"Now, with regular chaos magic, we'd make it into a sigil. But with this chess game, it's different. We call up the Knight's Move, and we write it on the long vertical bar of the L shape."

Ben opened the menu of chess moves, scrolled down to Knight's Move, and clicked it. On the screen a block of squares appeared in an L shape, with lines to write on running across both arms of the L. On the vertical one he typed, 'we get a new home.'

"Now, the other intent goes on the horizontal bar. I'm going to type, 'we have enough money to rent the new home.' All right? Do we all agree?"

They said yes again, and Ben typed.

"Now I click 'finish,' and it joins back onto the chessboard."

The next image was the whole chessboard again, with the L shape fitted back into it and outlined in blue. The Black Knight piece with its horse's head appeared at the junction of the L, paused for a second and then jumped smoothly two steps forward and one to the side, passing through all the squares.

On the computer, a voiceover said, "your knight has moved. The servitor knight is now serving you, and he will bring your intents to you."

In the room, The Black King cried, "mission begins!"

The Black Knight looked at Heather and said, "come on, girl!" The saddle and bridle appeared on her, and he climbed onto her back. "We ride out now and find them what they want."

"Don't they have to pay us?" asked the Black Bishop. "Chaos magic has offerings too, the same as ceremonial magic."

“Ben paid the fee for the first game when he joined,” the King explained tersely. “Mission on!”

As they galloped out into the street, Heather was excited but slightly alarmed. “Where will we go? How long will it take? Where do I graze and lie down to rest?”

The Black Knight had become accustomed now to reading the thoughts she sent him. “Don’t worry, girl. We’ll be coming back from time to time. It’s more like short expeditions than a long quest.”

They carried on along the streets, still galloping, even though they could fly. It was the mode of travel which felt appropriate for this stage of the Chaos Chess game.

The streets looked so monotonous- endless building facades, garden walls, drainpipes, traffic lights. It was raining as well as dark, although of course the cold and wet didn’t affect them.

Heather had been reassured by the Black Knight’s sympathetic words when they had first set out, but even so after a little while she sent the mental question, “where are we going?”

“The first thing we have to do is look for a connection between our human clients and a suitable flat. We could try Jamie’s workplace. Someone there might have a flat which Jamie doesn’t know about, so it would be up to us to bring them together. At the moment it’s Friday night and his work is closed. So we could try Cyan’s friends and her boyfriend, or Ben’s friends online. They might be the best ones to start with.”

Heather had no idea where Ben’s friends online might be. She asked tentatively, “Is that something you can home in on?”

“Yes. I’ve been near Ben, and his computer. That’s all I need.”

The magician who made them must have given the Black Knight and his horse different and complementary powers.

In some ways, servitors are like the bots on the internet. The main difference is that bots completely lack any emotional intelligence. Have you ever had them recommend you a product that you have already bought far too many of? Or recommend a highly unsuitable person as a friend on social media? By contrast, servitors soon start to evolve emotionally, which makes them far more useful to human beings.

The Black Knight gave the signal to turn, and Heather turned sharp to the left and began to fly upwards towards what looked like an attic room at the top of a house.

She slipped in through a shuttered window and came face to face with two young men. The room was so squashed that she was nearly on top of them. They were dressed all in black and sitting on the floor, surrounded by computers, musical devices and DVD drives.

Even assuming that only one of them lived there and the other one was visiting, there was barely room to move. Maybe they did know of some

available flats, but they were themselves sorely in need of rehousing. Heather knew a little about wealth and poverty, but it was all bewildering to her. Didn't the humans believe in giving one another enough space?

The Black Knight dismounted and began to walk around the house examining everything, especially papers and documents. He also tuned into the energetic currents that were circulating to see whether any of them could help with property matters, and Heather sensed what he was doing. She listened to the two boys' conversation, as that was her strong point, but it was mainly about games and music, and punctuated by loading up one of the games and playing it.

After half an hour, the Black Knight returned and climbed back into the saddle. "No luck here," he said. "There are no links with property at all."

"In fact, the tenant here needs rehousing as well," Heather remarked. "Unless he wants to expand into the roof beams."

To her surprise the Black Knight didn't answer, he just gave her the signal to start up, and she glided out through the window and galloped away.

Several similar trips followed. This time the people were living in better conditions, but they still didn't have any links with accommodation to rent.

Around one in the morning they returned to Jamie, Ben and Cyan's house, and Heather went outside to eat some grass in the garden and then lay down to rest. As she drifted into a reverie, she heard the Black Bishop call out to the Black Knight, "Hey! How's it going?" Then they sat against the bookcase in the hall and talked all night.

The next day the Black Knight saddled her up and announced that they were going to search for leads at the shop where Jamie worked. "They're sure to have a workplace noticeboard."

This time they flew above the streets, as Jamie took a train to work, and it was a longer journey. To Heather it looked like a map spread out below them, and again there was the endless repetition- road after road, brick wall after brick wall, as if the human beings had drawn a tessellated pattern and based everything on it. They were so high up that Heather could see where the city ended, and the countryside was an amazing contrast. Fields and trees stopped abruptly and gave way to endless houses, washing lines, rubbish bins and gutters, all looking identical and all polluting the surroundings.

Heather thought of the place where she had been created, outside in the fresh, keen air of the Emerald Isle. She remembered waking into consciousness on a green hillside with sprigs of flowers, a couple of miles from Heather Bay, and raising her eyes from the multicoloured meadow to the deep blue Irish sky.

Soon they arrived at the shop where Jamie worked, in a densely built-up street full of traffic, and they swept in through the open glass doors and across the busy shop floor. Jamie was serving behind a counter, talking

earnestly to a customer, and they glided past him and headed for the staff area at the back.

The staffroom was none too clean, and when they found the noticeboard many of the signs on it were well out of date, hanging limply from drawing pins. They found the section for houses and flats to let, and Heather noticed that most of them said 'NO CHILDREN OR PETS.' There were abbreviations such as GCH. "Gas central heating," explained the Black Knight. "As opposed to GSH which means good sense of humour and would be more relevant for the Bishop's Move."

A small group of workers straggled in, their clothes and hair tucked into overalls. The one they called Mandy was making sharp comments to a short, pale girl in a plainer overall than the others, who kept hanging her head and looking sad. Heather wondered what that was about.

"Those rents are all above the range we're looking for," the Black Knight commented. "Now we examine the energy currents for hospitality vibes." Once again this was his area of expertise, so Heather waited while he dismounted and spent some time walking around this unimpressive place. But just as on previous occasions, he found nothing useful.

## Chapter 3 Spinning Wheel

“I think this is it,” said the Black Knight. They had moved on to Cyan’s boyfriend, the next option on the Black Knight’s list. “If we hurry, they are discussing accommodation right this minute. This time we really have a lead.”

“I hope so.” Heather was beginning to fear that they would run out of time and the three tenants would be out on the street.

They soon found the place, four rooms on the first floor of an old house, and they went straight to the room where Cyan and her boyfriend were sitting. Heather was fascinated by the wool tassels hanging down from the couch, and she couldn’t resist nibbling them. The Black Knight paid no attention to Heather’s grazing movements, he simply dismounted and fixed his attention on Cyan.

Cyan was sitting right at the edge of the couch, leaning forward and speaking animatedly.

“It sounds great, but I’m still not sure. If I move in here, it means more chances for my pill to fail. A baby would mess up my course and I’m really serious about getting my degree.”

“The system’s all wrong. Just when you’re the right age to move in together, you’re supposed to study instead.”

“I agree with you there, Brad. Our society is all wrong-that’s why I want to qualify as a social worker. Do my best to help people in this mess we live in. And remember, we all need a new home, not just me. It might be hard for Jamie and Ben to find someone else to share with. I wouldn’t want to let them down.”

“You should put us first. They’re young and single- they’ll be all right.”

“Can’t we give it one more chance? All three of us are flat hunting twenty-four seven.”

“All right, do it your way, but I think you should move in now.”

Heather reflected that here was a new factor she had never considered. Cyan was just the right age to be settling down and having a family. She suddenly wondered if it was possible for a servitor horse like herself to have a foal. In between these trips on the Knight’s Move quest, she had taken to grazing in new places, like the local park. The children who played there would have been amazed to learn that they were sharing the park with an invisible strawberry roan mare, her russet mane uncut and flowing wild around her. But she couldn’t go further afield in search of wild terrains with other horses, because they were still in the middle of their quest.

She realised the Black Knight was speaking to her. "This is no good either. The boy is only willing to rehouse one of them, and there are three. Come on, girl, we'll have to think of something else." He remounted, and they galloped away.

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Heather and the Black Knight continued, making two or three journeys each day. They tried Ben's other friends, Jamie's friends and Cyan's friends. They tried the tenants' relatives, both elderly and younger family members. They went to Ben's job club; he was fortunate not to have a compulsory one that lasted from morning till night, just one that he attended a few times a week.

Finally they visited Cyan's college, on a day that they were having a lecture and debate about homelessness. The Black Knight thought that would be an auspicious time to go.

As the students filed into the lecture hall, Heather and the Black Knight flew up to the ceiling and positioned themselves in a corner at the back. Heather was intrigued by how long the students spent shuffling papers and coats and talking among themselves before the lecture started, and the lecturer too seemed completely absorbed in sorting through his papers. Eventually he called for quiet, tapped the top of his microphone a couple of times and began to speak.

Heather listened closely, and she was horrified to hear about the problem of people becoming homeless: how many of them ended up sleeping rough, covering themselves with boxes or newspaper, and begging passers-by for money. She heard how they were frequently dependent on food banks in order to eat.

The lecturer moved on to the role the students in the room would be playing when they qualified as social workers. It sounded encouraging at first; evidently Cyan and the other students would be instrumental in solving these problems. But when they proceeded to questions and debate at the end, it was a different picture. The students repeatedly raised their concerns that homelessness had been going on for an extremely long time and social workers had not managed to bring it to an end.

One student stood up and said, "let's be totally honest, we're part of the problem when we buy into the consumer society. I try not to buy things all the time, but I can't help it. I think about giving the money to a charity instead, but you can't be sure it goes to the right place, and however much you give they still ask for more. I end up spending it on myself like everyone else does, because it's too hard to go without the things that everyone wants."

Heather felt a chill come over her. What the student said was reasonable, but when it came to collective consciousness, it indicated a very harsh society. She felt sorry for Jamie, Ben and Cyan; no wonder they needed help from servitors like herself.

Some of the questions touched on what their own quest was about-landlords who put tenants out, who don't give them what the lecturer called 'security of tenure.' It rapidly became evident that the students and indeed the lecturer could see no end in sight to this practice. Apparently, it was already 'against the law,' but the unscrupulous were always finding ways around that. It also had something to do with 'the free market' which was a system they all supported, and yet it was contributing to what went on.

The Black Knight didn't become involved in general human problems the way Heather did. He was always focused only on finding something to help with his own objective. But he too looked gloomy when the debate was over. "It looks like no-one in this room knows what to do to help our clients. Even though they are training to deal with similar problems, and Cyan herself is training for it."

Once more they had drawn a blank, and the Black Knight swung into the saddle and rode Heather back to the house.

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Saturday morning, and Ben and Cyan were sitting on the long chair in Ben's room studying the Chaos Chess website. They had opened the list of options you could choose after declaring a game. Heather was hovering beside them watching, although the other three were not. They thought there was no need, now that the game was in progress.

Listed on the screen in heavy type were first the Knight's Move, and then below it the other two.

*The Knight's Move is protection, from enemies or danger or any kind of adverse circumstances. The chivalrous Knight is sworn to defend all the citizens of the realm, so call on him whenever you need him.*

*The Bishop's Move is spiritual transformation. For clergyman, read mage. He is the one to help you on your spiritual path. You can also use this move for finding love, finding friendship, and healing. The Bishop presides over all this; he conducts weddings, he leads the community, he visits the sick.*

*The King's Move is wealth, power and possessions. That one step he takes means you are one step away from the throne, where you can receive the King's favour. If worldly success is what you want, choose the King.*



“They’ve done a good job of squeezing everything you might possibly ask for into three groups, so that they only need those three characters,” said Cyan.

“Yes, they have. I suppose if you were to think of something else that isn’t covered, you would have to ask Eris, the queen. But they don’t tell you how, just that she works through the other three.”

“I’d like to know more about her. See what it says if we search for the queen.”

“Ok. You’re really getting into this game now, Cyan, more than I ever thought you would.” Ben was sitting near to her, and looking at her intently.

“I’ve got something to tell you. Brad’s asked me to move in with him.”

“Oh.” Ben swallowed. “Well, that’s good. What did you say?”

“That I will. Probably quite soon.”

Once again Heather was puzzled- that wasn’t what she had said to Brad. “Congratulations, then. Don’t worry about us- it might be easier to find a place with just me and Jamie sharing. But we need to keep searching for anything we can find.”

“Yes, I agree.”

“And I still think this chaos magic will work. Let’s get on with looking up the queen.”

Ben searched through the menus and options for several minutes.

“Ah! Got it.”

A glossy picture loaded, which looked like a photograph from a Greek mythology book. It showed a striking woman with dark, tumbling hair, wearing pale robes and a sharp-pointed crown. An instruction came up: *Pay £10 for an audience with the Queen.*

Cyan abruptly turned away. “What a rip-off!”

“It is,” said Ben, “but just a minute...” He swiftly skipped through three sub-menus. “Here, try this one.”

Cyan peered at the screen. “That’s more like it.”

*If you are in the middle of a game, you can ask the Queen one free question.*

“I’m going to ask why it’s taking so long for the magic to work.”

Cyan stood up. “I bet they’ll have some trick answer to keep you playing. The queen’s a bit of a disappointment. You carry on, I’ve got some things to do.”

“Ok. See you.”

Cyan went downstairs, and Ben called up the message box to write his question. As he began to type, Heather was struck by a sudden foreboding. There was danger to Ben here, she could sense it, and it was

her job to protect him. If she could just get inside the computer to identify the threat ... without thinking any more, she launched herself in.

It was strange inside the computer- criss-crossing lines at peculiar angles and electronic pulses. Then, to her amazement, Heather saw the source of her anxiety. It actually WAS Eris, the Chaos Goddess. In here she was no longer a picture but a real woman, sitting on an ornate chair at the end of a room.

"Eris!" Heather cried. You're too near Ben-you could kill him."

Eris turned her head towards Heather, and if anything, she looked bored.

"Don't worry, all I'm doing is this." She pointed at a floating, plastic-looking tray that was moving towards her, with illuminated letters on it spelling out, *why is the chaos magick taking so long to work?*

Deftly she pushed another series of letters onto it which wiped out and replaced the first ones. It now said, *the path of manifestation is coming together from two directions. You must give them time to meld together.*

Then Eris thrust it forward like a plate going through a serving hatch.

"Not exactly murder, is it, Heather?"

Heather felt a sense of familiarity come over her, as though she had known Eris for years, and for a moment she was sure she must have been mistaken about the danger. But she couldn't let Eris trick her. "It is my duty to protect Ben. The knight on horseback defends the player against all that threatens him. That's both of us- me and the Black Knight."

"I see the future, Heather. You are the first in a line of servitor mares who will be dedicated to helping human beings. In the end they will get mixed up with wishing horses, which will be exciting. In the meantime, as you're here, I might as well show you some of my kingdom. Come and see the spinning wheel room."

Heather pawed at the ground- if it could be called that, it was more like a woolly fog. "Is Ben safe?"

"Of course! He's put it on standby and gone to make a drink. Come on."

She drifted off her throne and moved towards an archway on one side which led into a corridor. Heather followed at a trot, across the non-floor. The area outside was like a fairy-tale castle with lofty ceilings and a great window through which battlements and spires could be seen. They moved through a long corridor which was filled with cobwebs, with a series of doorways leading to gloomy empty rooms. The largest toom held nothing but a huge dusty spinning wheel, and Eris paused before it.

"This is the tale of Sleeping Beauty," said Eris. "It starts with a feast to which the dark fairy was not invited. That's my story. I wasn't invited to the feast- I was insulted.

Therefore, I made the sleep. Everyone in the castle is asleep. You are asleep. It began when Princess Aurora, who is named for the dawn, pricked her finger on a spindle on this spinning wheel.

It has lasted for hundreds of years, and now the sleepers must awaken. The princess receives the kiss of true love, she awakens, and then all the sleepers awaken.

The higher purpose of magic is to awaken the magician so that he sees through the veil to reality. That is aurora, the dawn of enlightenment. The granting of requests, as we do in the Chaos Chess game, is only the lowest aspect.”

Heather was dazzled by Eris’ grand mission to wake up the sleepers of the world. She was barely starting to grasp why she existed, and what the three chess pieces were for, and now in a flash so much more had been revealed. How could she have doubted Eris? She had found her mentor. “Please tell me, Eris, how can I help the three humans through Chaos Chess? We’re getting nowhere so far.”

Eris leaned one hand on the spinning wheel and placed the other lightly on Heather’s flank. “It’s really the Black Knight I should be talking to about that. Pity he hasn’t the initiative to be here, so it will have to be you, Heather. On your quest so far, you and the Black Knight have been looking for energy links with property, and so far, you haven’t found any. The secret is to make them yourselves. First of all, call on my magical current of chaos, and then draw the energy of property that you need to that place and link it with the humans, so that the spell will work. That’s the real power of a servitor. That’s magic.

YOU create the chance for them to move house. Then you go on to the second petition and create the chance for them to have enough money. You will need to work with one of the luck and money spirits for that one. It will all be done in no time.”

“I’m not sure I can make the Black Knight go back to those places again. He might not listen to me. He would say we had already ‘done’ them.”

“Then go back alone. That’s the task I charge you with, Heather. Go back and make the magic work. I have high hopes for this Chaos Chess game, and it is you servitors who will make it a success. Think how you will multiply- there will be hundreds of you. Each time someone declares a game, he will be sent the same three chess pieces and a horse.”

Heather’s head swam.

*If there are many of me, will they all feel like myself?*

Eris lifted her arm and waved regally, and at the same second that Heather realised she didn’t know how to get out of the computer, she suddenly found that she WAS out, and back in Ben’s room. Ben had not yet returned. In the distance, she could hear the three chess pieces talking upstairs.

## Chapter 4 The Magical Current of Chaos.

### The Blog of Balor

In the beginning is the void. The void generates the universe which generates the void again. Chaos and cosmos, two sides of the same continuum, mutually dependent. It isn't important whether you call chaos evil and cosmos good, or chaos the Devil and cosmos God, but it may be better to think of them as impersonal, to avoid religious persecution of persons. Such as myself.

All those bigots. At last I've got away from them, here in seclusion. From here I can affect the world through my magic spells, and above all through my game, which is designed to help people. Those of us who belong to chaos have always desired to be useful, to help with problems and clarify where there has been misunderstanding.

Our opponents don't understand that chaos clears the way for order to reassert itself. There is no order without chaos first, and no chaos without order following afterwards.

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Heather went into the garden, but instead of lying down she flew up above the house and began heading for the first place she had visited with the Black Knight.

*This is the life I wanted- freedom, my own decisions, and a purpose to follow. Pity it will only be at night, and then it's back to being a hobby horse.*

She sailed in through the window and made a quick sweep of the flat, trotting around it. So she had been right before, it was only one of the two boys who lived there, and now he was in bed asleep. She tried briefly to tune in to him- was he a good friend of Ben, enough to have a strong desire to help with Ben's problem? Eris hadn't mentioned that preliminary step, but now she was carrying out the process she sensed that it was needed.

It was harder to read the emotions of a sleeping human being. She felt her perception growing as she tried, so practice must be the best plan. Eventually she picked up some sympathy, although it was tempered with apathy as self-defence, in case there was nothing he could do to help. Satisfied with that Heather returned to the tiny living room, and next she began to feel for the chaos magical current. She recited silently, "I call on

Eris' chaos current. I call on the magical current of chaos that belongs to Eris." It felt right to include Eris- she was the living figurehead. The Queen. The ruler of the chess pieces and all the other servitors.

After a bit, she felt something. It started like a light wind blowing, which although moderate carried an atmosphere of unpredictability. She continued to concentrate, and it grew in intensity.

A sudden ping startled her, coming from one of the computers. She hadn't realised it was on, with something updating in the corner. An outlined message appeared at the centre of the screen: 'You have lost connection and need to restart.'

*I'm on the right track, but I hope I haven't broken his computer.*

According to Eris' instructions, she now had to call an energy to do with property. Again, she felt inspired by being in the moment, actually doing it. Present tense would be best, as Ben had said to his flatmates. "Jamie, Ben and Cyan are finding a new property now, they are finding it now. Come here, here!"

This was the part where she was using her skills as a servitor, for it was possible that some humans would be able to sense the first two: sympathetic vibes, and the chaos current. But a property current would be beyond them.

She put in further concentration, also determination, and when she felt something approach this time, a much more nebulous something than 'sympathy' or 'chaos,' she mentally tied it to Ben's friend in the bedroom next door. It felt like the sensation when the Black Knight tied her into a saddle and bridle. This tying in was also a servitor thing which the humans couldn't do for themselves.

Heather turned to leave through the window, feeling triumphant, yet slightly uneasy about the Black Knight. What would happen if she alone mastered this, and he didn't? Would he go back into some cosmic mixing bowl?

Back home, Heather lay in the garden for the remainder of the night, and just after dawn she trotted indoors and floated along the hallway to the three chess pieces, who were sitting by the bookcase.

Unsure how to start, she whinnied and pawed the carpet. "What is it, girl?" asked the Black Knight.

Encouraged, she sent the thought, "Black Knight, I spoke yesterday to Eris, and she showed me a technique to make our magic happen. I have been to Ben's friend's house and tried it out. If it works, I strongly suggest you too should speak to Eris and take her advice."

The Black Knight looked puzzled. "Where was Eris? I didn't see her here last night."

"She was inside Ben's computer. Ben talked to her, and I was worried about Ben's safety and went inside."

The Black King frowned. "That is not part of the game. We are on the first petition in Knight's Move. Speaking to Eris might be part of the game for Ben, but you need to wait for my orders at each stage. I am the King of the chessboard."

"Eris is the Queen."

The Black Knight turned to the Black Bishop. "As our spiritual leader, can you help with this question? My horse could be seen as a religious supplicant before our Goddess Eris."

The Black Bishop went over to Heather and scrutinized her closely. He patted her nose, and pronounced, "your horse is restless and rebellious, and not for the first time. You need to keep her under control. But you haven't had a lot of success so far, so I suggest that if the magic suddenly works, I will lead a prayer from all of us to our Goddess Eris, asking for her help again."

*Well- at least they were more supportive than I feared.*

Later that day, Heather saw Ben hurrying up to Jamie as he came in from work. "Jamie, guess what! Oliver has heard about an ideal flat for us. It's on the top floor of an old house, but in better nick than this one. He was talking to his mate Stan outside a shop, and he started telling Olly about it right out of the blue. Stan's a landlord but he's ok, and he says he'll hold onto it until we've had a look."

"Sounds great. Can we afford it?"

"Olly thinks so. All those times I've played games with him, and I never thought of asking if he knew a landlord. It's the Chaos Chess, it's working, like I told you!"

"Don't shout too soon. We'd better make an appointment, sometime when we can all go- Cyan as well, in case she's coming with us."

"Right. I can go anytime. Where's Cyan? I think I saw her go in the bathroom."

Ben rapped on the bathroom door. "Cyan! When you come out, can you tell us what times you're free to look at a flat?"

"I'm trying to have a bubble bath, but this stupid tap stopping and starting is making the bubbles go soggy. I'll be out in ten minutes."

Heather wished she had checked the name of the boy in the cramped apartment. Presumably, it was Oliver- if so, the three chess pieces would have to start listening to what she told them. She paced up and down, tossing her wild russet mane and forelock.

The chess pieces seldom ventured downstairs during the day if the human tenants were home. They spent most of their time in the attic, engrossed in philosophical debates started by the Black Bishop. The Black Knight had decided early evening was the best time for sallying out on the quest, and he summoned Heather at the usual time.

Heather sent out a strong thought to him. "We may not need to go. It looks like my magic worked. We'll know soon."

The Black Knight paused with the bridle over his arm and looked her in the eye. "Let's ask the Black King if he will authorise going onto the second petition. We should be on it by now anyway if we're any good at this."

Heather whinnied and nuzzled his arm with her nose.

When the Black Knight spoke to the Black King, he jumped up excitedly and waved both arms in the air. "Second petition pending!" He cried. "Report to me as soon as you know if we have succeeded."

"What about in the meantime, shall we still go out and look for links?"

"Look for links to grant both petitions, until we know for sure."

"That's what I'd do as well," put in the Black Bishop.

"Come on then, Heather, girl," said the Black Knight, and they saddled up and galloped away.

As they sped through the streets, Heather revisited Eris' instructions. She was looking forward to meeting the other entities that they would have to work with. It was refreshing to have a new goal at last, and a chance to progress in magical skills.

But it soon became clear that the Black Knight was still stuck in the same old habits. He rode her to the home of one of Jamie's work colleagues, Ashley. Previous trips had shown them that he was the one who Jamie got along with best.

As soon as they were inside Ashley's home, the Black Knight dismounted and began to search for anything to do with either of the two petitions - property or higher income.

Heather neighed, and when he looked round at her she sent the thought, "We have to start by calling the magical current of chaos, the current of Eris."

"Now, Heather, I'm sorry but you can't tell me what to do. I'm your rider. If it turns out your method has worked, The Black Bishop has promised to get in touch with Eris on behalf of all of us. That's the way to do it. The bishop is the spiritual leader."

"Can't I call the current myself? I've already learned how to do it."

"No, you can't, you'll put me off what I'm doing. I have to feel for the energies and links, and I can't with a cross-current going over it."

*Looks like I'll have to make another trip at night, on my own.*

The Black Knight reported that he hadn't found anything when it came to property, but with money it was more hopeful. He had seen banking documents which showed that Ashley was much better off than Jamie.

"Now we have to influence things so that Ashley lends Jamie money, or goes into business with him, or helps him to win money...or something. Going into business would be best as it isn't a one off, but it takes more time than we have to get it set up."

From where Heather stood, he was making it far too complicated. She gave him a suitably sympathetic look and shook her head and stamped like a flesh and blood horse.

The Black Knight put his foot in the stirrup and swung himself up. "Come on, girl, time to do some planning back at base."

She knew what that meant- he would be right where he was comfortable, talking it out with the Black King and the Black Bishop, and even though it would lead to action, it wouldn't be fast or accurate enough. Their three clients deserved better.

When they got back, the house was empty except for themselves and the other two chess pieces. The Black King and the Black Bishop were making the most of it by lounging in the armchairs in the main room. The covers were very worn, but the chairs still looked comfy enough for the humans. "They've gone to look at the new place," said the Black Bishop. "If everything's all right, you two can notch up a victory."

"Looks like second petition on," agreed the Black King.

"About that," said the Black Knight. "I think we could be onto something with Jamie's friend Ashley. We just need to work out how best to proceed."

"Sit down then, man, and we'll plot our strategy. Get that astute mind of yours on it, Bishop."

Heather trotted out to the garden, leaving them to it.

After midnight when everything was quiet, Heather took to the air once again and flew back to the house where she had been the previous day. The windows were all closed, so she entered the living room by passing through the glass. It was a spacious room with a thick pile blue carpet, and she let her hooves sink into it, enjoying the sensation.

Instead of calling on Eris' current, she felt inspired this time to call out, "are there any wealth entities here?" She called several times, concentrating strongly on what she was saying, and then a tall, stately lady wearing a long red and green robe entered the room.

She smiled and spoke in an accent that Heather couldn't place. "You called me? How can I help?"

Heather replied by telepathy, "thank you for answering. May I ask who you are?"

"I'm Lakshmi," she replied. "Ashley's mother is Indian- did you know?"

Heather was still unsure about the races of human beings. The ones she had seen so far all looked similar to one another and most of them were pale, including Ashley. She noticed now that this lady's hair and skin were darker.

"Ashley's mother prays to me often to send him good fortune. I have done so, and he is a sensible boy. I approve of him helping your Jamie, but there will be an obstacle. Jamie has more challenging tests in life than Ashley."



“I’m happy that you know so much about Jamie’s problems, but may I ask, how do you know?”

“I am a Goddess. You’re a servitor, yes? You may be a Goddess too someday, but first, many tests- like Jamie. Go home now, and it will be as I said.”

Heather gave a nod of acknowledgement and immediately turned to travel back.

## Chapter 5. Check!

At a quarter to eight the next morning, Heather heard voices on the stairs and glided indoors to listen. "I've been ruminating about this deposit during the night. Why let that one thing stop us? I've decided to ask Ashley to borrow it. If I really scrimp, I should be able to pay him back."

"I'll help," said Cyan. "I've told Brad I'm going with you for at least a month, so that it looks solid, and he agrees it's best."

"Great," said Ben. "If Ashley says yes, I'll tell Stan it's definite tonight."

The three chess pieces came running towards Heather, the Black Bishop carrying a long scroll. "We've done it!" exclaimed the Black Knight.

"Assuming they take the flat, we're officially on the second petition."

"And I have my plan for the second one all worked out," said the Black Bishop, waving the scroll. "If they say yes to the new landlord tonight, I'll call on Eris straight away and show her my plan. She will help us if it falls short in any way, and before you know it the second petition will be done too."

"Triumph pending," echoed the King. "Prepare to finish the quest."

"AAAGH! What's this?" an anguished cry came from Ben's room. "What's happened to my Chaos Chess?"

"I can't look at your computer now, Ben," Jamie said over his shoulder as he headed towards the bathroom. "Sorry, I've got to get ready for work."

The servitors flew into Ben's room and hovered above the computer. Across the screen was a message in large capital letters:

YOUR KING IS IN CHECK. DIDN'T THINK OF THAT, DID YOU?

Ben pressed the keys frantically. "It's frozen! It's been hacked! Why does someone have to spoil it for everyone else?"

Colour drained from the Black King's face. "I've lost my servitor powers!"

"Then we must have, as well," said the Black Knight. "And you, Heather."

Heather tried tentatively to tune into something. The mood of the tenants, energy currents. No use, it was dead. Her intuition wasn't working.

The Black Bishop looked disgusted. "Just when we were on the brink! I can't reach Eris now. And the plan on the scroll is no good without our powers."

"Confined to quarters!" the Black King barked. "Everyone upstairs to the attic."

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The Blog of Balor

Today I was attacked. I'm not completely surprised. Brilliance draws fire, originality draws fire too. I know exactly where they are. It's a place here in Ireland, and I know which part.

There will be retaliation. I will be victorious. It may take a little while, like the war campaigns in olden times, but I am certain of victory. I give you fair warning.

There is always prejudice against the primal world order brought by races like the Fomorians. The new conquerors, like the Tuatha de Danann in our myths, think they are superior. They seek to crush us, and substitute their way, because they think their way is better.

I wish the outcome in the myths could have been what it will be here, in the twentieth century- victory to me.

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Heather was bored in the attic, and she wanted to keep an eye on what was going on with the tenants, so every so often she clopped mournfully downstairs and listened to what they were saying.

When Jamie came home from work, he confirmed that Ashley had lent him the money for the deposit. "I'm so afraid of being homeless. I really opened up about it, and he was shocked. But I don't want to take advantage of him. I've got to pay him back soon. I've asked for some night shifts as overtime- those are not as popular, so there are always some available."

"You can't work day and night, you'll collapse," said Cyan.

"It's only the first shift of the night. I'll try it and see what it's like."

Ben looked sympathetic, but all he did was phone Stan and tell him they would move into the flat at the end of the month.

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After Jamie's first extra shift, he came home with dark rings around his eyes.

Cyan came out from her bedroom, where numerous textbooks were spread out on a desk. "You look shattered- let me make you some hot chocolate. I would look for some temp work this week, but we've got a midterm test; it's practice for an exam."

"Don't worry," Jamie sighed. "I'll get used to it."

Heather went upstairs and sent an angry thought to the chess pieces. "We have to get them some real money, not just money they've borrowed. That boy Jamie is going to kill himself working long hours."

"Yes, and I have my plan for it all ready, on the scroll," said the Black Bishop. "Petition number two, money. But we'll have to wait until the game is operational again."

“We need to find another wealth entity. I found one and she got Ashley to help our clients, but it isn’t enough because it’s still Ashley’s money.”

“You did what?” The Black King stared at her. “Those aren’t my orders- the plan on the scroll is.”

“It was Eris’ orders.”

The Black Knight looked at the Black Bishop. “Can’t you ask Eris? Surely you can pray to her without waiting for the game to be fixed.”

“I can only pray if I’m a bishop,” he replied. “While the game is frozen, I am not a bishop, you are not a knight, and even Heather is not a horse. We’re only a lump of servitor material.”

Heather stamped her hoof. “That’s mad- I know I’m a horse. I’m going to search for wealth entities. Call me when the game is mended, because you’ll have your powers back then and will be able to reach me.”

As she galloped away, she heard the Black King say, “she’s gone wild again. We might have to repurpose her as a knight’s horse all over again when she comes back.”

Heather didn’t stay to hear any more, she carried on galloping, out of the house and along the street. She passed the park, where she still grazed at times. It was black and silent at this hour, but then her keen eye caught a movement up in the treetops.

A large creature flew out of the trees and headed straight towards her, and on drawing level it jumped in front of her, so she had to pull up sharply. The creature was fluttery and filmy like a butterfly, coloured in pale pastel pinks and blues, with long semi-transparent wings.

“Stop!” the creature called out imperiously. “You must stop your quest at once. You can go somewhere else, but not on your quest.”

“Who are you?”

“I belong to the people of Dana. Some magicians performed a rite in which they dressed Dana all in white and stood her fifty paces in a straight line from the King with the black cross on his head. My instructions are to block your way if you continue on the quest.”

Heather thought quickly. “I have another purpose for running away today. I want to find other horses and see if I am enough like them to live wild with them. If I promise only to do that and not to continue the Knight’s Quest, will you let me pass?”

“Yes, but we will be watching you all the time. Return to the quest and I will return you home. I can have you there in a few seconds, however far away you may be.”

Heather started up again this time at a trot, her urgent manner gone. She crossed the park and found a sheltered place between a clump of trees and the railing, and there she lay down for the night.

The next morning there was no sign of the fluttery creature, so she left the park and began to move through the city. She trotted again as if unhurried,

examining her surroundings closely. They were not inspiring. Everything in the city streets looked grey. The air smelled faintly smoky and tasted of grit against her tongue. Many vehicles hurtled by along the road, making the whole area unsafe for physical horses.

She revisited her reverie from that first night at Heather Bay and contemplated once again the fate of racehorses and show jumping horses, and horses on farms. That kind of life had its advantages but there was no real freedom in it. Somewhere there must still be wild horses. Heather was also intending to look out for wealth entities, but very subtly and passively, so as not to attract the attention of the people of Dana.

Soon she had reached the outskirts of the city. It was the first time she had left London since the start of the mission, but there was nothing to keep her here until the situation was resolved, when she was sure she would be able to return instantaneously. She thought of returning to Ireland but that would be too close to their adversaries. So instead, she began heading in the opposite direction, eastwards through the countryside. Even on the ground she could travel much faster than a physical horse. Her aim was to reach the coast.

She passed through larger and smaller settlements and several times risked walking close to a bank and scanning it for non-human creatures. But she only saw human beings going in to make their financial transactions.

At last she reached the sea. The beaches were stony, and her mood matched them, so much more sombre than on that carefree day at Heather Bay, which now seemed a long time ago. Yet she found herself remembering Eris' words. The burden of responsibility she felt for the three clients felt like a sign of growth, as if she were moving nearer to an awakening, and it would lead someday to awakening others too.

If she was intending to travel overseas it was time now to fly, but she needed to know which way to go. Heather launched herself into the air and rose until she could see for miles and began to look for horses. They might know where the wild horses lived.

She saw a farm a few miles from the coast, with four horses in one of the fields. She landed next to the field and leaned her neck over the fence.

*Will they find me pretty? And clever?*

It was immediately apparent that two of the horses couldn't see her, just as the humans couldn't. They looked right through her. The other two, a colt and filly at the far end of the field, were watching her warily.

"Greetings," said Heather. "May I ask you something?"

The filly trotted towards the fence. "What is it?" Horse telepathy was a little different, not as verbal, which made sense.

"Do you know which country wild horses live in?"

The filly looked confused. "Horses who are not pets of people? I don't know. You'll have to ask one of the people."

"The humans can't see me."

"I'm not surprised. You look like...you've got a part missing. You're like a dreaming horse."

Of course, a servitor has only an astral body, another piece of knowledge Heather had been given when she was created, but the consequences had never occurred to her. "You mean, I could only run with horses like you when they are dreaming?"

"The cart horse is wise. He has travelled to many places. Go and find him and ask him."

Heather bowed her head in acknowledgement and moved away from the fence. She trotted along the yard that ran around the farmhouse and came to a heavily built horse encased in a harness and shod with horseshoes. He was standing in front of a stable and the cart lay idle a little way away.

"Greetings," Heather said again. "I would like to live with wild horses. Do you know if I could, and which country I would have to go to?"

She could see when the cart horse turned his face towards her that he was quite an old animal. He spoke slowly. "I heard a tale once of horses in the Dream Time, owned by no man."

"That's it!" Heather exclaimed. "The filly said I was like a dreaming horse. Where is this Dream Time?"

"I don't know that. The tale says in a land far away."

"Thank you, I must find it." Heather inclined her head again and flew up into the sky.

## Chapter 6 Private Site

### The Blog of Balor

My mare is my greatest success. Yes, I am talking about a servitor. In my present campaign of technomancy I have made a few, and my triumph is the mare. She is independent, resourceful and dedicated to helping those who call on her.

I will build on this success and make another in due course, of a grander design. She will be made by a group; my hand will be unseen in the design and yet I will be the originator.

The only flaw I detect is that I made my mare too sexy! She wants to mate with real stallions and run with a real herd of horses. Normally I would be in favour of that, but we are talking of optimum servitor design.

The next mare I make will be of an ascetic nature, like a sublime Goddess, so that she can be guaranteed to stick to the missions for which she is conjured. She will be like the unicorn, ridden by maidens, a symbol of purity. Yet also a facilitator of chaos magic. The world will wonder at her!

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In fact, Heather was trying hard to stick to her mission. As she flew over the towns near the east coast of England, she was constantly aware of her search for wealth entities. But without her servitor powers, she couldn't call them to her. She continued to slip past places like banks and post offices and observe them covertly, but she still didn't see the creatures she was seeking.

In the meantime, she might as well investigate the wild horses, using the clue the cart horse had given. How to find out more information? Then it came to her- a computer! They were what the humans used to find information. She had been inside one once, and could do it again.

In a high street library, Heather found a computer switched on and waiting to be used. Without hesitation she launched herself inside.

She recognised the electrical pulses, the whirring sounds, the non-solid ground that shifted under her feet. She hoped it wasn't essential to type a question the way Ben had done. Could she simply ask a question? She projected a thought; "what is the Dream Time?"

A group of bots approached her, looking like tiny men with radio heads and large drawing pin legs. She felt comfortable with them as bots are akin to servitors and waited quietly for them to respond.

The tiny men pressed and pulled various half-hidden buttons and levers, and a list of answers appeared, projected onto the back wall. The topmost one opened itself into a tray of glittery letters like the one Eris had pushed out towards Ben. It said, 'the Dream Time is the name given by the Aborigines of Australia to the beginning time of the world.'

Heather recognised Australia as the name of a country; it was part of the knowledge that had been programmed into her. She asked another question, "are there wild horses in Australia?"

The little bots orchestrated another search, and this time the top answer in the tray said, 'Australia is one of the countries where there are still wild horses.'

Heather pranced excitedly around the room. Who would have thought this could be so easy? She had one final question.

"How do you find Australia from up in the sky?"

The bots paused at this one and looked at one another, perplexed. After a moment one of them pressed a button, and the others followed with their own manoeuvres, gradually speeding up.

The response in the tray said:

'RIDDLE. How do you find Australia from up in the sky?

ANSWER. Follow an aeroplane.'

That should be easy. Heather had seen aeroplanes. Of course, she would have to go inside the planes and look for information about their destination.

This was so exciting, but dutifully she pulled her attention back to her three clients. She was in the ideal place for continuing the quest without attracting the attention of the people of Dana, for she was pretty sure they didn't frequent the realm of cyberspace.

So once more she projected a thought, "I need wealth entities."

Heather found herself changing location, moving at speed through the pathways of the computer until she was standing in front of a huge wooden shutter. A sign on it proclaimed, 'Private Site.' The only entrance was a letterbox slit on one side. Suddenly behaving like a physical horse, Heather sniffed the letterbox, kicked the shutter with her front hoof and neighed softly several times.

Soon she heard scraping and shuffling on the other side and then a voice called out, "password!"

"I don't know the password."

"Then create a user ID and password and answer our questions about whether you're a serious student of the occult. You have to do that before we'll let you in."

"I'm not a human. I'm a servitor horse and..."

"Oh. Servitors can come in. You should have said before- we're in the same business as you."



The section of the shutter that surrounded the letterbox sprang open, revealing an invisible door. The inside was like a cave and grouped around the door were five small dragons. "Greetings, servitor," said the tallest one, giving a kind of bow. "We are griffins. The griffins who guard the treasure, they call us. We work for Bune. Has a chaos magician sent you?"

"I've been told it's bigger than one magician. It's a whole chess game that anyone can play, but now someone has attacked it and frozen it. Before that happened, Eris tasked me with finding some beings like you to help my clients."

"Hmm," said one of the other dragons. "Your clients will have to pay for our help. They must do a ritual, make an offering."

Heather couldn't imagine Ben performing an elaborate magical ritual, and Jamie and Cyan seemed even less likely to do that.

"I think I'm supposed to be their ritual," she said. "The Black Knight and me. Ben paid some money to take part in the game, and his second request was for more money to help them move house."

"Huh, that's chaos magic- a mess," pronounced the tall dragon. "In that case, you or the knight will have to tune into the wealth current and call it."

"I can't until the game is unfrozen, because I haven't got my servitor powers."

"So, just a normal horse. All you've got are your hooves and teeth. What I would do is go and smash whoever froze your game. But one mare, on your own? I would take an army of knights along, not just one."

The second dragon spoke again. "Don't look so sad, little mare. We'll show you the wealth current. Here it is." He lifted his claw and the atmosphere changed in the air above him. Something was rippling, although the effect was barely visible to Heather in her normal horse state.

"As you're a servitor, you've got programming," he continued. "Even with the powers frozen, you should be able to self-programme simple sequences. Look hard at that scintillation and concentrate on adding it to your programming. Then when you get your powers back, call that pattern."

Heather did what he had described- she could only hope it would work.

One of the other three dragons turned to leave. "Someone's logging on!" he announced. "Password Martini007. It's that boy who sees himself as James Bond. I'll go and check what he's doing. I hope he did his ritual right, or he'll find us more than a little glitchy."

He went back into the cave, swishing his arrowed tail, and another of the dragons followed him.

"Thank you for your help," said Heather. "Let me get this straight- I have to go to one of my clients' friends and tie the wealth current to them."

The dragon's eyes widened. "No. If you do that it will just be charity from their friend. You have to tie it to your clients themselves."

The tall dragon shook his head. "Servitors! Well, she'll be a better one now."

"Thank you again." Heather turned and galloped away along the paths, concentrating on reaching an exit and coming out of the computer, and in due course she sprang out into the library.

So now, Australia!

She realized that flying to the coast hadn't been such a good idea. The aeroplanes probably didn't leave from the coast. She launched herself into the air again and soared up much higher, until she could see a panorama of southern and eastern England, including the two airports. Then she plummeted down next to Heathrow Airport.

Now it was only a matter of examining signposts, and within the planes the flight documents. It was no different from what the Black Knight had done on their trips, when he looked around the buildings for notices and for smaller papers inside the drawers and cabinets.

When she was satisfied that she had found a plane bound for Australia, she lay down to rest in a field beside the runway until it was time for take-off.

## Chapter 7 Free Time

Heather didn't intend to sit inside the plane like a human being, nor to follow it at the pace it went which was considerably slower than she was. She noted its exact appearance and the flight path and went away to explore every so often, re-joining the plane further along the route. The physical world was extraordinary, that was the only word for it. Broadening her experience could only be beneficial for any human beings she would help in the future.

She had to graze several times when exploring at ground level, because her servitor energy began to run out. The grasses tasted and smelled different in the various countries she visited.

At last the plane began to dip lower, getting ready to land. The country below was quite different from England. There were so many wild places, covering vast areas of land, and full of plants that differed from any she had seen before.

As they flew lower, Heather was excited to see wild horses in a number of places. Many were roaming around together in herds. It was daytime and most of the horses were awake, so it would take a day or so to start experimenting with dreaming horses.

As the plane drew closer to the runway, Heather's head filled with plans for what she would do to join the wild horses.

It was at that moment that she heard a voice in her head, the Black King. "Heather! Our magician has restored Chaos Chess. Game on again! Come straight back."

If the Black King could contact her all the way from England, he must have his servitor powers back. She checked for her own, and immediately knew that she could home in on the Black King and the clients' home and streak back to them in a few minutes if she wanted to.

Heather felt torn, for servitors are not designed to rebel against their mission. Of course, her clients were the most important. But her wish to live the natural life of a horse felt just as important.

She dropped down to the ground, thinking furiously about what to do next. She ran over in her mind everything she had experienced, and all the beings of various species who she had met so far in her travels: human beings, horses, the two Goddesses and whatever the creature in the park was.

She came to the last one, the helpful griffin.

He had told her that a servitor can self-programme simple sequences. Of course, that was the answer. All she had to do was self-programme the

route as she flashed back to where the Black King stood, and then when the quest was over, she could follow that route back to Australia. It would take a few minutes to get here instead of a couple of days.

Heather had to be sure that the previous self-programming had worked. She focussed her attention on the wave pattern of that rippling wealth current, and sure enough she could see it before her eyes, just as if it were floating against the Australian sky. One quick call, and it would be there in reality.

As she did her streak back to London, Heather watched her movement closely and concentrated on adding it to her programming. She was more confident now, doing it for the second time.

She materialised on the landing outside the attic, where the three chess pieces were gathered.

“Good to see you, girl,” said the Black Knight warmly, and patted Heather’s forelock. “Our magician was up against a group, and he was determined to beat them by himself, which is why it took a few days. When the king is in check in a chess match you can move him, or you can take the checking piece, or move another piece in between the king and the checking piece. He managed to get Eris in a straight line with their queen, and one space in front of the Black King. The opponent could take our queen, but then our king could take their queen. In chess, you would have to move the checking piece away.”

“Game on again!” cried the Black King, doing a little dance.

“Wait,” said the Black Bishop. “We need to know whether to follow Heather’s plan or the one we wrote on the scroll.” He knelt down on the floor and raised his hands in a dramatic gesture, while closing his eyes.

“O Eris, our great Goddess, I implore you to hear us....”

Eris appeared on the other side of the landing, wearing a voluminous black dress made of satin. “The things I do! But I think it looks better on me than Dana’s dress looks on her. Now, let’s not have all this ecclesiastical language, even though you’re a bishop. Let’s stick to chess terminology. Black Queen’s decree! Heather has learned a technique with a wealth current, therefore please follow her and complete the Knight’s Move and the Knight’s Quest.”

“I’m proud of you, Heather!” exclaimed the Black Knight.

“Second petition on. Heather’s technique!” ordered the Black King.

“I’ll leave you to it,” said Eris, and she disappeared.

“Do we have to ride somewhere, Heather?” asked the Black Knight.

“Not at all-the only place we have to go is downstairs, to our three clients. I’ll call the current and then we attach it to them.”

“How long for? Do we have to take it off again later?”

That hadn’t occurred to Heather. “Um, I think it works just once, if we’ve been paid once.”

“Ben has definitely only paid for one game,” confirmed the Black King. “I’m hoping he’ll pay for another, King’s Move next time.”

“Or Bishop’s Move,” added the Black Bishop.

The Black Knight put his hand on Heather’s shoulder. “Come on, we haven’t even finished Knight’s Move yet.”

They found the three tenants in the kitchen drinking tea and talking about a man with a removal van who Cyan was intending to hire. “All the students on my course use him, even the ones who’ve come from up north. He’s very reliable.”

Jamie got out a calculator and they started to work out the cost for the items they wanted to move.

Heather was pleased- this was a perfect opportunity, while they were all in the same room, and keeping relatively still. She called the wealth current, using the wave pattern she had stored. This time, with her powers back, she could see a lot more than just the ripple effect. It was vibrant, strongly coloured in gold and green, and forceful like a wave in the sea. With her mind she told it to wash over the three humans and transfer its effects to them. After a few moments she let go, and it faded from view.

“That was very advanced, Heather,” said the Black Knight. “You’ll have to teach me, and then we can do it again when we need to. And we must try with other sorts of currents as well.”

“Yes, if we’re...” Heather didn’t finish sending him the thought. *If we’re still together, because I’m going to Australia.* Surely there must be a way to make this their last mission.

In the days following, everything went back to the old routine. By day Heather watched the humans and grazed, and at night she rested in the garden. The three chess pieces spent most of their time talking and debating together. Jamie continued working and doing extra shifts, Ben looked for jobs and played on his computer. Cyan went to college, did homework, and visited Brad. All the while the humans continued to make their arrangements for moving house at the end of the month.

The day came when Ben finished a phone call and ran excitedly into the kitchen where Jamie was cooking. “Great news! I got that IT job I went for on Monday. It pays quite well during the training, and a lot more when I finish it. You can stop working extra shifts, Jamie, and it won’t matter when Cyan moves out.”

“Oh, Ben, that’s fantastic. Good for you as well as us- it will lead somewhere.”

The Black King didn’t usually listen to their conversations, but he appeared out of nowhere to cry, “Objectives achieved! Game over!”

Heather was disappointed that Ben didn’t say it was the chaos magic this time. He seemed to have other things on his mind, and never stopped talking for the rest of the evening. When Cyan came in, he said the same

things to her all over again. Cyan looked pleased, and then told him about the concert she had been to with Brad.

It was after midnight, and the other two were asleep when Ben called up the Chaos Chess website on his computer. He muttered to himself, "Good, it's still there. Hasn't been hacked again." Then he moved on to something else.

After her rest, Heather stood up and trotted to the middle of the garden. It was still dark, with dew on the grass. Once more she called on stored information, the route to Australia, and willed herself to do the lightning-fast journey in reverse.

Sure enough she was there, on the same tarmac road next to the airport where she had been standing when the Black King called her. It was early afternoon here in Australia.

Heather flew up high enough to see the wild horses and plunged down near a medium-sized herd. She landed in a concealed spot between trees. It wouldn't do to look like a visitor from outer space.

Slowly, apprehensively, she moved towards the horses. They all had different coats: dun, black, cream with light brown and strawberry roan like herself. Their manes were tousled like hers, and some had longer manes and tails than she did.

When Heather got close, it was again a female horse that came over to speak to her. Must be etiquette.

"Greetings, what are you doing here?"

Heather said boldly, "I would like to join a herd of horses. Would yours like to have me?"

"Maybe. If one of the stallions likes you- we have three. But you look like a ghost horse." She jerked her head to indicate the other horses, and just like before, certain horses were looking right through Heather.

"I haven't died. I'm a servitor, it's a different kind of thing that is always like this."

"You can't have actual foals then- we need them to strengthen the herd. But don't fret, it might still be all right. Do you talk, or just think? Do you neigh and whinny?"

Heather neighed and whinnied.

"Mm, it's still a bit ghost, if you see what I mean. I think all the stallions can see you- let me ask them."

She gave a high-pitched neigh, and the three stallions looked round. "Would any of you like a ghost mare? She says her breed are always ghosts."

They stared at Heather hard. Heather looked at the ground, which she had never done before.

“You’re a pretty ghost mare,” one of them said. “You can join my herd, but why haven’t we seen your breed before? I hope they don’t like to attack – they could do stealth attacks very well.”

“We are made one at a time,” said Heather. “There are no herds of us, in fact there may not be any others like me in Australia.”

“I like that. If I have the only one, I will be important. But tell me if you see any others in case we have to fight them.”

“I’ll look out for them.”

He assented, and walked away.

That afternoon, Heather was pleased that she had to graze because it gave her something in common with the others. They spoke to her mainly to tell her the names they gave to plants and which ones were good to eat. Seeing them at close quarters, they looked even more different from the English plants.

When night came, Heather found that she could indeed interact better with the other horses when they were dreaming. They entered a world of anarchy and intrepid adventures. There were sexual encounters in the dreams in which no-one bothered about which mares belonged to which stallion, or whether it was the breeding season.

The days that followed were the best she had ever known. The herd galloped across the land, foraging at the edge of forests and playing on hillsides. The stallions decided where they were going and always managed to agree about their direction of travel. Once they came to a beach and they all cantered across the sand, kicking it up and sinking their hooves into it the way Heather had wanted to do when she was being trained at Heather Bay. She loved that part of Ireland, untouched by the pollution of cities, and the Australian bush was the same only much more extensive.

One morning, while Heather was nibbling a new kind of moss, she heard something most unwelcome. It was the Black King’s voice again. “Heather, where are you? You’ve been gone for days. Come back.”

“We finished the quest, so I’ve gone away with some horses I found. I’m free now, aren’t I?”

“No, not at all. Ben is still a member of the Chaos Chess website. We are his three servitors, and we have to stand by in case he declares another game.”

“I can be here and back in a few minutes. Just call me if you need me.”

“But you are the Black Knight’s horse, and you have to be constantly available to ride out with him. Supposing you tire yourself out in that place, and have to rest before you can respond?”

*Why is he inventing all these obstacles? And why aren’t the three chess pieces evolving too, and wanting to join in with humans?*

“You must come back,” insisted the Black King. “I order you to. We need to discuss this.”

Heather snorted with resignation. She didn’t want any trouble. If she could get here in a few minutes, so could the other servitors, and the wild horses who could see them might mistake them for hostile humans. “I’ll come back for a little while,” she said, and began to trot away from the herd to find a suitable place to launch herself into the air.

She heard a neigh and looked behind - it was the mare who had spoken to her when she had first approached the herd. “Hey, we don’t go off on our own. A fierce animal might come.”

“It’s those people who make us one at a time. I need to go back to them for a minute. I can fly back extremely fast.”

“Don’t be long, then, we’ll miss you. And don’t bring any more ghost horses. The stallions don’t trust them.”

Heather assented, moved away a little further and then travelled rapidly to the house in London. She felt disoriented by the sudden change of environment. Looking around she noticed that the flat was full of boxes and crates, packed with the tenants’ possessions. “They’re moving tomorrow,” the Black Knight told her.

The other chess pieces arrived, and they discussed the question of Heather’s role in Chaos Chess. It was a heated discussion. The chess pieces were adamant that Heather must stay with them and remain in Ben’s service until he left the website, if he ever did. Heather was heartbroken. Ben might grow old and forget all about the Chaos Chess website, and never bother to close his account.

They talked late into the evening, and then the chess pieces treated the matter as closed and went upstairs to the attic. Heather went to the garden and slumped dejected against the brick wall. Maybe she could communicate with Ben, ask him to leave the website. Maybe when he was dreaming? Which he should be now, as it was the early hours of the morning.

She floated up to Ben’s bedroom window and into the room. Human beings dream in their astral body, and Ben’s was only a short distance away from his physical body. Heather entered into his dream.

Ben was sitting in front of a computer wearing a white lab coat, surrounded by three girls who were dressed in the same way as him. He was looking anxiously at one of them. “Why do I have to use algebra? It isn’t what I do best. And I suppose it’s no involvement, because we work together. It’s the same wherever I work. Wherever I live.”

Heather could tell that they weren’t real girls, just thought forms from Ben’s mind. One of the other girls said, “Something different will happen here. See?” She bent down and picked up a camping stove which must have been down by the side of the desk, and placed it on the desk. Then she



suddenly had a frying pan, and she was frying bacon, eggs and sausages in it. The whole cooking motif had appeared out of nowhere.

Heather neighed and opened her mouth, and when she tried to send a thought, words came out instead. "Ben, I'd like to ask you a favour. Please could you leave the Chaos Chess website? You've got what you wanted."

Ben barely glanced at her, and carried on addressing the girl he had spoken to before. "Now you've brought in a horse. It talks. They're not allowed in here-you'll have to put it in a stable."

The girl seized Heather and began to sweep her out of the room. Heather struggled, but these thought forms must be amazingly strong, and the next moment she was outside in a featureless corridor.

She tried to get back into the room without leaving Ben's dream, but it was impossible. The door was sealed shut. After a while she began to search the corridor, and it was empty most of the way along. Finally she came to a packing crate with 'Bowbrick's' written on the side.

Heather went back to the door and called out, "Ben, what is Bowbrick's?" Ben opened the door. "It's where I used to work," he said. "They make lab equipment."

He obviously needed a pep talk before he would listen to her. Pity the Black Bishop wasn't here to give it. "Ben, when you first got your new job, you talked for hours about how your life had changed for the better. Now you've started to worry, but this isn't your old job. That's all in the past- it's a fresh start now."

He was taking in what she said, then in a flash everything vanished, and he went into the non-dreaming phase of sleep. Outside, the sky grew paler as dawn approached.

Heather was sure she could reach Ben, but it would take time. The horses would think she had deserted the herd, and might not let her back in.

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## The Blog of Balor

All experience makes us grow. My experiences as a techno-mage have been rich and instructional, and I am ready now to ascend to the next level. I have given my magic an upgrade, and that includes my servitors who have been upgraded too. It's like a factory which has become leaner and more efficient.

This is only the beginning. I will continue refining what I do, and I hope to be one of the most consulted practitioners in the field of practical magic. Whatever you need, I can supply it. My methods are creative. All attacks will be deflected. I won my last battle without my poisoned eye and without

bloodshed- those may be needed another time, but this time it was the power of my mind, and technology.

Technology and magic combined is the way of the future.

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Daylight was fast approaching, and Heather got up reluctantly and wandered into the house. As she was gliding up the stairs, she saw an incredible sight. The Black Knight was coming towards her, going down the stairs, and he had been transformed. He had turned into a centaur, a man down to his waist and then below his waist the legs and tail of a horse. "Heather girl, I've been upgraded! The knight on a real chessboard has always been one piece, never two, and our magician decided to correct me. You can be free now, like you've always wanted."

The Black King and the Black Bishop were at the top of the stairs, looking delighted, and they both applauded. Somewhere in the haze of joy and amazement that hung before Heather's eyes, she saw Eris hovering beside her.

"It was me who put that correction into the magician's mind, Heather! Once I had sparked the realisation, he fleshed it out and programmed your information into the horse part of the Black Knight. That includes everything you learned so that he can apply it to future missions, and you won't have to undertake them yourself.

Remember the sleepers who must awaken? It doesn't apply to horses. We don't have any Buddha horses yet- only humans can awaken. But if your ideal is to roam with the horses, horses who go back to the Dream Time when it's night, then knock yourself out. Go and live with the wild horses."