

CRYSTAL CAVERNS AND WATERY GRAVES

by Inez Pascal

Part 1

It did not seem possible that two years had passed since Catherine had been gone. Vincent was sitting morosely at his writing desk leafing through his memories. Each anniversary tugged him back to exact moments and feelings, and he truly felt as though there was no such thing as time. Within his mind every experience happened simultaneously and all he had to do was reach for it and relive it.

Jacob touched and grabbed at each memento as Vincent placed it on the table - the beloved volume of '*Great Expectations*' and '*Shakespeare's Sonnets*,' a pressed rose, the white-feathered owl masque, her crystal and his white ivory rose. Vincent fingered his rose absentmindedly, his thoughts years away.

A shrill baby scream brought him back to Jacob, lip bleeding, a gold chain dangling from his mouth. he had caught his lip between a very sharp little tooth and the crystal. Vincent took it away and gently wiped away the drops of blood. The precocious toddler let out another scream and grabbed for the chain, pulling at it with all his childish strength. It took Vincent by surprise and the crystal slipped from his fingers. He was often amazed that so much power could be stored in such small hands.

Little Jacob was fascinated by the lights dancing off the facets. Vincent took his son's small hand in his own large, strong furred one and held it up so that the crystal twisted to and fro in the candle's dancing glow. It sparkled and twinkled and Jacob squealed, "How pretty! Daddy! Daddy!"

Vincent, looking into his young son's eyes, saw the same wonder that had shown in Catherine's eyes the night he had given her the crystal. He had always planned on taking her to the Crystal Cavern. He could well imagine her awe and wonder at the walls of shimmering crystals, but he never had the opportunity. Another day would be soon enough; but there had been no '*other day*.' If nothing else, he learned to act on his inspirations. Life is fragile; tomorrow may not have breath.

"Jacob, how would you like to take a journey with Daddy? I want to show you a special place, a room that shines just like this."

"Go! Jacob, go," he demanded, sliding off Vincent's lap and tugging at his leg.

"We must get ready. Tomorrow, when you wake up. Tomorrow we will go."

Vincent carefully padded the sling he used to carry Jacob. Wanting his son to be comfortable on this two-day journey; they were soon ready. Jacob was snug in his sling, their provision pack strapped to Vincent's back under his cloak. Goodbyes were said amid little Jacob's high-pitched mewling and big Jacob's frowns.

"Jacob, settle down or we will go nowhere," admonished Vincent, placing a hand on the wall to brace himself. Jacob was bouncing so much that it was having an unsteady effect on the usually surefooted Vincent.

"No. Fun!"

"No! We go no further." Vincent rested his back against the wall and swayed gently to calm Jacob; then, in almost the same rhythm, he started out again. Jacob was soon asleep, allowing Vincent to make some headway. Arriving at the Chamber of the Winds, he looked on, amazed, as Jacob's long blond hair flew out from around his little head just as Vincent's fanned out about his shoulders.

The first day's journey was uneventful, but as Vincent rounded the corner near the little chamber where he had planned to spend their first night, he came upon a cave-in. There was no way open along his original, planned route. They would have to double back and take another passage, which eventually, would lead around the pile of fallen rocks.

He pressed forward looking for an area large enough for him and his son to be comfortable for the night. Jacob needed room to run around a bit as his little legs had been cramped in one position most of the day. All at once Vincent heard a familiar sound, the sound of rushing water. Had he gotten turned around somehow and returned to the waterfall cavern?

The passageway was getting narrower and Vincent soon had to take off his sling and pack to move sideways through the converging walls. Setting Jacob down at his feet, tying the pack and sling around his waist to drag them behind, he held onto a straining Jacob with one hand and the lantern with the other.

Finally making it through what was by now a mere slit in the sheer rock cliff, Vincent knew they were below the level of the Crystal Cavern and from his estimate of their location, much further east than he had ever explored.

The natural subterranean light, which faintly illuminated the tunnels Below, had always amazed Vincent, but this area was unbelievable. No one had ever figured out where the illumination came from, but this looked as if it were reflected, magnified, and bounced off of every crystal lining the walls. The myriad colors exploded, as crystal prisms refracted the unknown light into rainbows and reflected them off a rising mist.

Jacob broke free of Vincent's grasp and went chasing after an elusive rainbow playing in a wisp of fog. Vincent caught him just on the brink of land for he realized that there was; indeed, rushing water under that magical, iridescent, rainbow cloud.

"This looks like a wonderful spot for us, Jacob, but you must be very careful. Do not come near here," and Vincent pointed to the edge of the water. A very emphatic **"No!"** emphasized his point.

Jacob looked up sheepishly and Vincent knew his warning of danger had been understood. "You may play over there, against the pretty wall." Vincent took out a few toys to occupy Jacob and then began to set up their camp. They ate dinner, played together for a while and soon fell asleep, Jacob curled in his father's arms.

Vincent's slumber was disturbed, but being exhausted, the pull of sleep was greater than a dream of wading through waves in the sunlight. Jacob suddenly started gasping and thrashing about, as if he were drowning. Vincent started awake to find water curling around his son's little head and Jacob, struggling to stay above it.

Vincent immediately leaped to his feet, grabbing Jacob out of the water. He looked around and realized that they were in some sort of underground tidal basin and it was high tide. He felt under the quickly rising water for their supplies but they had either been carried off by the current or he just couldn't locate them under the water. Clutching his cape, as it slid off his shoulders, Vincent pulled it around a shivering, screaming Jacob and turned for the crevice opening in the rock. There was no way out, for water was gushing from the opening.

Vincent tied his cape over one shoulder and under his opposite arm in order to loose it quickly should it begin to drag him down. He untied his vest, put Jacob under his sweater and retied the vest. A terrified Jacob was quite content to be so engulfed by his father.

Vincent knew he would be able to stay afloat on his back for quite a while. If only they could reach a level above the high water mark, they would be safe until ebb tide.

"Hang on, Jacob, and lie still. Know that your Daddy loves you and will protect you." The words sounded hollow in his ears. How many times had they been said to Catherine? There were just some things love could not fix. With a mighty kick, Vincent pushed off from the land's end into the icy, churning water.

Floating atop the rising water for what seemed like hours, he could no longer feel his arms and legs, and water had filled his ears. He came close to losing consciousness many times, but Jacob's weight nestled in the down on his chest gave him reason to stay afloat. Even with that, his endurance was nearing its end. The water had risen above the crystal reflections and the cavern was now dim. Vincent could spy no opening or ledge to swim for, not at all certain that he could move his arms or even kick. He let out a long, slow breath and lost consciousness The dark was comforting as it closed around him. There was no longer any cold and the total relaxation caused his body to sag as he began to sink into blackness.

A pathetic little boy sat on the floor on a thick, white bearskin rug next to the bed where his father lay. Sobbing, his cheeks tear-stained, he had been sitting, dejectedly, crying for hours. A kindly old man, much like his grandfather, had come and tried to feed him, lure him away, pick him up, and put him to bed, but little Jacob wouldn't budge from his father's side. Finally, after falling asleep on the floor, a sailor in a blue and white striped shirt tried to pick him up, but the little boy awoke kicking and screaming, **"Daddy! Daddy! Help me! Help me!"**

Vincent struggled to reach the place in the distance from where his son was calling to him. He could barely hear, but sensed Jacob's need. Why were his eyelids so heavy? '.... *Concentrate, Vincent. Open your eyes....*'

Breathing heavier and deeper, a low rumbling growl escaped from his throat. The sailor turned just as Vincent opened his eyes. Jacob was immediately brought to the bed, where the little one threw himself at his father, holding onto the arm nearest the wall.

Vincent tried to lift his head, but it throbbed and his ears ached. He was very hot, yet he shivered. He couldn't be sure if the room was moving up and down or if he were just dizzy.

"Well, hello, young man. I am glad you have decided to remain among the land of the living. Welcome. I am Captain Vishnu and you are aboard the Temporis Collectus. My men pulled you and your little boy out of the water just as you were about to give in."

"We are alive?" Vincent's throat was sore and the usual husky voice was barely audible.

"Yes, very much alive. Just look at our bruises and scratches from trying to care for your son. By the way, he has not eaten, but right now, I think he needs you more."

They looked down at the now sleeping Jacob, nestled contentedly beside Vincent, one small fist still gripping his father's arm.

"What is his name.... our little warrior?"

"He is Jacob, and I am Vincent."

"Well, Vincent, I shall have some warm tea brought into you and then leave you to the sleep you both need."

Two days passed with Jacob huddled next to the wall, as Vincent drifted in and out of consciousness. Finally, the morning arrived when Vincent awoke clear-headed; the sun streaming in through the portholes. The distinct aroma of brewed coffee reminded him of his hunger. As he sat up in bed, little Jacob popped a blond head up from the corner of the bunk near his father's right foot. A bag of cookies and a mug, along with a little blanket lay in a pile - Jacob had acquired a few possessions.

Vincent, wearing a night shirt of luxurious silk, was attacked by his son, who was very happy to see his father awake and sitting up. The bed where he lay was a built-in bunk, the walls and sides made of mahogany. Beautiful, deep blue drapes hung in front of the bunk and were tied back with gold cord. Vincent swung his feet over the edge of the bed, where they promptly sank deep into the fur of a plush white rug. Was this some kind of luxury ship? Where were they? How had they been rescued? So many questions rattled around in his brain.

After a lovely breakfast of fresh fruit, freshly-brewed coffee and fresh baked rolls with creamery butter, Vincent's clothes were brought to him, clean and mended. Even his cloak had been rescued and laundered. Jacob also had a new suit of clothes. A sailor entered their quarters with a carved horse for young Jacob's playtime.

"You may walk about if you wish, sir. Captain Vishnu will join you in the lounge in half an hour."

Jacob, holding tightly to his father's hand, explored the strange vessel which in many ways, reminded Vincent of Captain Nemo's *Nautilus* from literature. It was very large, with ornate decor, but there seemed no way to get out into the fresh air, even though Vincent could see the sky and water through portholes.

As he entered the lounge, the Captain noticed Vincent caressing the mythological figurines standing sedately on a chessboard.

"Do you play?" he asked.

"I learned at my father's knee," replied Vincent.

"Good! Good! I have been waiting for a challenging partner," responded the captain enthusiastically.

"Come... sit down. There is much I need to explain and much, I think, you have been waiting to hear."

Vincent was certain he had stepped through the pages of *'Twenty Thousand Leagues Under The Sea'* after Captain Vishnu finished his story. The captain's demeanor became very serious and sonorous, adding to his credibility, as he recounted his tale. It seems that the *Temporis Collectus* was a vessel from the between world and Captain Vishnu had been given the task of protecting all that was rare, or one of a kind, which were left to extinction by the carelessness of human civilization. This was the god's ark and the captain had been sailing the world since the beginning of Earth's history.

"Have you heard of the Loch Ness monster, Vincent?"

"Yes, of course."

"He is one of our charges. The best part is that he is not always in the Loch. There are underground waterways which connect all the waters of the Earth and we found you in one of those waterways. We were compelled to take you with us, even though we are on a tight timetable. You see, our latest mission is much anticipated and getting there in time is of the utmost importance."

"Where is your destination?"

"Ireland. We are more than halfway across the ocean, now."

"The Atlantic? This is the Atlantic Ocean?" asked Vincent, astounded.

"Yes, we sail above now, but as soon as we approach land we will submerge."

"Under water? We will be under the sea? Then this is a submarine, just like..."

"Yes," the captain chuckled, "Just like the *Nautilus*. I know that this is quite a lot for you to take in, but I assure you, it is all true. You and your son are safe. We just happened to be resting on the bottom of that particular basin waiting for high tide. It was quite fortunate for all of us. Now, I must bid you good day, Vincent." And with that he left the lounge.

Father and son returned to their cabin. Vincent mulled over the strange story, thinking that perhaps this was a ship of madmen. His logic told him that all this could not be, yet when he passed the full length mirror in his cabin and caught a glimpse of himself, he stopped and stared. If **he** could exist, why not Captain Vishnu; if Jacob could exist, why not the *Temporis Collectus*; and if they could survive a watery grave, then why not the truth of the captain's fantastic tale?

The next morning, the order was given to submerge for their approach to the northwestern shore of Ireland. Vincent had often dreamed of an ocean voyage; another impossibility now coming to pass. There was a knock on the cabin door. Vincent was informed by a crewman that his presence was requested by the captain. He followed the sailor and found the captain in a very serious mood.

"Vincent, I know now that it was no accident that we rescued you and your son. You were sent to us. It is you who must complete this mission."

"But I know nothing of you or your ways," argued Vincent.

"My men will guide and instruct you, but it is only by your hand that she will come. It is only your beckoning she will follow."

"What do you know of me? How do you know that I am the one of whom you speak?"

"You did not question the story which I related to you; you did not question our existence or our mission; you simply accepted."

"You accepted me. How can I, of all creatures, question another's existence?"

"Vincent, indeed, you are our champion. Will you aid us? We will care for Jacob. He is even now like my own grandson."

"Will there be any danger to life in this undertaking?"

"Our mission is and always has been to preserve life; we protect and save - we do not harm."

"Then I shall do what I can." Vincent agreed out of gratitude and curiosity. In fact, many things intrigued him and he seemed to be drawn by a need to play this out.

"You will be going on a hunt, but it is a specific animal we seek. Do not frown. She is ours, and just as '*Nessie*' is ours - yet free to go where he chooses. Mariah has been put to pasture for a year. It is time to bring her home."

"And for this you require my assistance?"

"She will respond only to your voice. Tomorrow we will surface near Ballycastle at the foot of the Trostan Mountains. If you would be so kind as to be ready to disembark when the order is given, I would be most grateful."

"Will I then be given more information?" asked Vincent.

"Along the way. Now, have a good night and spend the day revelling in the wonder of your son. Bon Soir, Vincent."

"Good night, Captain."

Everything seemed simple and innocent enough, but why did they need him? It made no sense, but then sense wasn't what all this was about.

Vincent had been told to be ready to leave when the vessel began to surface and could already feel the upward surge of the boat and detected slight variations in cabin pressure. Time to leave was drawing near.

"Daddy has to go away for a little while, but I will be back."

The little boy's blue eyes clouded and a pout quivered the beautiful little mouth, so much like his mother's.

"Now, you be brave. Everyone here is your friend. They will play with you and take care of you." Vincent embraced Jacob, who clung around his neck. They made their way to the hatchway where Vincent handed Jacob over to Captain Vishnu and, for just a moment, doubt crossed Vincent's mind, but the kind captain had already gained Jacob's confidence.

The hatch was opened and Vincent followed four seamen up the ladder. The view which greeted Vincent was another impossible dream come true. The moon cut a path over the water, as waves rippled and crested ever so slightly. Mountains, wrapped in midnight blue, as the moonlight reflected up from the water lifted from the coast. Nestled between the sea and the mountains was a small city.

"That is Ballycastle. It is very old and has been used as an outpost since ancient times," informed Anton.

"This is a sight I thought never to see. It is wonderful," responded Vincent.

They rowed silently toward the shore, disembarked and hid the boat.

"We must go through the town to reach the pass. There is no other way, but it is late and all is quiet," explained Hans. "Stay close, Vincent."

The town was indeed very old, quaint would be a good description, and peculiar to the Irish. The houses were made of large, gray stone walls, thatched roofs, silled windows with shutters, and large chimneys. The streets, narrow and cobblestoned, all led upward toward the pass.

Suddenly, Vincent stopped short. There, in the window of a bookshop, was a picture of Brigit O'Donnell. She was to be in town in two days time for a book signing ... a new book of poems. He stepped slowly to the window and placed a large, spread-eagled hand against the cool glass. He longed to see her; to speak to her of Catherine and their parallel tragedies.

"Will we still be here in two days?" asked Vincent, staring into the shop window.

"It is possible," answered Anton.

Vincent decided he would definitely try to seek out Brigit.

The five companions climbed to the base of a tower structure which, upon entering, reminded Vincent of home. It was dark with lit torches lining the stone walls and steps circling up to a landing which led to a tunnel continuing upward. Finally, they came to a room that looked like the hall of a great castle. Swords and shields, armour and coats of arms hung on the walls, but the focal of the room was the massive wooden doors.

"What is all this?" questioned Vincent.

"Out there, beyond those doors is the pass to the Trostans. Throughout the centuries, Ballycastle has remained prosperous from tolls charged to those who travelled from sea to mountains. It has only been in the last ten years that they have allowed free access," explained William.

Anton and Kareem pushed open the massive doors and the wind blew in from the pass. It smelled of heather and clover – sweet - and seemed to draw Vincent out into the waiting arms of the mountains. He had never thought to see mountains, and now he was in their very midst. He caught his breath as he looked around, peaks and valleys shimmering in the moonlight.

"We will travel till we reach Bryne Castle. There we will wait for dawn," said Hans.

No one spoke on the way to Bryne Castle. Vincent followed, but felt a bit uneasy. His four companions were deep in thought and seemed almost sinister ... *'What have i gotten myself into,* he wondered.

The old castle was in ruins. The only sturdy structure was a fieldstone corral with an iron grate for a gate. It was part of what had once been a corner tower, as it jutted up to jagged shadows. Many of the stones had tumbled into odd shapes and patterns. Remnants of stone steps were here and there, encircling the strange structure. There was hay in the corners of a roofless stable and the five men settled for the night, trying to make themselves as comfortable as possible.

The first thin rays of sun warmed Vincent's arms and he marveled at the light as it moved slowly across his chest. Never having awakened to a sunrise, he sat up and faced east, staring at the brightest spot in the niche between two peaks. For just an instant, there was a blinding green flash and then the sun crested in a fiery arc. It blinded him for a moment, but he savored this special gift, because he might never again see such wonder once he returned home.

Home... Father would be very worried. They might even think that he and Jacob were dead. He thought of his son and wondered how they were going to get home. Would Captain Vishnu agree to make the return trip?

He didn't have much time to ponder this question, for the sailors were up and passing around sea biscuits and cheese. The mountain air made Vincent ravenous, and he still felt hungry after having eaten his share. It would have to be enough.

"We will travel through the day and reach Trualee Glen by evening. That is our destination. It may take most of the night to find Mariah, so just stay close, Vincent," instructed William.

At least this won't take too long, thought Vincent. He wanted to get back to meet Brigit.

Most of the day's journey was easy, but as night approached, the trail turned into a path and the sheer rock walls seemed to close in around them.

"We're getting close," announced Hans.

They stopped, ate a meal and waited for nightfall. Soon it grew dark and the sailors moved stealthily up a hidden trail to a crevice between the steep walls. Passing through, they crawled along the flat top of the rock until they reached the far edge.

"Lie flat, Vincent, We cannot chance being seen," warned Kareem.

Seen? By whom? wondered Vincent, but as they approached the edge he heard music and laughter, singing and joyous shouting.

What he saw as he peered over the rim caused him to think he was losing his mind, or at the very least, hallucinating. The valley below was an ancient crater shaped like a witch's cauldron. There were campfires everywhere, throwing eerie, flickering shadows across the black tors. The makers of the merriment were *'the little people'* – leprechauns - passing around jugs of ale, playing harps, singing and dancing around the fires. A place of pure magic, Vincent was certain.

"We will wait until they sleep and from the amount of ale and whiskey flowing down there, it will be a sound sleep," chuckled Anton.

Vincent was feeling rather left out and alone. His companions only spoke to him when they were explaining or giving instructions.

"We should rest now," advised Hans.

Vincent, drawing his cape around his shoulders, soon fell asleep; the lively music, with its magical lilt, lulled him to sleep and filled his dreams.

"Catherine," murmured Vincent, as she appeared before him, wearing a lovely, white, embroidered blouse; full skirt with ribbon trim; white stockings and black slippers with a strap across the instep. She gave him an impish glance, smiled and started to dance a jig. She held out her hands. Taking her slender fingers in his great furred hands, they danced in a circle, spinning faster and faster. They were soon laughing joyously and she collapsed breathlessly against him, and he held her tightly in a loving embrace. She lifted on tiptoe and tilted her head back, eyes closed. He bent down, kissed her gently, and they flew away together.

"Wake up, it's time," ordered Hans.

As always, Vincent felt desolate when he awoke from his dream of Catherine. He felt he would die with longing for her. Their love was forever, and now, so was his aloneness.

The way down was not easily seen, in fact, there looked to be no way down, but they soon found a ledge which led to a cave where torches were hidden. Each man took a torch and lit it, then proceeded down the interior passage toward the floor of the crater.

"All right, Vincent. Call to her," whispered Kareem.

"I just call, 'Mariah'?"

"We will walk close to the walls in the circle and you call out."

"Mariah!"

The moon was now high in the sky and starting to bathe the crater floor in silver light. It was a bright evening and they could see *'the little people'* sleeping, curled near the embers of their dying fires. They walked around almost the entire circle.

"Mariah!"

Unexpectedly, a beautiful white horse, shimmering in the moonlight, stepped from a thicket - Mariah. Vincent stood spellbound. Never had he seen anything so powerfully exquisite. She stood quietly at the edge of the thicket, then reared, her front hooves flashing high in the air.

"Call to her again," Kareem urged.

"Mariah!"

Still she did not come.

"Vincent, you go to her," suggested William.

Slowly, Vincent started toward Mariah. A strange feeling - just a feeling, an overshadowing - grew stronger as he neared her. As he got closer he held out a hand and, to his great surprise, she came, allowing him to rub her nose and pat her head. He turned to rejoin the others and she followed close on his heels.

"There, that wasn't so difficult, was it?" commented Anton.

Mariah followed along, slowly and surefootedly, her nose ever so often nudging at Vincent's back. Whenever she seemed to hesitate, Vincent would turn and gentle her by rubbing her nose or crooning her name. The most difficult part of the return journey was getting her down from the bluff. The crevice was barely wide enough for Vincent and she scraped the sides often. Finally, they all made it through to the

canyon floor. It seemed to take hardly any time at all to get back to Bryne Castle.

Hans and Anton attempted to get her into the corral, but she bucked and shied, kicking out with hind hooves and striking out with her forelegs. They could not manage her and Vincent was needed once again. Walking into the corral, he called to her softly. Mariah lowered her head and went to him. He stayed with her while Kareem and Anton put down clean straw, then they all left and closed the gate.

It had taken all night for Mariah to be located and brought to the castle. It was now mid-morning and while the men slept, Mariah rested. All seemed peaceful and quiet. They awoke at sunset and as they ate their evening meal, Mariah started to act up ... whinnying constantly ... almost as if she were calling out. Vincent went to the gate and felt her discontent.

"Must we keep her locked up?" Vincent asked, remembering his own imprisonment at the hands of the arch-criminal Gabriel.

"It is for her own good. We cannot have her wandering off, now, can we?" explained William.

"I suppose not, but she seems very agitated about something."

"Why don't you go down to the town tonight. Don't worry, we won't let anything happen to her."

It was a dark and moonless night, as Vincent made his way back down the tower and carefully through the town. A storm threatened to unleash its fury. He went to the only inn in town and peered through the window, trying to locate Brigit. The lower floor contained the kitchen, dining room and common room, but Brigit was not there. He looked up to the second floor where three windows were lit. There were vines growing up the sides of the walls that looked sturdy enough to hold his weight, but he climbed part way and tested them by pulling down hard. They had probably been growing there long enough to become part of the walls and roof.

Peeking into the first lit window, Vincent saw a man sitting before a fireplace, sipping a toddy. He moved over two windows to the next which was lit and his heart warmed as he saw Brigit sitting at a desk, writing. He tapped lightly at the window to get her attention. She looked up but chose to ignore the sound. He tapped twice more, louder, and then twice again. This time she came to the window to see what could be making such a rhythmic sound. Opening the window, she stood and stared, a quizzical, cock-headed look on her face.

"Vincent?" he smiled as she opened the window wider. "By all the Saints ... how on Earth did yah get here? How in the world did yah get to this God-forsaken coast of Northern Ireland?"

"Would you come out so that we may speak?" asked Vincent.

"Surely. Give me a moment. I'll meet yah down behind the stable."

Vincent climbed back down the vines and stole through the shadows to the rendezvous point and waited. It was barely five minutes before he saw Brigit coming toward him, a spring in her step and a sweet smile of welcome on her face.

"I'm still dodgin' me bodyguards," she admitted impishly. "Well now, yah are the very last person I ever expected tah see, but tis happy I am yur here. So ... tell me ... how is Catherine?"

She was as inquisitive and open as he remembered ... and as compassionate, as he related the events surrounding Catherine's kidnapping and subsequent death. Brigit wept along with Vincent as he finished his tale.

"Aye, Vincent ... 'tis a pain that never ends. But tah have become a part of someone and then have that someone taken from us, while the powers-that-be tell us we must go on, 'tis almost more than a body can endure. But we must go on," consoled Brigit.

Vincent then told her of his son, Jacob, and these two years of joy and wonder at watching him grow and learn.

"Aye, yur Catherine left yah with such a precious, wee gift. I can well understand your reason tah to on living, Vincent. I have so often wished that Ian and I had had a child. I have me writin' but tah have a child - a livin' reminder of yur lost loved one..." Brigit looked off, tears spilling from the pools which had formed in her eyes.

He finally told her the strange story of his rescue and adventure across the sea.

"Now there's a tale for a writer tah put tah paper and yur talkin' tah one who believes in the old magic. Why I've even seen the little people a time or two. Yah must have been tah Banshee Cauldron then, have yah? I've only heard of it, mahself."

"Yes, there are strange impressions there which I am struggling to understand," said Vincent.

"I can see that. I can also see that there's somes sinister doin's afoot. Could yah take me tah Bryne Castle, Vincent? I've never seen a Mariah," asked Brigit.

"It will not take long, but you should be prepared for some climbing," advised Vincent.

"I have all I need, let's go!"

Brigit followed Vincent closely, feeling like a little girl again. There was an air of excitement surrounding Vincent and she found it refreshing in her guarded life. As they neared Bryne Castle, they could hear a terrible noise coming from the corral. The whinnying and screeching was deafening.

Vincent and Brigit stayed in the shadows of a collapsing stairway. The four seamen, sitting in a circle playing dice, seemed unaffected by the torments of that beautiful animal.

"What's happenin' here, Vincent?" asked Brigit.

"I don't know. All was well when I left."

They circled around and up a ramp to the top of a wall; from there they could look down into the corral. Mariah, bucking and throwing herself against the rough stone walls, had already opened up so many gashes on her white flanks that the blood was flowing down her sides in rivulets of scarlet.

"Oh, Vincent, yah must do somethin'," cried Brigit.

He jumped lightly into the corral and soothed the white horse. "What is it, girl? You don't like being confined? I understand.... quiet now... I'm here. I'll take care of you," he crooned, softly, all the while stroking the velvety white neck of the frightened mare.

"Vincent, I'm comin' down," warned Brigit. He turned around in time to catch her as she jumped.

She paced slowly to Mariah and placed a gentle palm along the mare's heaving flanks, then along her neck and finally, stroked down under the proud head.

"Vincent, I believe this mare is pregnant and about tah give birth. Poor darlin'."

Vincent unexpectedly grabbed Brigit and pressed her against the cold stone wall of the rock corral as Hans came to investigate Mariah's sudden silence. She stood in the center of the corral, pawing the ground and snorting, but as nothing seemed wrong, he returned to the game.

"We must help her, Vincent. Yah say yah took her from the little people, and that she's been here a year?"

Did yah see her mate?"

"No. She just came out of the thicket when I called," Vincent went to Mariah and put both palms along her neck. 'She wants to be with him. She needs to be free. She does not want her baby born in captivity...' His voice trailed off.

"I know, Vincent. It's all too familiar to yah."

"I must take her back. I cannot bear that I was the means of such treachery."

"Remember, Vincent, she belongs tah Captain Vishnu. He probably left her here so that she could mate. By rights, the foal is his. He may not take kindly tah yur interference," reminded Brigit.

"Also, he has little Jacob. I will take Mariah back first and then see to Jacob. You had best go back to the inn, Brigit. I will take you as far as the tower."

"No yah don't, Vincent. Yur no goin' tah get rid of me that easy. I intend tah haelp. Besides, I'll not miss the chance tah see Banshee Cauldron and the little people," insisted Brigit.

"It may be dangerous," warned Vincent.

"There is no safety, Vincent. Remember ... *'There are times when we must walk empty-handed among our enemies'.*" Vincent smiled as they recited her words together.

"Come, we will wait until they are sleeping," said Vincent, as he turned and moved into the shadows of the corral to sit down.

As anguished and loud as Mariah had been before, now she was quiet. She even seemed to be walking on muffled hooves as they slipped her past the sleeping seamen. Brigit held a steadying hand on her flank as Vincent led the way. They arrived at Trualee Glen well before dawn, and found their way easily through the crevice. They were standing on the top of the bluff as the sun rose over the opposite rim of the Cauldron.

"I never thought I would actually see this place of the old magic. It's just as described by the minstrals of old. This is mah heritage, Vincent; the things that make the history of mah people."

"It must be very reassuring to have a history," Vincent mused sadly.

"How do we get down?" Brigit asked, looking down into the crater.

"Follow closely. The footing on this ledge is tricky."

They were soon through the cave and winding their way down. As they emerged into the sunlight, Mariah broke loose and raced to the thicket.

"She's home, Vincent where she wants tah be."

"Yes," drawled Vincent. "Where she can give birth in safety with her loved one near."

There was no reason to remain longer in the Cauldron, so they re-entered the cave and without warning a net fell over them; bars lowered to close off the entrance and exit of the tunnel. They were trapped.

PART TWO

Two little men, standing no more than 30 inches tall, stepped out from the shadows. They jumped back as Vincent turned and growled, fangs bared.

"Well, what have we here, now?" said a third little man, obviously the leader. "A son of nature, is it? A man of myth?"

"Would yah be King Culmac by any chance?" asked Brigit, eyes sparkling with excitement, hands on hips.

"Aye, that ah be, and ye be a daughter of the auld sod. Just what might yur name be, girl?"

"Brigit O'Donnell, Your Majesty."

"Well, not, Brigit me girl; just what might yah be doin' here, and with the likes a him?" questioned King Culmac pointing at Vincent.

"We came tah return Mariah," she responded.

"Does yonder, great, hulking Minotaur speak?" the miniscule monarch inquired.

"Yes, your majesty, I speak," answered Vincent solemnly.

"So, what have yah tah say for yurself. How do we trust yah?"

"I was brought here to lure Mariah out to the sea. We were sent by a Captain Vishnu, but I was told that Mariah was his and we were simply to return his horse. But I could not separate her from her mate; so Brigit and I brought her back."

"Does he speak true, Brigit, me girl?"

"Aye, yur majesty. He does."

King Culmac gestured and the bars were lifted. He motioned for Brigit and Vincent to follow, as he led the way deeper down into the heart of the mountain.

"Sit yurselves down. Tis a debt we be owin' yah, then."

Brigit and Vincent sat down on comfortable quilts, and true to the old of ways of hospitality, food was offered, which they gratefully accepted.

The little king began his tale. "Yah see, tis our very way of life that's bein' threatened. Tis not really Mariah that this Captain Vishnu is after... tis her mate and foel. We had a time, I can tell yah, tryin' tah keep him from followin' her."

"I know what he felt. I can sympathize with his feelings of desperation," admitted Vincent.

"Yah be sufferin' yurself, I think, lad. What be yur name?"

"Vincent, your majesty."

"Tis warnin' yah I must, Vincent, not tah trust this Captain Vishnu. Do yah no realize that yah be in the same jeopardy as our charge." King Culmac suddenly rose and left the chamber in response to a companion's frantic gestures.

He returned, joyous and dancing in little circles. "Tis time! Tis time! Come! Yah must be a part of this," he called as he disappeared around a corner.

Brigit and Vincent quickly followed the king out into the valley. They stepped back a pace as they were taken completely by surprise, for there, stepping regally from the thicket was a true creature of myth.

He was large, white and cloven-hoofed, with tufted mane flowing freely, and glistening in the bright noonday sun was one, single horn growing from the center of his forehead.

"Vincent, do mah eyes deceive me or is that a Unicorn I'm a lookin' at? How can this be?" whispered Brigit in amazement.

"How can / be?" countered Vincent.

"Aye! Yonder glorious beast has been in our care for centuries. We in this valley only exist because of him. Were he tah be taken from us, all before yah would vanish."

"And Captain Vishnu collects only those who are one of a kind, those on the brink of extinction," recalled Vincent.

"Aye! Think Vincent. Does this no include yurself?" demanded the king.

Suddenly, all the pieces fell into place. All the little foreshadowings now had meaning. He knew he would have to face the captain's displeasure, but the extent of the man's perfidity had not been clear until now.

Brigit, meanwhile, was being slowly and inexorably drawn toward the majestic Unicorn. He stopped short, pawed the ground with one golden hoof and eyed the approaching stranger. Brigit showed no fear as she slowly advanced with outstretched palm. He waited, and just as she got quite near, turned and led the way back to the thicket with Brigit following close behind.

"Vincent! Come quickly. 'Tis a wondrous sight!" called Brigit excitedly.

King Culmac and Vincent ran toward the thicket but halted just inside the first row of trees. Mariah was standing protectively over her newborn foal, who was trying, unsuccessfully, to stand on wobbly, spindly legs. He had his hind legs braced but the front ones seemed to have other plans. He was pure white, still wet and slick as Mariah licked him clean. In the center of his forehead was a small, round, ivory nub, proof of his enchanted ancestry. The Unicorn stood nearby, proudly guarding his family.

Tears were unabashedly streaming down Vincent's face as he saw nothing but the little family and heard "Thank you, Vincent." He was looking into Mariah's eyes, but heard Catherine's voice. Remembering Mariah's desperation to break free, he started sobbing.

Brigit went to him and held him. "Mah friend, ah canna tell yah twill be easier in time, but ah can tell yah, ah understand."

They left the thicket feeling blessed at having been witness to a miracle... a beauty that could not be, was.

"Twill be such celebratin' tonight. Surely, yah will stay for a bit?" invited Culmac.

"If your warnings are true, I fear that my son is in great peril. I must return to face Captain Vishnu," replied Vincent.

"Yah have a son? A wee bairn?" asked the astonished king. He sobered and continued, "Well, then, yah be right, lad. He be in great danger. Just as Vishnu wanted the Unicorn and the foal, he wants yurself and yur bairn; and why? Tah keep from extinction or for his own managerie. Yah must stay out of his clutches."

Suddenly a ram's horn sounded warning, as the lookout posted by Culmac sent forth an alarm; the seamen from the Temporis were approaching.

"Ah thought they'd be a-comin'. Well, we'll just be waitin' for 'em. Tis nothin' we little folk like more than a good fight," stated Culmac, a twinkle in his eye. Then he smiled and added, "unless 'tis a good mug-a beer."

Terrible screams of agony and grunting animalistic growls emanated from the mountain tunnel and as Vincent and Culmac entered, they saw his men being gored and tossed about. One injured man, trying to flee the carnage, halted long enough to tell his tale.

"Yur Majesty," he cried breathlessly, "Ah swear tah yah, before mah eyes they turned into wild boars. 'Tis lost we are!"

Vincent, running into the tunnel as the growling intensified, echoed and reverberated through the caverns, was attacked from all sides. The wild creatures' eyes glowed in the dark and one charged, catching Vincent in the leg with a hooked tusk. He reached down and twisted the ugly head in one powerful wrench, then held his cape out to confuse them. Another boar charged head-long catching the cape fully. Vincent lifted the squirming boar-body and threw it against the wall where it slammed with a hard wet thud and slid, gore covered, to the cavern floor.

Vincent's leg was bleeding and began to throb as he headed for the mouth of the cave to get help.

Somewhere in the tunnel, there were two more assailants. From out of the shadows he heard a grunt and a whine, as a boar with a little spear stuck in its shoulder, leaped at Vincent, knocking him to the ground. Vincent, bleeding badly as was the boar, realized that this struggle would end only when one of them grew too weak to continue.

Fangs and tusks glistened in the light from the cave entrance as the two rolled and tumbled. Vincent's claws dug into the throat of his one-time companion ripping the coarse hairs and exposing the windpipe. All at once there was another angry grunt coming from overhead. Vincent looked up to see the fourth boar leaping into the fray. Vincent turned his head, anticipating the attack, but Culmac's spear was true and embedded itself deeply into the boar's evil black heart. It fell lifeless to the ground as the boar held tightly in Vincent's grasp went limp.

The battle was over, but at what price? Vincent, wounded several times and bleeding badly, tried to get up, but collapsed into an unconscious heap on the cave floor.

It was like reliving the last five years all over again. All of Vincent's love for Catherine was vibrating through him. All their moments together were vivid; all of her patience and tenderness, revealed. They were standing together on her balcony, the evening breezes blowing softly. He was content at last, so why were voices calling him from this?

"Here is my happiness. This is where I must remain...."

"Vincent, *'please'...*"

"Who is calling me? I need not turn away from Catherine. I need not go back. I will not leave you ever again, my love - my eternity."

Catherine, wearing the white lace dress she'd worn on their first anniversary, was lighting candles. Suddenly, her sweet smile turned grim; alarm kindled in her eyes.

"What is it, Catherine?"

"Jacob!"

He struggled against the memory that one word evoked.

"Vincent, please. Remember, we must rescue Jacob." It was Brigit's voice invading his dream. However annoying, he understood and started to move away from the balcony and Catherine. She was encouraging him with a nod and a smile.

His eyes opened and Brigit smiled down at him. Looking up, he saw the sky filled with millions of stars; the full moon hanging just over the rim of the crater. He lowered his gaze and caught sight of the Unicorn standing not too far off. Vincent could feel his strength returning, almost as though the Unicorn were transfusing him with energy.

His wounds had been cleansed and bound and Culmac made sure he drank a strong stock broth and a hot *toddy*, which promptly put him back to sleep. But this was a deep healing slumber, and when Vincent awoke the next morning, he was surprised at how well he felt.

"Vincent, do yah think yah have the strength tah travel?" asked Brigit. "We fear that if Captain Vishnu doesn't hear from his men soon, he may surmise that somethin' has gone awry."

"Ready or not, I will have to make it. You are right. We should move quickly. He will be waiting for news of

the foal's birth. He knew that the time was near."

"Aye, and yur little one is now his prize possession," agreed Culman, "and the foal would have completed his matched of bairns."

"Well, at least Mariah, her foal, and the Unicorn are safe," observed Vincent.

"For now, Vincent ... for now." There seemed to be a warning in Brigit's words.

King Culmac came over to them and settled himself next to Vincent as he ate a hearty breakfast. "Tis glad ah am tah see yah heal so quickly, lad. There's much tah be done. Now, as ah see it, we have tah get aboard that there ship and rescue yur wee bairn. Any ideas how?"

"I could go aboard and announce the birth of the foal. That would allow me time to find out if he is willing to take Jacob and me home," said Vincent.

"Do yah really think he would do that?" asked Brigit.

"That would be my hope."

"Yur too honorable, lad," quipped Culmac. "Whether or nay yah think yah need it, yah'll be gettin' help. The Sidhe are going tah be helpin'."

"What or who is a Sidhe?" asked Vincent.

"Yur tah be honored, Vincent," said Brigit. "For a Sidhe tah help, yah must have earned their favor. The Sidhe be the faery folk, yah see. They have great powers if they choose. The story goes that they wre the Tuatha de Danan, the gods of the elements... earth, fire, water, and wind. They went into hidin' when other gods and beliefs overcame them. They live there... in the ratha," explained Brigit, pointing to the hills at the foot of the crater. "Am ah right, Culmac?"

"Aye lass, yah are. They care for all the flora and fauna, yah see, and the Unicorn has been under their direct protection, as are all horses. They sometimes take the form of horses... or anythin' else they wish... and they have become most annoyed at Vishnu's constant attempts to kidnap the Unicorn throughout the centuries. 'Tis ready we must be for anythin'. The Sidhe will be a-joinin' us presently."

King Culmac picked five men, all brave and true, and provisioned them with swords of steel and daggers of bronze. They packed food and blankets, and were ready whenever Vincent and Brigit should give the word to leave.

Vincent, still weak, was walking about trying to regain the strength in his legs. He had wandered around a boulder and as he turned to head back toward camp, a beloved voice halted him in his tracks.

"My love, I am ready to go with you."

He turned quickly to find Catherine standing before him. "Catherine?"

"Yes, Vincent. I am allowed to be with you for a short time. The Sidhe wished to please you. They have allowed this because you are their champion. You have fought for the safety of their home and won."

"Are you real?"

"Only until we reach the ship, and you and Jacob are safe, but we do have these few hours," said Catherine. Vincent seemed almost shy. He acted as he had when they first met. "What's wrong, Vincent?"

"I do not know what to do. How do I act with you?"

"You love me and you hold me," answered Catherine, as she stepped into his waiting arms.

"Is it all right?" asked Vincent. He remembered only too well the sensation of her and his need for her. He held her away from him almost ashamed of the feelings.

"It's all right, Vincent. Where I come from, it's what is in a person's heart that counts... the heart, the spirit, the commitment. There is no nobler heart than yours; no purer spirit than yours, and no deeper commitment than ours. We are judged by these things. They are the things of the other world which we possess; not appearance, not custom and not earthly ritual."

She reached up, pulled his head down and kissed him, slowly and deeply as she had always desired in the sunlight.

They walked hand in hand back to the mountain entrance. Brigit, who had been watching them approach, ran to meet them. "Culmac explained that the Sidhe had already begun to work their magic. 'Tis good it is to see you, Catherine."

"Brigit, it's good to see you also. I want to thank you for your part in all this. Your courage shall be rewarded in kind," replied Catherine.

"In kind?" questioned Brigit. Catherine, however, just smiled knowingly and walked past her into the cave without answering.

Culmac was waiting, his men anxious, and the plans set. "It seems we're to be needing one more co-conspirator to make this work," he stated with a wink.

"Culmac, we have a plan, then? Will you share it with us?" inquired Vincent.

"Well now, ah don't rightly know all, but the Sidhe will be revealing it to me as we go along. You must trust in them, my lad."

"She will guide us, Vincent," added Catherine. Vincent was about to ask, "She who?" but was too overwhelmed by the sight and sound of Catherine's presence to argue.

"All is clear ahead, we may leave now." A familiar voice made Brigit freeze as a tall, young Irish lad with black hair and startling blue eyes came from inside the mountain. He stopped short as he saw Brigit. The tears coming from both and the look of love which passed between them left no doubt as to the identity of the newcomer... Ian O'Donnell. Brigit started shaking and teetering and would have collapsed had Ian not reached forward to catch her in his arms.

"In kind," Catherine said softly, tears misting her gaze.

"Now that all this nonsense has been done away with, let's be going," grumbled Culmac. He led the way as the two pairs of lovers followed, completely lost in each other.

The small troupe made it to Bryne Castle without mishap and Culmac directed his men to set up camp.

"Come mornin', ah'll know what we're to do. Now, we eat and you four may go off and... 'do whatever it is that lovers do."

They ate quietly, and after, Catherine and Vincent found a secluded corner, while Brigit and Ian went outside the walls and they did whatever it is that lovers do.

Morning found Catherine locked in Vincent's warm comforting embrace, his cape wrapped around their nakedness. She ran her nails along the nape of his neck bringing a low, rumbling purr from deep within his chest.

"I'll remember this night, my love," he whispered and as he bent to kiss her, their loving interlude was interrupted by a great commotion and a loud angry honking coming from the camp. Dressing quickly, Vincent and Catherine rushed to see what could be the problem. There were the five little men being chased around the campfire by a goose... a large, white goose. King Culmac was sitting on a ledge laughing uproariously and slapping his thigh in glee. It was such a funny sight, they all enjoyed a good laugh, except of course, the five poor fellows who were the target of that sharp vindictive beak.

The goose finally settled herself on a haystack and calmly began preening her feathers. The companions settled down to a breakfast of wonderful fruit and vegetables, that seemed to appear just as suddenly as had the goose.

"The plan has been made known tah me," started Culmac. "'Twill work, but ah canna tell yah all for fear that Vishnu may perceive the outcome. 'Tis most important that he be tricked, so each one of yah will be told yur part and just as much of the plan as yah need tah know. Vincent, will go back aboard the ship, as suggested, and announce the birth of the foal. Ian, will act as one of Vishnu's men and row the dinghy back and forth 'tween the shore and the ship. Brigit, me girl, and ye, Catherine, will be lasses from the countryside, bringin' fresh fruits and vegetables, and yonder goose, supposedly purchased by the seamen. We'll all go down tah the shore and ah will tell yah further there."

They waited at the tower until Ballycastle was asleep. As each member of the party descended the circular stairway, Culmac whispered further instructions. The stage was now set and the actors knew their parts.

Vincent showed Ian where the dinghy had been hidden and everyone assisted in putting it back into the water. Culmac and his men watched from shore as Ian rowed out to the Temporis.

Vincent was allowed aboard after identifying himself and was led into the lounge.

"Vincent, I am happy to see you. Tell me the news," welcomed Captain Vishnu.

"All is well. Mariah followed me as planned. She foaled yesterday - a fine strong son for a fair lady."

"Good! Good!"

"Before I go on, William sent along some provisions from the village. Where may they be taken?" inquired Vincent innocently.

The captain gave the orders to allow the village women aboard and show them to the galley where they could leave the goose and empty their baskets.

"Now, Vincent, all that is left is for you to bring Mariah and her foal aboard. Then we can get under way."

"Tomorrow. We will start moving them, tomorrow. The foal is only now just finding his legs," said Vincent.

"But how do you intend to get her on board?"

"Quite simply! The air chamber has a moving platform down to..."

There was a sudden loud commotion at the hatch. Captain Vishnu went to the door of the lounge and peered down the passageway to see two pretty village maids being chased by an angry crewman.

"Come back here! That's not the way out! You can't come this way!"

One of the maids nearly ran right into the captain. "What is it, child? What do you want?"

Brigit came forward, pulling a crying Catherine. "Sir, we need tah bring our baskets back. Katie, here, forgot hers, and father will take a stick tah her if she donna have it when we return."

"All right, all right. By all means, get your basket," Vishnu declared, annoyed at the interruption.

"Oh, thank yah, sir... thank you," managed Catherine, as she ran back toward the galley.

"Captain, may I ask that I spend an hour with my son before I go back? The dinghy can return the young ladies to shore and come back for me."

"I would enjoy your company," said the captain and then in a louder voice to a sailor, "Have the dinghy return for Vincent."

"Thank you, sir. May I ask, If there are any plans to return my son and me to our home?"

"Well, not for a while yet. You will be taken back when we're in the waters near your shore. Are you so anxious to leave us, then?"

"Everything here has been delightful, and I have seen things I have only read about, but I do miss my loved ones," replied Vincent. "May I see Jacob now?"

"Of course, but he's sleeping right now. Perhaps I will accompany you. You know, I've become very attached to that little boy."

The two men walked in silence down the passageway to the cabin door. Vincent opened it slowly and even in the dark, could see that Jacob was sleeping peacefully.

"Here, let me turn on a light so you may see him more clearly," offered Vishnu reaching for the wall switch.

"No," Vincent whispered hastily. "That will not be necessary. I can see him quite clearly."

"Perhaps, but I need to see him." The captain turned on a small table lamp and crossed the room to the bunk to check on Jacob. "Come in, Vincent. See for yourself. We've taken very good care of him," Vishnu whispered, gesturing for Vincent to join him at Jacob's bedside.

Vincent, wanting to grab hold of his son and run, knew they would never be able to get out the hatch if Captain Vishnu gave orders to stop him. No, he would wait for the completion of the plan.

"Shall we play a game of chess while Jacob gets a bit more sleep? We can play right here so you can watch him," suggested Vishnu.

So you can watch both of us, thought Vincent. He didn't know how his friends could get Jacob off the ship with both of them in the cabin.

"I would just as soon go back to the lounge," said Vincent.

"I think not. You deserve to spend time here," countered the captain, as he gave the order to a passing sailor to bring in the chess set.

Vincent wondered if Vishnu suspected something - that would never do - but he had no choice. He would have to go along with the suggestion.

A light meal and tea were brought in with the chess set, and the men spent two delightful hours playing and conversing. Jacob became restless and finally woke up. He ran to Vincent and they had a joyous reunion.

"Daddy! Daddy! love you! We go now?" said Jacob, as he grabbed one fur-covered finger and slid down off Vincent's lap.

"I have missed you, too, Jacob," said Vincent, as he pulled his son onto his lap and held him close. "We can't go just yet, but I will be back tomorrow." He rocked Jacob until he fell back to sleep and then returned him to his bunk.

Captain Vishnu watched and seemed satisfied that Vincent was sincere. Just then, word came that the dinghy had returned for Vincent.

"It is time for you to leave. This has been the most pleasant interlude for me, Vincent. I look forward to the time when we can spend several evenings thus."

Vincent almost panicked. Something must have gone wrong with the plan because Jacob was still on board. Despite his misgivings, he could not display his feelings. All he could do was go up the hatch and into the waiting dinghy.

Ian rowed swiftly away from the submarine. When they were a safe distance from the ship, Vincent asked, "Did something go wrong? Jacob is still on board."

"No. All went accordin' tah plan. 'Tis just yurself we need tah get safely tah shore," replied Ian.

"I can attest to that," said Catherine, as she popped her head out from under a tarp. "Jacob is quite safe on shore. I took him myself in the basket."

"But I just left him..."

"Have yah no heard of a changeling, Vincent?" added Brigit, smiling broadly as she joined Catherine on a seat.

"A changeling?" queried Vincent.

"Aye, yah great oaf, a changeling. The goose was a Sidhe who can change into any form she chooses. Right now she's '*Jacob*' sleeping peacefully on a bunk in yonder cabin."

"Why wasn't I told?" asked Vincent. "I almost tried to take him with me."

"Yah weren't told, because yah don't lie well, Vincent," teased Brigit, a twinkle in her eye.

"You don't lie at all, my love," said Catherine, as she snuggled next to him. "We have just the time it will take to get to shore. Hold me close."

Ian stopped rowing as he and Brigit kissed. They would have stayed there, still in the water, if it weren't that they were yet vulnerable to Captain Vishnu. Reluctantly, Ian started rowing again. "Jacob is waiting for yah," he said.

The lovers were savoring each moment that was left to them. Their time together was too short, yet they had to be grateful for those two days. As they neared shore, Vincent got out of the dinghy to guide it through the rocks.

He steadied it and turned to help Brigit. She was still holding his hand as a wind started to blow with gale force.

"Look! Look at the Temporis!" shouted Culmac from shore.

A white goose was circling over the ship. The clouds were gathering, black and ominous. As they all watched, the white filmy form of a woman emerged from the goose. Her long hair was flowing and her arms were outspread as she called out, "Maldowwyn! Maldowwyn! He is here - we are avenged."

The sea and sky seemed one as the water surged up and turned over in one gigantic wave. The *Temporis Collectus* vanished in the giant swell, as did the dinghy containing Catherine and Ian. Vincent just barely pulled Brigit out before it was swept away.

The little group on shore was stunned by the power and the swiftness of the sea.

"She called on her brother, the god of the waters. Ah told yah she was powerful," explained Culmac. He started dancing in a little circle all the while chanting, "That'll teach yah, Vishnu, tah invade the waters of Kire. That'll teach yah tah rob the Tuatha de Danann. That'll teach yah tah give up yur centuries-long quest. The Unicorn is ours."

Brigit was screaming "**lan!**" and Vincent was on his knees, roaring his pain at losing Catherine yet again.

"Don't cry, Daddy. Jacob loves you." The little boy, trying to snuggle under Vincent's cape, started crying, too. "Pretty lady all gone."

All fell silent, as they tried to recover from the sight they had just witnessed.

"Three hundred days, or only two, we must be grateful, Vincent," comforted Brigit.

"It was just so swift. One minute she was smiling up at me and the next she was gone, but I will always remember these days in Ireland with my Catherine in my arms."

"I am glad of that," said a beautiful, petite woman as she appeared before them.

"You two are the best and most honorable of mortals. I weep with you. You should never have been allowed to feel such sorrow and I shall do what is in my power to ease it."

"What are you?" asked Vincent.

"I am Fay, of the faery folk."

She then touched Jacob's head and smiled. Brigit held out her hand and Fay touched it lightly as she floated upward and disappeared like a wisp of smoke.

"'Twill be gettin' light soon and Ballycastle will awaken. We must be startin' back," reminded Culmac.

Reluctantly, they started the journey back to the mountains. Vincent and Brigit stopped once to look out to the sea, but soon the mountains stole that sight from view.

The black rugged mountains stood out against the rose colored sky of dawn. Vincent had faced the dawns of the past days in awe and wonder, but it went unnoticed on that particular morning. The small band had made its way from the sea through Ballycastle and the outpost pass up to the mountains. They trod along silently until they arrived at Bryne Castle. That old ruin once again became the place to rest and have a meal. Culmac and his five men were busy arranging straw and pulling food from hidden caches. Little Jacob was intrigued by these men who were his size and he decided to help them.

Brigit and Vincent were lost in their memories of the night they had spent there in the arms of their loved ones. Ian and Catherine had indeed been there with them, but once again life goes on in aloneness.

"Can yah still feel her? Do yur arms still hold her substance, Vincent?" asked Brigit.

"Yes, answered Vincent as he knelt on one knee and reached down to touch the ground where he and Catherine had lain.

"Ah know. Ah can feel Ian's embrace and his kiss. The love is always just beneath the surface. 'Twas so easily aroused. Sweet pain," said Brigit with a sad smile.

"That night will remain with me forever," said Vincent. "You were right. It is sweet pain."

The small body of a little boy hurled itself at Vincent, interrupting the memories. "Beckfass! Time to eat, Daddy."

Brigit cupped Jacob's face in her hands and said, "'Tis a true gift he is. Catherine loved holdin' him; she even sang tah him on the way tah shore from the *Collectus*. 'Tis happy ah am tah have been a part of that moment. She was radiant."

"I have seen this in my dreams, her sweet face aglow with love," said Vincent, as he followed Jacob to the morning meal.

There was a feeling of the tying together of loose ends. Culmac was making sure they had left no trace of their presence. "It must be as if we were never here. Once we reach the Cauldron, we shall disappear to all mortal eyes. So, Vincent, what will yah do about now?"

"Somehow, I must find my way home."

King Culmac furrowed his brow and reached his hand up to touch Vincent's fingers. He said in a low, serious tone. "Lad, yur more than welcome tah stay with us. Yur our champion. The Cauldron is yours."

"That is kind of you, but those who love us must be suffering because they think we are dead. I know this pain and I will not let them endure it one moment longer than necessary."

"Spoken like a true and noble knight," commented Culmac, nodding. "Ah expected no less of yah, lad."

Drawing his sword, King Culmac hopped up onto a stone stile and, requesting that Vincent kneel before him, proceeded to dub him '*Sir Vincent, Knight of Empathic Sorrow.*' "Yah not only bear yur own sorrow, yah bear the sorrow of others as well. Rise, Sir Vincent."

"Congratulations, Vincent," said Brigit. "Tis now official; yur a peer of the faery folk. There's naught they won't do for yah, now."

"Nothin'," said Culmac with a twinkle in his eye.

They left Bryne Castle, Vincent and Brigit turning often to recapture that night of love.

It was late afternoon by the time they reached Trualee Glen. Another meal was offered and accepted after which eyelids became very heavy. There was nothing to be done but to take a well-earned nap. Jacob snuggled next to his father as Vincent covered him and Brigit with his cape.

The moon had just crested the canyon, flooding the floor with light. Slowly, Vincent opened his eyes and then stretched. Jacob began wiggling, as he tried to get closer to his father once again. He pulled on the cape and Brigit woke up as her back felt the chill. She yawned and rubbed her eyes.

"Vincent? Are you awake?"

"Yes."

"What a wonderful nap. I feel very rested," commented Brigit.

Vincent sat up and had no trouble seeing the glen. "Brigit, we are alone. Culmac and his men are gone."

He got up and went to the wall with the crevice, but there was no crevice. It was as though it had sealed itself.

"Culmac did say they would no longer be visible to mortal eyes," remembered Vincent.

"He did that," replied Brigit. "What are we tah do now?"

"I can't believe they would abandon us. I somehow know we will find the way." With that, they heard hearty laughter.

"Where's that comin' from?" asked Brigit. "We must be careful. These mountains are full of brigands."

"I will look into it," said Vincent.

"Not without us!" exclaimed Brigit as she scooped up Jacob, cape and all.

PART THREE

Voices... coming from somewhere beyond the canyon walls and as Vincent followed the sound, a passage seemed to open before him, the terrain changing to foothills with jagged rock projections. Carrying Jacob, Brigit stayed close to Vincent. He stopped and held out an arm to warn her.

"What is it, Vincent?" she whispered.

"Listen... laughter. It sounds very sinister. I would imagine pirates sound much like that," replied Vincent quietly.

"Tis careful we must be then," said Brigit as she gestured to a reflection of dancing flames on a large rock formation. They were closer than she had thought.

They crept to a place where they could look into the campsite.

"Well now, by all the saints!" exclaimed Brigit.

"What is it? Do you know them, Brigit?"

"Aye, that ah do, sure enough. There's Paddy O'Neill and yon is Johnny Ryan. 'Tis the croppies; the very gang me father ran with," she explained.

"Friend or foe?" asked Vincent.

"Now, that's hard tah say. 'Twill all depend on how they look on me; me father's daughter or Ian's widow, but if ah play me cards right, they may just be your ticket home."

"And if they don't wish to play your card game? What will happen to you?" asked Vincent.

"Well then, it could be a wee bit unpleasant," responded Brigit. "But ah think ah've got more than a fifty-fifty chance. Yah see, Paddy once asked me tah marry him. Ah think twould be best if ah went down there alone."

Vincent started to protest, but Brigit hushed him and continued. "Vincent, firstly, if they saw you, they may shoot first and ask questions later. Secondly, ah would no be a threat tah them and they may just hear me out - out of respect for me father if nothin' else. You and Jacob stay here, safe. Ah'll come for yah when 'tis safe, when ah feel that marvelous face of yours won't send those daft croppies into a panic."

"Are you sure you want to do this?" asked Vincent worriedly.

"'Twouldn't be doin' it if 'twould bring danger tah you and little Jacob, besides, ah's lookin' forward tah meetin' Paddy again. You and Jacob rest; ah'll be back 'fore yah can get a good nap," Brigit assured Vincent, as she bravely sauntered toward the croppies' camp.

Vincent watched as Brigit disappeared between two large rocks. He could still hear the voices and nothing seemed to be alarming them. Taking Jacob in his arms and covering them both with his cape, Vincent rested his head against a rock. He stayed alert for a time, but there didn't seem to be any cause for alarm and he soon drifted off to sleep.

When Brigit was behind the rock and no longer in Vincent's view, she stopped for a moment to catch her breath. Head held high, she squared her shoulders and started slowly forward. She hadn't told Vincent that Paddy had a terrible temper and had never quite gotten over the humiliation of being rejected.

"Well, as I live and breath, if it isn't Paddy O'Neill," said Brigit brightly, as if they had just bumped into each other on a street in Belfast.

Whirling around, automatic weapon held in front of him, Paddy whipped around to face Brigit. "Stay put, girl, or ah'll have tah use this."

"Ah wouldn't think of movin', but what are yah doin' that for? 'Tis me, Brigit O'Donnell. Where would ah be goin'?" questioned Brigit, trying to be as nonchalant as one could be staring down the barrel of a gun.

"'Tis not where yah are goin' that concerns me, but where yah comin' from? What yah be doin' here and who yah be with?"

"Twas with some friendds... campin'. We got separated and ah wandered around a bit looking for 'em when ah heard voices. I headed for the voices, and, lo and behold, ah walked straight into your camp," explained Brigit.

"And just who be yur friends?"

"Acquaintances from America, if yah really must know. Yah have nothin' tah fear from them or from me, Paddy O'Neill."

"Ah can't say the same for you, me darlin'," threatened Paddy, as he grabbed Brigit's right arm and twisted it behind her back, pulling her hard against his chest.

"Well, at least you put the gun aside," said Brigit, a bit relieved.

"Yah don't think ah can have mah way with yah, girl? Ah could break yah in two with mah bare hands," threatened Paddy.

Brigit began to panic as she realized that he had changed, had become sadistic and unpredictable. Her next thought, however, was that she had to remain in control of this situation.

"Yur still bullyin' yur way around, no different from when we were in fourth grade."

"But, ah'm not ten. Ah'm a man full grown, starin' in the eyes of the woman ah've loved and hated for nigh-on five years. Ah'm a man," he said, as he let go of Brigit's arm and grabbed her hair, pulling her head back.

"Maybe, but yah act just like a ten-year-old."

With one sweep, Paddy threw Brigit to the ground. She lay, huddled against the base of a rock. She had to think! It would not be a good idea to do anything to rouse Vincent, for surely the guns would be blazing before he could get to her. She was in this alone. '*... Try to remain calm...*,' she thought, '*...Keep your senses about yah...*'

"Which is it now, Paddy? Hate or love? Did yah enjoy hurtin' me?"

"Ah'll never get enough of hurtin' yah."

"Because I couldn't marry yah?" asked Brigit. "Did yah want me without love in mah heart?"

"Yah disgraced me, girl. 'Tis mine yah were. All knew yah were mine and yah loved an Orangeman."

"A body can't always choose who will win yur heart," replied Brigit sadly.

"Well, ah stopped yur nights o'lyin' with him, and ah stopped his touchin' yah as only ah should have, and ah stopped his mouth from coverin' yours. It dinna matter which one of yah got in that car; ah had tah stop the shame of it." spewed Paddy with all the venom in him.

Brigit caught her breath. Her head was reeling. Ian's murderer was standing before her. She was losing sensibility and could no longer think clearly. Rage was taking over. First to go was her hearing, and then her vision became pinpointed like looking down a long tunnel. Only Paddy stood clearly in view, all else was a black blur. Her lips started throbbing and her fingers swelled as her hands took on the semblance of claws. Power exuded from her as her breathing became rapid and from somewhere deep within came a frightening sound. She sprang at Paddy, nails embedding into his cheeks and teeth sinking into the hand he thrust out before him for protection.

Vincent's head shot up as he heard Brigit's banshee howl, but, he was at a loss. What should he do? He couldn't leave Jacob alone, and yet to rush in with his child in his arms would be an even greater danger. He was struggling to control the Beast, so that he could do what would be best for all of them. Almost without his knowledge, a mighty roar escaped his throat.

Back in the camp, all hell had broken loose. The croppies started shooting at the sound of the wild animal that seemed about to descend on them. They were aiming and shooting into the black shadows of the rocks surrounding them. Paddy screamed in pain as he drew his pistol and would have shot Brigit in the breast, even as he pressed the cold steel against her flesh, had the bullets of a sten had not whizzed past his head. He fell to the ground taking Brigit with him, searching the gloom for the source of the barrage.

A booming voice managed to penetrate the din. **"Quiet! Quiet! Yah great pack of dithering dolts! Ah leave yah for a day and what do ah find when ah return, but the pack of yah trying tah kill yurselves."**

Out of the shadows stepped a man of considerable height and breadth, with rugged features and piercing eyes. Obviously the leader of this little band, he wielded power with an authority which commanded respect.

"Let the lass up, Paddy. Now, just what yah be shootin' at? An animal yah can't even see?"

"Michael, glad ah am tah see yah made it back safe," exclaimed Paddy, as a change came over him. He lifted Brigit to her feet and asked if she was unharmed. Except for shaking and seething tears, she had escaped the melee unscathed.

The man came directly to Brigit. "Well, me darlin', let me get a good look at yah!"

There was something familiar about him. Brigit knew him from somewhere and the thought tugged at her heart at recognition.

"Mickey? Uncle Mickey?" was all she could say, as a glimmer of recognition dawned on her.

"Aye, sweet girl. Tis yur Uncle Mickey."

"But, 'tis twenty years yah been dead!" exclaimed Brigit.

"Come, give me a hug, lass, and see fur yurself."

Brigit gladly accepted the invitation and felt lucky to be engulfed safely in those enormous arms. This was her father's brother, but more, he was the first boy on which she had a crush.

Michael O'Reilly was just nine years older than his niece and had started fighting with the IRA when he was fifteen. He would pop in on his brother's family from time to time, with hero's tales and a hero's swagger.

Brigit would stay in the shadows and stare in awe, feeling shy and awkward. He seemed to grow taller and more handsome with each visit and his laughter seemed to tinkle off the windowpanes. For all of his swagger and bravado, there was also a sadness. He missed his home and family and it was always Brigit who would eventually seek out his gentle heart.

She always thought of him as the gentle giant who was an outcast and because of this understanding, they became very close. He would bring her little presents, given in secret so that the others would not know that she was his favorite.

Then the ever present danger became a reality, the Brits put a price on his head. Brigit, just ten years old, came to the determination that being an outlaw or outcast does not make a person bad because she knew her Uncle Mickey had a great, good heart. She never saw him after that and a year later, the family received word that he had been killed while on a raid. Suddenly, there was no glory in war for Brigit, especially this senseless war between neighbors.

"You're alive? You've been alive all these years?"

"Aye, livin' the grand life of a renegade," replied Michael, smiling.

"And all these years, Da kept your secret? He ne'er said a word, not even on his deathbed."

"Were you with him, then Brigit, at the end?" asked her uncle.

"Aye."

"'Tis glad ah am that yah made it up with him. Yur separation was breakin' his heart."

"As all this keeps breakin' mine," replied Brigit.

They sat together filling in the years and when Brigit was sure that his soul had not really changed, she told him of her friend, Vincent, waiting in the shadow.

Just in time, too for Vincent had decided he could no longer abide not knowing what has happened to Brigit. He jumped down from the rocks into their midst, cape flying, startling everyone.

"Hold your fire!" shouted Michael as he realized this must be the friend about whom Brigit was speaking.

"Well, she did say yah were interestin'. That's one way o'puttin' it, ah guess," said Michael as he walked over to face Vincent.

The two men stood face to face, staring into each other's eyes. Vincent only saw a twinkle of kindness in the man's eyes and relaxed, then moved his gaze to Brigit. She nodded and smiled.

"Ah's just fine, Vincent," she reassured.

Jacob, thinking it was great fun to leap through the air in his father's arms, was laughing and bouncing about. It was very difficult for Vincent to look menacing and fierce with all of Jacob's antics.

Michael put his hands on his hips, threw back his head and roared with laughter. Soon Brigit joined in, and they both escorted Vincent to the campfire. After sharing their meager rations, Vincent and Brigit retold the tale of their adventures and the magical events.

"It hardly bears believin, and if 'twere 'tah have happened anywhere but here, ah'd say a pack o'lies. But ah do know better and ah believe yah tah be one o'the favoured," Michael said to Vincent. "Besides... me girl here, sees into a man's heart and she calls yah friend. 'Tis enough."

He gave them his own sleeping place in a recess among the rocks and kept watch throughout the night. He did not trust Paddy O'Neill.

Vincent woke and became aware of movement about the camp. He lay there watching, as the men packed up and left by twos and threes. Michael then came and woke Brigit, turned and motioned for her to follow. They spoke for a few moments and Brigit returned to explain the plan to Vincent.

"Ah must return tah Belfast for a few days. While we're there, we'll see about gettin' yah home."

"Brigit, you will be safe?" asked Vincent.

"Aye, Vincent. Bein' with me Uncle Mickey is like bein' in me own mother's arms. Please, now, yah must stay here and ah'll return... hopefully with yur passage."

"How?"

"Uncle Mickey knows a way. Ah must make the arrangements. There's food aplenty for yah and this be a good secluded hideout. Ah'll see yah in two days' time."

So it was that Vincent stood and watched as all vanished into the mist as if by magic, leaving him and Jacob to wait out the days until Brigit's return.

As the day warmed and the sun sparkled, Vincent decided to explore his surroundings. It was great fun and he thoroughly enjoyed just sitting in the warm sunshine, the wind blowing through his hair. Jacob ran into the meadow chasing whatever caught his eye.

Suddenly, Jacob stopped and pointed. He called out, "Pretty Lady! Daddy, Pretty Lady!"

Vincent was at his side in two steps. "What is it, Jacob?" he asked. It was then he noticed a swift stream hidden by tall grasses. He shuddered to think how close Jacob had come to such watery danger.

"Pretty Lady!" Jacob repeated pointing down.

Vincent looked into the rippling water and saw Catherine's face smiling up at them. He was visibly shaken as he reached toward the vision. It might have been just his imagination, like all those other countless times throughout the past two years, but Jacob had seen her first; he had seen her and it stopped him from falling

into the water.

"Are you all right, Jacob?" asked Vincent, as he checked over his son.

"Pretty Lady all gone," Jacob pouted. As soon as Jacob was safe, Catherine had vanished.

There was no explanation for this, but then there had been no explanation for anything since that night in the Crystal Cavern.

"Thank you, Catherine," was all Vincent could say, as he sat there clutching their son. Chills ran down his spine as he realized that she was with them.

Brigit returned late the next afternoon, alone. Vincent was very happy to see her, as that whole day had been spent thinking of home, Father, Mary, Mouse, Jamie and all his family. As he had once told Devin, it *is* possible to miss a hold in the ground.... when that hole in the ground is home.

"Ah don't know all the details, yet, but Uncle Mickey is arrangin' everythin'. Ah had tah get mah passport and then ah called mah agent tah set up a signin' tour in America, so ah have a good excuse for bein' there."

"Are you coming with us then?"

"Aye! Of course. Ah couldna rest 'till both of yah were safe. Anyway, ah'm the only one with legal access into the country."

"Brigit, we can't legally enter the country. I mean, I can't take any conventional means to get... How am I going to travel and, what about *my* passport and Jacob's? This is almost funny."

Vincent was getting irritated as he started to vocalize all the questions that had plagued him throughout the day.

"Vincent, do yah remember, once ah told yah that me father had been to America several times, all of them illegally?"

"Yes."

"Well, it seems that there's a regular smugglin' route set up between here and the States. They go back and forth all the time. We're goin' on the next trip."

"How are we going to get there?" asked Vincent beginning to worry a little.

"Probably every means of transportation yah can think of," stated Brigit, grinning.

"Airplanes?" questioned Vincent.

"Ay, ah'm sure," she replied.

"Oh!" said Vincent softly, more excited, but still a little fearful.

"Uncle Mickey'll be here tomorrow mornin' and we will have tah be ready, as 'tis a good night's sleep we should be gettin'."

Michael O'Reilly returned alone; the fewer people who knew of this venture the better. It took them the better part of the next day to reach a hidden airstrip. They relaxed in the woods surrounding the clearing until dark. It was a moonless night and as dampness was rising from the matted leaves on which they were sitting. Jacob, restless and cold, began to cry.

"Yah must keep the child quiet, now lad. 'Tis silent as church mice we must be," admonished Michael. "We canna be detected, 'tis still early in the evenin'."

Vincent got up and started pacing. Jacob held close in his arms, hoping to lull him to sleep. He walked to the bank of a small river not far away, which was falling gently over little rock ledges.

Slip... lash... slip, lash. The sound repeated over and over. mesmerizingly. Slip, lash... *'Sleep my little one, Rest now my little one, Close your eyes, The day is nearly done, Rest your head, Tomorrow will surely come.'*

The lullaby was repeated before Vincent realized what he was hearing, but by that time Jacob was sleeping soundly in his arms.

"Sleep, Jacob. We will soon be leaving this land where what seems to be... isn't, and what can't be... is. If we stay much longer, I might prefer this loving insanity."

Vincent returned to the edge of the clearing where the rest of the band waited.

Michael turned and whispered, "'Tis time tah light the signal fires. Vincent, yah take the near side of the runway. Light all the firepots, they're buried about every ten feet. Ah'll take the far side." And with that, he ran out into the clearing. Vincent passed Jacob's sleeping form to Brigit and followed, taking the lighted torch Michael handed him. They proceeded down the runway, lighting every pot and hurried to return to where Brigit waited. Before Vincent got halfway, the drone of an engine could be heard and he turned to see a plane touch down and whiz past him. He ran to catch it, not really believing he was actually going to board this craft and soar into the sky.

"Vincent, hurry! We can't chance stayin' on the ground too long." shouted Michael, as they both ran to the waiting doors. By the time they reached the plane, Brigit and Jacob were already in the two small passenger seats behind the pilot.

Vincent noticed that this was a small, single-engined aircraft and as he reached up to heave his massive body into the seat, the plane seemed to tip slightly. *'Not very solid... too flimsy,'* he thought, as his throat constricted and his mouth grew dry.

"Buckle up," said the pilot, as he began to taxi down the runway. Brigit and Jacob waved to Michael, but Vincent stared straight ahead. Finally, Brigit reached forward, took the seatbelt from Vincent and buckled him in.

"'Tis best tah keep the belt on in a craft such as this. We're goin' tah get bounced around a bit as we cross the ocean," explained the pilot.

Vincent never had a chance to react to the word *'bounced'*, as the plane started to lift off and his stomach dropped to the ground as the plane ascended. He was glad his hood was up, covering his face, for he was sure he looked as green as he felt. Soon the plane leveled off and they were flying through the billowy cloud cover. It was fairly smooth, and except for the constant vibration of the engine, rather enjoyable.

Jacob started screaming and rubbing his ears and Brigit had all she could do to comfort him. He finally fell asleep and all was quiet.

Vincent decided that this new aspect to their adventure might not be so bad, and unclenching his hands from the seat, tried moving. This seemed to cause no problem, as he ventured to look out the side window where far below lay a city, its lights strung out like jewels against a black velvet background.

"'Tis Land's End down there," offered the pilot. "Yah can see the ocean there, then we're on tah Iceland where we refuel. So, you're Sean O'Reilly's girl. Many's the time we made this trip together, Sean and me. 'Tis glad ah am tah meet yah, lass. Now there's no need tah worry 'bout me, ah don't ask questions. Ah do mah job and keep mah mouth shut. 'Tis a good thing tah keep yur hood up, though, boy'o - that way ah have no idea who yah might be. Makes no difference tah me. After yah've done this for as long as ah have yah get used tah just about anythin'." With that the pilot grew silent and all was quiet as fatigue fully claimed Brigit and Vincent and they both drifted off to sleep.

Twenty-four hours after leaving Ireland, the little airplane prepared for a landing in Newfoundland. They had refueled in both Iceland and Greenland, where every attention was given that their arrival be under the shroud of darkness. This schedule sometimes allowed them to get out of the plane and stretch a bit and, like the pilot, those meeting them on the ground asked no questions; they just went quietly about their business of refueling the plane. Vincent quickly adjusted to flying and was enjoying the experience; however, not all was going well.

It did not take Jacob long to realize the ascending and descending was causing discomfort in his ears. Both Brigit and Vincent had all they could do to get him back in his seat for takeoff. Once airborne, keeping that little bundle of power and energy occupied was yet another problem. Jacob was one happy little boy when they waved goodbye and started walking down the road according to the pilot's instructions.

Hearing an approaching noise, Vincent ran behind a stone wall beside the road. Brigit waited as a haywagon drew near. At a signal from the driver, she and Jacob climbed into the hay as the wagon turned around and she gestured frantically for Vincent to join them. It seemed as though he flew from the tip of the wall to land quietly in the wagon alongside them.

"We're on our way to the harbor. From there we'll get a boat to Nova Scotia," explained Brigit.

"Still a ways to go, but at least we're on the right side of the ocean, Jacob," commented Vincent.

The three of them stretched out in the comfortable straw; it felt wonderful after being cooped up in that little cockpit for twenty-four hours. A sliver of silver moon from time-to-time peeked from behind clouds and the air smelled of saltwater. The rocking of the wagon turned into a large cradle and Brigit needed to be shaken awake by the driver, when they arrived at the little cove just the other side of a bluff from a fishing village.

"Lass, yah best be gettin' up the big fella and babe. Glad I am yah had time tah rest. Hope yur crossin' will be smooth and safe. 'Tis a pleasure it's been tah meet the daughter o' Sean O'Reilly."

With that he faced forward, as Vincent jumped off the back of the wagon and helped Jacob and Brigit to the ground. They watched as the wagon turned and faded into the morning mist.

"Fast! Fast! This way!"

Following the sound, the travellers walked toward the water to find a rowboat waiting for them.

"Hurry, we need to get you on board the boat before the town wakes."

So it was that they soon found themselves in the forward cabin of the small fishing vessel, where lanyards and the anchor winch were housed. No one came near the cabin, once the young man who rowed them from the cove showed them to the cabin, gave them some breakfast and then locked them in. The air became stagnant and the rocking motion in the bow of the boat was more pronounced. It was hot and they were soon sweating and uncomfortable - and little Jacob was getting sick.

Brigit was about to pound on the cabin door when they realized that the engines were slowing, to be followed by the definite, bumping of the boat against a dock. All were silent; they waited apprehensively. Soon there was the sound of a winch groaning and screeching.

"They're unloading their catch; I can hear their voices. The boat will soon be empty and the crew will go ashore. They probably can't wait to get drunk," said Vincent distastefully.

Finally, a key turned in the lock and the door opened, reviving the little group, as fresh air rushed into the stifling confines of the cabin.

"I'm sorry for your discomfort, but we couldn't chance that any of the crew might find you. I'm Captain Cavanaugh. It was my son, Thomas, who brought you aboard."

"Ah'm Brigit, and this is...."

"No need, girl. What I don't know, I can't speak of. I am pleased to meet you, though," interrupted the Captain. "I have supper waitin' for you."

When they got on deck, the Captain pointed to a bus parked on the dock. "That's your transport to Halifax. It brought a chartered tour here for a boat excursion north, then it returns empty tonight. They driver will be sitting on the piling whistlin' and whittlin' when it's safe for you to leave. You must call him by name... Jim... and he will know you by name. You'll be safe here until then. No one will return to the boat 'till mornin'."

With that he left them to the freedom of the little fishing vessel. It felt good to walk the deck; to not be traveling for awhile, however, short-lived. Around two in the morning, Vincent heard whistling and woke Brigit.

She quietly made her way down the gangplank and along the dock, until she was facing the man sitting on the piling.

"Yah seem wide awake for it bein' so late, Jim," said Brigit, holding her breath.

"I could say the same, Brigit. Is it a bit of trip you're ready for?" queried Jim.

"Well, how about a wee bus ride tah Halifax?" she countered.

"Right this way, me Lady," said Jim, as he jumped off the piling and gave a mock bow.

Brigit laughed and motioned for Vincent and Jacob to follow. They boarded the bus and Jim suggested that they stay in the back until they got out to the countryside.

The suggestion seemed prophetic, as Jim stopped the bus to pick up a young man standing in the middle of the road waving his arms.

"What can I do for you?" Jim asked as he stopped the bus and opened the doors.

"Who about a drop-off at the barracks in Sydney?" asked a large young man, dressed in a Mounted Police uniform. He stepped up into the bus and sat his large frame in a front seat near the door. Jim nodded, closed the doors and continued on his way.

Brigit and Vincent, laying across their seats in the darkness at the rear of the bus were very grateful that Jacob was sleeping. They had no idea how far Sydney was, or how long they had to stay quiet.

Jim and Corporal McGreggor were engaged in pleasant conversation and there didn't seem to be any immediate cause for alarm, so Vincent decided to relax. He took a deep breath and closed his eyes; just then Jacob cried out in his sleep. He turned over, sat up and cried out again, never really waking.

Brigit and Vincent looked at each other across the aisle. They dared not sit up to see what effect the sound had on the corporal. Vincent held Jacob close and hugged the seat cushion. Suddenly, the bus stopped, brakes screeching. They felt helpless as they waited to be discovered.

The door opened and closed as they heard Jim say goodbye and restarted the bus.

"All's clear! I think you can move up front now, if you wish?"

"Jim, what happened?" asked Brigit as she moved forward.

"We're required to give the police a lift between cities. There's a big station in Sydney. This happens sometimes; nothin' to be concerned about," explained Jim.

"What about the baby crying out?" asked Brigit.

"That was pure luck. I was just pullin' into the station and started slowin' down. Did you no hear the brakes

squeal? What's one more squeal? The babe just happened to start before I put my foot on the brakes; Corporal McGregor never heard a thing."

"Ah thought we were goners for sure," said Brigit.

"Well, now you can just sit back and enjoy the rest o' the trip."

Just before dawn, the bus stopped at the edge of the cliffs north of Halifax.

"This is where we part company," Jim announced.

They got out of the bus and Jim walked them to a spot where two bluffs seemed to meet. They looked over the edge and saw wooden steps descending at steep, perpendicular angles.

"At the base of this cliff is a small cabin on a narrow strip of land. That's where you will wait 'till Danny picks you up. I can't tell you when that might be, though; he's the reckless sort. Just be ready. Well, good luck to you, Brigit; and to you and the boy, sir." With that, Jim boarded the bus, smiled, waved farewell and drove off.

Descending those rickety-looking steps was no easy matter and Brigit looked forward to a quiet rest in the cabin, but this was not to be, for smiling up at them from the bottom was the devil-may-care face of Danny Stewart. He had been watching from the time Brigit, Vincent and Jacob started the descent and had gotten a very good look at Vincent. He wasn't the least bit alarmed, as alarm wasn't in his nature.

"Well, how do you do? I'm Danny Stewart," he said extending a hand to Vincent.

Vincent held back a little, but finally offered his hand. "I'm Vincent. This is Brigit and Jacob."

"Oh, I know of Brigit. I've heard a lot about her over the years. I want you all to relax and enjoy," said Danny with an impish smile, as he led the way toward a grotto where an inboard cabin cruiser was moored, waiting for them. They could see the opening where the grotto emptied into the ocean as they wearily boarded the gently bobbing boat.

"We must be out of here before high tide. Now... we can play it safe and hug the shore three miles out, or we can strike straight across the ocean." He grinned rakishly and continued, "Weather reports are pretty good, we'll chance the ocean."

That was the last thing Brigit remembered for the next twelve hours. She found that sailing the Atlantic at break-neck speed was not her '*cup of tea*'. She was quite ill and stayed in the tiny cabin with the porthole open a bit.

Vincent, on the other hand, found it extremely invigorating and spent as much time as possible out on the prow with the wind blowing through his hair, riding the waves as the small craft rose to meet them.

Jacob, safely esconced in the wheelhouse with Danny, didn't like the wind blowing with such force and after he fell asleep, Danny strapped him to a bunk, lashed the wheel and took some hot coffee to Vincent.

"I'm not one to ask questions ordinarily, you see, but you're a magnificent sight standing there. Were you born like that?" asked Danny.

"Yes."

"Tak! That's too bad. Here I was hopin' to ask where I could get some of whatever it is that made you that way."

Vincent started to laugh. He had never encountered this kind of reaction to his appearance. What followed was a time filled with good conversation and understanding; the two men could have become good friends under less trying circumstances.

Later, Vincent, wanting to learn some of the fine points of navigating took the wheel. He was standing attentively at the helm when Danny pointed to a beacon.

"Montauk!" exclaimed Danny.

"Long Island?" asked Vincent.

"That's right!"

"So close to home," sighed Vincent.

"Best word in the world, '*home*'," stated Danny sadly and Vincent sensed there was a story to be told, but now was not the time, for Danny took the wheel and told Vincent to prepare for docking.

He knocked on the cabin door and asked if Brigit needed help readying herself to disembark. It was the best news she could have heard and managed to wash her face and comb her hair so as not to alarm Vincent. She went out on deck in time to watch the small boat slip silently next to the dock of a darkened cottage.

"It's okay! Come on in. This is my place," said Danny, as he unlocked the door. The weary travellers followed him into a large common room. "I keep this place pretty well stocked. Can I get you anythin'?" he asked.

"Ah'd just appreciate a bed that ain't movin' about," said Brigit.

"I guess this is a little late for a party. This way, my friends," he said, as he led the way down a hall to two facing doors. "Guest quarters... Sleep well."

They were very comfortable and even Jacob slept late. There was a knock on each door, followed by a cheerful. "Lunch is ready."

Danny turned out to be a good cook, as well as a charming host, and they sat companionably at the table enjoying the meal.

Finally, Danny told them he had to leave, but that they were to stay in the house and wait for a van to pick them up. It would be quite late, but they were not to turn on the lights. The van would stop out on the road and they were to walk out to it; then, they would be driven into Manhattan.

Everything happened just as Danny had said and soon they were being driven through Long Island by someone who didn't even turn around to acknowledge their presence as they entered the van. Not one word was spoken, and the anticipation made it seem like a very long drive.

Four hours later, they crossed the Brooklyn Bridge into Manhattan.

"Okay... so where youse goin'?" asked the driver, finally breaking his silence.

"Ah have reservations at the Americana," replied Brigit.

"Ritzy! What about you, Mac?" he asked Vincent.

"That will be close enough, thank you."

"Okay. You got it."

Vincent turned to Brigit and taking her hand said, "There is no way I can thank you for all you have done for us. I don't know when we will see each other again, but know that you will be thought of often and I shall be forever in your debt."

"Vincent, tis been a great adventure for me as well. Maybe ah'll get another good book out of it all," she replied.

They looked into each other's eyes and smiled as the van pulled up to the hotel. The driver opened the door for Brigit and as she stepped out and turned back, Vincent and Jacob disappeared. She barely caught a

glimpse of black cape as it vanished between two buildings.

"Good night, Sweet Prince!"

Knowing there was no easy way for he and Jacob to make a reappearance, Vincent took his time going through the tunnels to Father's study. He used an entrance under a building behind the Americana, but didn't take a direct path; instead he wandered a bit pondering the past events. How much of this story could he tell before they would think him crazy and restrain him?

"You know, Jacob, it's unusually quiet down here and I haven't noticed any guards posted, maybe when we get closer...." observed Vincent.

There wasn't the usual occasional lantern, but this didn't bother Vincent until they drew closer to the living quarters. True it was late, but there was always some light left burning in the arterial tunnels. Then he noticed that even the pipes were silent.

Vincent's heart skipped a beat as he realized that something was drastically wrong. He hurried to Father's study, the usual hub of community activity, only to find it as dark and deserted as the rest of his tunnel home.

He called out, shouted, roared; but there was no response, only black silence followed his own reverberating echo.

Finally, he turned and slowly made his way to his own chamber and setting Jacob on the floor, lit a candle. He made a slow sweep around the walls and noticed that there had been things added to his collection. On the ledge by his armoire stood two carved wooden figures of himself and Catherine.... "Cullen." Next to them lay a lovely edition of *'Romeo and Juliet'*... "Father." Noticing an *'Eye of the Storm,'* Vincent knew that Mouse had also contributed. Just as he recognized Mary's offering... a crocheted shawl she had been making for Catherine and then put aside upon hearing of Catherine's death.

Vincent knew this was a memorial for them. It was his family's way of coping with their loss. Everyone seemed to have contributed some treasured memento.

But it was the scroll of paper in Samantha's handwriting that brought tears to his eyes...

*'This is not thy deception, not thy
witchcraft; it is the work of nature.*

She was roused, and did -

no miracle -

but her best.

*I supplicated God, that, if it seemed
good to Him, I might soon be taken
from this life, and admitted to that
world to come, where there was still
hope of rejoining thee -*

*Oh, I longed for thee both with soul
and flesh! I asked of God, at once*

*in anguish and humility, if I had not
been long enough desolate, afflicted,
tormented; and might not soon taste
bliss and peace once more.*

Jane Eyre

"How they have suffered!" exclaimed Vincent through his tears and as he lifted his eyes from the scroll, he gasped. Hanging on his wall, was an exquisite portrait of Catherine holding Jacob.

He lifted the candle in order to better examine it. The painting had obviously been painted by someone who knew them well, for the crystal hung around her neck. He reached out his hand and ran a finger along her cheek; then bowed his head and sobbed.

"Daddy! Daddy!" Jacob squealed.

"All right, little one, let's get you to bed," said Vincent, struggling to get himself under control.

He went into Jacob's chamber to get a nightshirt and when he returned, was surprised to find that Jacob had pushed a chair over to the portrait and was leaning to touch it.

"Pretty Lady," said Jacob studying the painting. "Jacob," he continued as he recognized himself.

"I guess it's time you knew. Jacob, this is your mother; your brave, wonderful mother."

"Ma-ma," attempted Jacob as he tried to say '*mother*' then he turned. "No. Pretty Lady."

It was obvious that Jacob was having trouble merging the two ideas into one person.

"Don't worry, you'll understand someday."

Making sure Jacob was asleep, Vincent threw himself on the bed and was soon in a sound, dreamless sleep. Tomorrow would be time enough to solve the mystery of the empty tunnels. For now, all the hours and miles of travel pressed heavily upon him.

When Vincent and Jacob had not returned from their visit to the Crystal Cavern after six days, a search party had been sent out to find them. Father waited each day for news; some clue, some hint of what could have happened to them.

Nothing was found except the cave-in, which caused great anxiety; but when the rubble was cleared with no sign of the missing, it caused deep despair.

There was always the knowledge that Vincent would disappear for weeks at a time and then show up, but he would never endanger little Jacob. The hopes, despairs, discussions and speculations went on and on, until all had to admit that they were lost... simply vanished.

A pall settled over the tunnel community as each person tried to cope with life without Vincent; after all, they had thought of him as being invincible. It brought them all face to face with their own mortality, for it also left them defenseless and new safety strategies had to be developed.

It was decided that if faced with any threat, they would evacuate instead of putting up any kind of defense. They set up an evacuation camp beyond the waterfall and all knew to report there if Pascal sent the message on the pipes.

"Surely, Father, we are down so many levels that it would be difficult for anyone to find us," argued William.

"Well, yes, but that is why it would be best to leave our chambers darkened and make no noise. This way no one could be drawn down here. It is most important that our living levels look no different than any other part of Below," explained Father.

It pained him to give way to fear, but until they were more confident and felt less vulnerable, this seemed the best course of action.

Three weeks after Vincent's disappearance, the autumn weather turned fierce. A gale blew in off the ocean and temperatures plummeted. The people living in the park and on the streets turned to the subways, steam tunnels and conduits for shelter. Many were already living in the upper tunnels and the storms forced more unfortunates into already crowded, unsanitary places.

The tunnel community watched all of this with wary eyes. They would leave what food and blankets they could spare, but they couldn't chance making contact.

Soon fighting broke out and there were increased thefts in the subways. The police could no longer look the other way. It was fairly routine for them now; they would make a sweep of the upper tunnels. Every once in a while, when they wanted to probe deeper, they would send in dogs.

On the rare occasion when this happened, Vincent would go up to meet the dogs. They would bark and growl; he would growl and roar and the dogs would leave. But now, the situation in the upper tunnels was dangerous and surely the police would be most thorough.

Diana sent a message that the raids were to start and, rather than face any threat, the Tunnel Community went to its well-stocked hideout, leaving nothing but silence and darkness behind them.

After staying for three days, Mouse was ready to bore through the walls. His antics were driving everyone crazy. Finally, Jamie persuaded Father to let them check out the situation Above. If nothing else, it would give Mouse something to do.

Everything was very quiet. They went to the upper levels first. There were just a few people who had returned. They then checked all the way down to their living levels.

"Safe and snug," grinned Mouse.

"Yeah. Well, you go that way and I'll go this. Meet you back here," directed Jamie.

She held her lantern up as she checked Father's study and then moved to investigate Vincent's and Jacob's chambers.

She poked her head in the arch and moved the lantern from side to side. As the dim light passed over the bed, she let out a stifled gasp. She was startled and if the truth be known, afraid. She didn't want to go in any further by herself so she ran back after Mouse.

"I tell you, Mouse, someone's in there. Someone is lying on Vincent's bed!"

"Jamie's afraid, that's all," teased Mouse.

"Well, wait until you see."

Quietly they sneaked up on the intruder. Jamie held her lantern over the bed and they both stared and started to tremble.

"Alive! Alive! Mouse knew."

"Shhhhhh! Let him sleep. Let's go tell Father," whispered Jamie.

They burst upon the solemn gathering, Jamie yelling, **"He's alive!"** and Mouse repeating, **"Vincent."**

Vincent." over and over.

"Gracious, what is all this commotion about? **One at a time."** ordered Father.

"First of all, everything is all right. Mouse and I checked everything, and while I was checking Vincent's chamber..., Jamie blurted out breathlessly.

"Afraid... Jamie was afraid. Had to come get Mouse," interrupted Mouse, with a smug smile on his round, cherublike face.

"Afraid of what, Jamie?" asked Aisling.

"I found him sleeping in his bed. Vincent is sleeping in his bed," exclaimed Jamie.

"Are you sure?" questioned Father excitedly.

"Sure. Mouse saw him, too," assured Mouse.

"Come on, Father. See for yourself," offered Jamie excitedly.

Father, William and Pascal followed Jamie and Mouse, while the others packed up to return to their living quarters. As they approached Vincent's chamber, they could see the faint familiar glow, telling them that someone was indeed, inside.

Vincent heard them coming and turned just as Father entered the chamber. He held his arms out to the other man, who was visibly shaken. They embraced, as Father repeated Vincent's name over and over.

Soon the voices of the other tunnel dwellers could be heard and a grand reunion took place in Father's study and Vincent recounted his adventurous tale, leaving out references to the magic.

Aisling was especially curious about Ireland and Vincent was happy to tell her about her homeland. She was well-versed in the lore of her homeland, though, and knew that there was more to Vincent's tale than he was admitting.

Life seemed to get back to normal. Jacob grew quickly and extremely headstrong, as he realized that being a two-year-old was the best thing to be. There were times when the little beast showed itself and this worried Vincent, until he was reminded by Mary that every two-year-old was a little beast.

Vincent would often enter his chamber to find Jacob standing on a chair in front of Catherine's portrait. He would silently watch his son stare and reach out; the look of love in Jacob's eyes touched Vincent deeply.

"It is good that you love your mother, Jacob," commented Vincent.

"No! Pretty Lady!" insisted Jacob. He simply could not, or would not, make the connection.

This went on for months, as Vincent's restlessness increased. He felt an anticipation; a feeling that he would turn a corner and come face to face with his destiny. The tunnels seemed confining after his adventures and to make matters worse, he could feel Catherine nearby. Their bond was ever present, and he fought it as long as possible, but one night could no longer suppress its insistent call.

The next morning, he asked Aisling and Father to watch Jacob for a week. He explained that it had occurred to him that the tidal basin might be a great place for fishing and an excellent source for food; he wanted to try his luck. Actually, his longing to return there was strangely connected to his bond with Catherine. He needed some peace, to find out; he had to go meet her.

When he arrived at the larger crystal cavern, it was just as he remembered. He had no idea why he connected his place with Catherine, but he felt better for coming. He had been careful to plan his arrival with low tide and carefully calculated how much time he would have before high tide forced him to leave.

He laid some fishing lines and settled back, feeling more relaxed than he had in months. Allowing his gaze to

wander over the crystal-lined walls, for an instant Vincent thought he was seeing things, but at second glance, realized that something was really there. Across the water on a ledge, almost blending in with its mottled background, lay a seal.

"Well, what in the world are you doing here? Did you get stranded by low tide? Can't you find your way out?" Vincent watched as she turned her head and looked directly at him. "I won't bother you, if you don't bother my fish," he said and then thought, *What am I saying? They're probably her fish.*

On that first visit, he actually had some luck... enough to warrant his return. On his next visit, Vincent laid lines and settled back; but this time he anxiously searched for the seal. She wasn't on the ledge or anywhere else visible. He could only assume that she had found her way to open water. He felt a little disappointed, it was like having a secret friend.

Feeling close to Catherine and reliving lovely memories of their time together, he was startled by a sudden splash. Leaping from the water in a graceful arc was a seal, perhaps the same seal. Vincent laughed at her comical antics as she circled several times very close to where he was standing and then dived.

Having found a more direct route to the cavern, it now took Vincent only three days for the round trip to and from the cavern and he thereby made it a weekly venture. He appreciated the solitude and the tunnel community appreciated the fresh fish.

Each time Vincent returned to the cavern, he was happy to find the seal was still there. She became increasingly friendly, until it seemed she was always waiting for him on that little strip of land by the opening in the wall of rock. When he arrived; she would flip into the water and delight him with her aquatic ballet. Once, she had jumped out of the water and slid up to him, stopping with her head resting in his lap. He laughed and then his breath caught in his throat, as he looked down into two large, beautiful green eyes.

"You are a playful one, aren't you?" he said. He had gotten into the habit of talking to the seal, especially since she seemed to respond to his voice.

Jacob was always happy to see his father return, but was beginning to have a life of his own. Left with Father, Aisling and little Desiree, he felt a part of their family and he liked it when Aisling cradled him, or sang to him, or told him stories. She would brush his unruly hair from his eyes and kiss him goodnight when she tucked him in.

One day, after little Jacob had fallen and needed a little comforting, he had run to Aisling for comfort, but she was nursing Desiree. He screamed and pulled on Desiree's legs trying to make room for himself on Aisling's lap.

"No, Jacob. You mustn't. I'm Desiree's mother. I have to feed her, now. I'll be done soon and then it will be your turn."

Jacob stood staring at the two of them and said, "Mother?"

It was the first time he had said the word; the first time he began to relate to the word. He stomped off to his father's chamber, pulled the chair to Catherine's portrait, touched it gently and whispered, "Mother."

Entering the chamber, Vincent said, "I see you are at it again. I don't blame you. I look at your mother all the time, too."

"No! Pretty Lady!" Jacob snapped defiantly and from that point, there was a definite change in the relationship between father and son. Jacob became increasingly difficult to handle, belligerent and often given to tantrums, for he had finally realized that he didn't have a mother; yet he loved the Pretty Lady and

felt a great sense of loss.

One of Jacob's favorite things to annoy Vincent, was to play with Catherine's crystal. It was a connection Jacob could understand. The Pretty Lady wore it in the portrait, Jacob was in the portrait, so the crystal became all he had from the picture that he could touch.

The situation became so bad that Vincent asked Peter to come Below to observe Jacob's behavior.

"About a week before Cathy disappeared, I gave a party for my daughter," Peter explained, as they stood in Vincent's chamber looking at the portrait. "I hired a photographer to take pictures of the guests and when he brought me the proofs, he withheld one until last.

'She never even knew I took this picture,' he said as he handed me the picture. I can't tell you how I felt when I saw that photograph. I'd never seen Cathy look so radiant. It must have been that '*glow of expectant motherhood*' that everyone talks so much about. Anyway, when I decided to have a painting commissioned, I took that photo to the artist. He told me that it looked as if she were gazing at her lover."

Peter looked at Vincent and tried to gauge his reaction to that last statement. "I also had a picture of Jacob that was taken at the last Winterfest celebration. I thought the artist might be able to use it for inspiration. He's the one who decided to combine them into one portrait."

"I'm sorry, Vincent. I never dreamed that this portrait would cause such trouble when I had it commissioned," said Peter.

"Don't apologize, Peter. I can't thank you enough for it, but it isn't your painting; it has something to do with me and Jacob," responded Vincent.

"No. Actually, it has to do with a very bright, precocious two-year-old trying to deal with a cruel reality. If we can't deal with it, how do you expect him to? You can't make him understand what happened and he needs someone to blame, and unfortunately you're the safest one around. He'll come to terms with it eventually. Two-year-olds are resilient," explained Peter.

"Maybe, maybe not," said Vincent. Somehow, he thought there was more to it.

After Peter left, Vincent thought over the whole story. Maybe Jacob really did blame Vincent. After all, Jacob had seen the Pretty Lady drown while his father saved Brigit and let the dinghy sink.

Vincent sat for hours in the dark feeling great empathy for a little boy who was feeling lost and betrayed by his father. How could he help? How could he explain? How could he help heal the rift between them?

"Maybe yes... maybe no. Mouse found," muttered Mouse, as he entered the darkened chamber.

"What is it, Mouse?" asked Vincent.

"Letter... maybe... could be. Don't know!" quipped Mouse.

Lighting a candle, Vincent took the dilapidated envelope which Mouse held. It was muddy and a corner was starting to water rot. The name on the outside had been nearly washed completely away except for a barely visible 'V'.

"Where did you find this?"

"Up... Above."

"Where Above?"

"Park entrance," replied Mouse. "Thought maybe 'V' meant '*Vincent*'."

"Well, let's find out," said Vincent as he opened the damaged envelope.

"Dear Vincent.... Why it's dated Nov. 19, just a month after we returned. Thank you, Mouse. It is for me. You

can go now."

"Can't even know who it's from? Never have it 'cept for Mouse," muttered Mouse as he left the chamber. Vincent turned back to the paper in his hand and began to read....

Dear Vincent

I don't know if this letter will ever reach you. I only knew of this entrance to your world from my talks with Catherine. I searched and was relieved to finally find it. You never told me how I could reach you. Ordinarily, I wouldn't have minded, but I have such news; it just must be shared. It is so wondrous, you must not lose heart.

Do you remember the touch of Faye's hand and her promise to do what she could for us? She spoke true, Vincent. What was started then, continues. I know this to be so, for I carry its promise growing within me. Tucked safely beneath my heart is Ian's child. A more precious gift they could not have given me.

It makes me wonder what is in store for you... you, who are their knight... their champion... their peer.

Do not lose faith, Vincent, look all around you; it may already have begun.

Love

Brigit

He studied the letter and re-read it trying to feel her joy. It was now July, her child would have already been born. He must contact her; give her the name of a Helper so she could write to him. He put all else aside and wrote a letter to Brigit, addressing it through her publisher. At least she would know he received her letter.

He had often thought it would be good to have her near to help with Jacob, for as the weeks progressed, his son's behavior became increasingly worse. Finally, Father and Aisling offered to take Jacob on a more permanent basis because his tantrums were becoming more violent and he would run high fevers.

"Vincent, for some reason, you seem to be the cause of his problems or at least you trigger them," said Father.

"I know, and I do understand," replied Vincent. "It's the illnesses that the tantrums cause that worry me the most."

"Yes, I know. He is, after all, his father's son."

Vincent winced inwardly, but agreed to move Jacob's things to Father's chamber and then sat feeling quite desolate and alone. What could Brigit mean, *'It may have already begun.'*

"Am I now to lose my son as well?" he screamed to the silent walls of his chamber.

One night, when all were supposedly asleep, Vincent turned restlessly in his bed to find Jacob crawling from a chair to the ledge holding Catherine's portrait. In his hand he held her crystal and reaching up pressed his cheek against her shoulder. It was enough to break your heart.

The more time Jacob spent with Aisling, the more he understood what *'Mother'* meant and the more his little heart mourned. He was after all, Vincent's son, in understanding as well as depth of feelings.

Knowing that his son was better off without him, hurt Vincent, but it made his trips to the cavern a relief from the constant tension. He thought of little else but Brigit and her baby, their adventures, Faye's promise and Culmac's assurances... *'Nothin' we won't do.....'*

"Well, little seal, since I returned you're the only new thing in my life. Am I missing something else?"

And so the year passed. Soon it was time for Jacob's third birthday and Aisling had planned something special. He had more or less accepted living with her and Father and they gave him a great deal of love.

Father would stroke his sleeping brow and marvel at his beauty.

"Aisling, look... he's like a cherub. We must all love him as much as we can, for if not, he may want to return to that place of perfect love. He was created from perfect love and I fear he cannot go on in this turmoil much longer," said Father.

"We'll see him through this, but 'tis right yah are, he is one of the Lord's cherubs... almost too beautiful to gaze upon," agreed Aisling. "We'll give him a grand party and ah'll tell tales from the old country. You'll see, all will be well."

On the big day, Jacob woke as Samantha ran into the study, calling, "Jacob. Jacob. Here's a package for you. It's addressed to you."

Jacob sat up, puzzled. She ran to him and placed it in his arms.

"Can he open it?" asked Samantha.

"Don't you think we should wait for Vincent?" Aisling asked smiling.

"I'll get him," offered the excited child, as she ran from the chamber.

"This is a birthday present, but you may have to wait to open it, Jacob. Let me see," said Father putting his glasses on. "Oh, it's from Miss O'Donnell."

Vincent entered the chamber and from the look on Jacob's face, decided he had better not take the box from his son.

"Jacob, will you let Aisling help you open it?" asked Vincent.

The little boy nodded his head and held out the box. Aisling, sitting next to him, helped little fingers tear away the paper.

"Wait a minute, Jacob. There are two packages in here. This small package is for your father."

Jacob held it for Vincent to take. The larger package was wrapped in birthday paper with a pretty bow.

"Your first present, darlin'!" exclaimed Aisling. "Wouldn't yah rather wait 'till yah get yur others? No, ah suppose not," she continued, as Jacob tore into the wrapping. It was a book, a beautiful book which he clutched to his chest.

Vincent carefully opened his envelope and smiled to find photographs of a precious infant and a radiant Brigit. He opened the letter and read...

Dear Vincent,

I am happy to send you these pictures of my darling Kathleen Jean at her christening. We call her Karey Jean and already she is bright enough to know her name.

I am sending Jacob a copy of my new book for his birthday. I used my time of confinement well. It turned out differently than I thought, but it seemed to write itself.

Every time I look on my sweet, beautiful daughter, I know how specially blessed I have been. Faye touched my hand, Jacob's cheek and felt for us.

I do so hope you have found your happiness.

love

Brigit

Looking at his family, Vincent knew he had always been blessed with love and support.

"Jacob? Will you let Daddy see your book?"

"No!" snapped Jacob, clutching the book tightly against his chest. He walked around with it all day and put it down with the rest of his present only when his party started.

Friends gathered in Father's study for the party. William brought in a lovely, large cake with lit candles. Jacob squealed with delight, as he blew them out and was allowed to cut the first slice.

"All right, now... before we open presents, ah'd like all the children to gather around me here on the floor," stated Aisling. When everyone was seated she began, "Now, we all want to make little Jacob happy today, so ah thought maybe we might persuade him to tell yah about his adventures in Ireland. Ah'll help him a little, because ah know the land. What do you think, Jacob? What do you remember?"

"Pretty Lady!" answered Jacob.

"Now there, ah don't understand. Ah can't help yah with that one. Is there anythin' else you remember?" asked Aisling.

"Men... like me," laughed Jacob.

"Little men?" she prompted and when he nodded vigorously, Aisling went on to tell wonderful tales about the leprechauns. Everyone laughed and enjoyed themselves, and it made little Jacob feel very important.

"Anything else, Jacob?"

He got very serious. He really liked this and wanted to remember. Finally, he said, "Faye... she touched my cheek."

"Faye? The Faye? Faye, the faery? Well, you were told some tales weren't yah? Well now, all you children draw close and listen carefully.

"Faye is one of the faery folk... one of the Sidhe," started Aisling and then proceeded with great, funny, scary stories from Irish lore. Everyone was spellbound, including Jacob who was sitting enraptured hanging on her every word.

"....and the Sidhe are very powerful. They're the Tuatha de Danann yah see. They're all the elements of nature and perhaps the most powerful of all, is Maldowwyn. He's Faye's brother and he rules all the waters of the world."

The children never moved a muscle, as all eyes were on Aisling. Jacob, however, had worked his way slowly to the edge of the group. He was beginning to feel uncomfortable with the memory of Maldowwyn. He was still listening, just putting a little distance between himself and Aisling.

"Back in Ireland, we think of him as being so strong that we include him in our prayers to God. His is the washing, healing symbol of God and so whenever we want to pray for the healing of a loved one or the safe return of a loved one, especially when on the water, we take something that belongs to that person and, do you know what we do?"

"No..." chimed the young voices.

"We place it in a stream and ask for our heart's fondest desire. We ask that the healing waters use its power for that loved one. We call on Maldowwyn and sometimes... sometimes the wind will blow and the sea will rise and a tidal wave will come and sweep away all in its path."

The children gasped and then laughed as the spell was broken.

"Jacob?" called Aisling.

But Jacob was not there; he had understood every word Aisling said and it brought a vivid picture to his young mind.

Only Vincent could possibly envision what was going on in Jacob's mind and he started to panic, as he realized that Jacob was no longer in the study.

Going to his chamber first, Vincent called to his son. No answer, but he noticed that the chair had been pulled up to the shelf; the shelf where he kept Catherine's crystal. He knew what he'd find.... the crystal was missing. Water! Where was the nearest water? The waterfall cavern. How much of a head start did Jacob have? Children can be so quick.

Vincent ran through the tunnels and just ahead saw his son at the opening of the cavern. He called out, but that only served to spur the child on his mission. Jacob ran to the water's edge and held the crystal out over its sparkling surface.

Reaching the cavern Vincent shouted. **"No! Not the crystal!"** just as Jacob dropped it into the water and called out **"Mother!"**

Vincent ran to his son and grabbed him away from the edge, embracing him fiercely.

"You know, don't you? You've made the connection. Oh, my poor little boy, such anger, such pain," and they both wept.

Once calm, Vincent suggested that they kneel and say a prayer for Jacob's mother. Then when they were finished, Vincent walked beside Jacob back toward Father's study. Halfway there, Vincent felt a small hand furtively slide into his and he smiled.

By the time they returned, everyone had started to worry about the disappearance of the guest of honor and his father. They had left without a word and Aisling had started to wonder if she had said something wrong. Everyone was relieved when they reappeared at the top of the landing in the study archway.

They rejoined the party and after opening the rest of his presents, Jacob picked up Brigit's book and handed it to Vincent. "Read story, Daddy?" requested Jacob.

Vincent set Jacob in his lap, picked up the book and read the title. *'To Win Favor'*; then opened the cover....

TO WIN FAVOUR

by Brigit O'Donnell

DEDICATION

TO VINCENT WHO IS A TRUE KNIGHT IN OUR TIME, HE IS COURAGE AND FAITH.

TO CATHERINE WHO WAS THE EMBODIMENT OF HIS DREAMS. SHE IS LOVE.

TO JACOB THE JOY OF THAT COURAGE, FAITH AND LOVE. HE IS HOPE OF ALL OF US

FORWARD

When I was but a wee lass, I went to spend the summer with my mother's mother. She lived in a village on the northern coast of Ireland just within sight of Seal Island. I learned early on that much of the faith of the

townfolk revolved around that mysterious isle which seemed to glow through a halo of mist. Gran, being the keeper of lore, was full of marvelous tales and liked nothing better than to settle into the telling of them. It was here, at her knee, that I first learned of the 'gods,' the Sidhe, and why the Irish faith has kept them on his blessed Isle.

"What is it, me Brigit? What worries yah so?" she asked.

"Ah don't believe any of it! There is only God!" I retorted as any dutiful seven-year-old who had just received her First Eucharist that May.

"Ach!" she exclaimed. "It is time you learned to see with your heart."

"Gran, don't be daft! Ah see with me eyes!"

"And that is your trouble; yah see only half the world that way."

"There's more than what Ah see?" I asked, beginning to be intrigued.

"Aye, my sweet one, so much more." She stood in front of me, quietly staring into my very soul and then continued. "What do yah see? What are yah lookin' ah?"

"Why, you," I giggled. "Me Gran."

"Can yah feel me lovin' yah? Do yah love me?" She asked.

I grew very serious as the love passed between us. I could barely breathe, my eyes watered, and my vision blurred; still the love connected me until I could see it, a white, filmy outline glowing around her. I gasped, and she broke the trance.

"Don't be afraid. Ah wanted yah to see that other world, the world of the spirit which exists alongside our world. It is the world of God, the angels, the saints, and all of God's other creatures. It is these others which is causing yah grief, and Ah will now tell yah of them."

With that she picked me up and carried me to the divan. Sitting with me on her lap, she cradled me in her arms and started my lesson.

"In the beginning there was God. Now yah know of His Archangels, don't yah girl? Lucifer, Angel of Light and Michael, Angel of Defense, Gabriel, Angel of Music and Raphael, the messenger. We know also from Revelations that these citizens of heaven will be with us mortals throughout all of time. They each have their duty on this earth, even though their existence is in that other world of the spirit. They are able to effect us through their power from God. Do yah understand this?"

"Aye. We learned of them and our guardian angels."

"Good! Well, now, it is fine to believe in spirits as long as we call them angels, but what if I were to call them the Tauth De Dannan, who some call gods of old? I contend they are the angel of the waters or the angel of the flora and fauna - an angel to protect each of God's precious creations. We have our names for them, other people call them differently.

"Throughout history, civilizations have done much to put them in their place. It is all right to speak of them in Church but not in the town hall, as if they wouldn't exist if people did not admit to their need for these favors from the other world.

"It is well documented in the Bible how God sent his angels to do his work on earth. Do you know of these, Brigit?"

"Some, Gran. But why do they live here in Ireland?"

"Because we have allowed them to, and because we believe in them. They have become a part of our lives.

They are important to us, and so they stay near us."

"But Ah can't see them, and Ah don't know that Ah believe," I said solemnly.

"Must yah see to believe? Remember our love?"

"How do Ah know they are here when Ah can't see them?" I insisted.

Gran then lifted me to my feet, took my hand, and led me out to the meadow, taking a lantern as we passed through the summer kitchen. We continued onto the foothills, and before I knew it, she was leading me into a cave.

"Ah tell yah now, Brigit, that there are paintings on these walls.

Can yah see them?"

"No, Gran."

"Do yah believe me?"

"Aye."

"Why?"

"Because yah told me!"

"Ach! Now, move forward and look up," she said as she lifted the lantern.

I stood with my mouth open as ancient paintings came into view.

"Oh, Gran, they're beautiful!" She then covered the lantern.

"Can yah see them now?"

"Of course not! There isn't enough light."

"Have they gone?"

"No, they're still there."

"Are yah sure?"

"Aye."

"So the problem is that your eyes can't see in the dark not that the paintings are not there."

"Aye," I said, beginning to understand. "The other world is here all the time, ah just can't see it."

"Yah are very quick, me darlin'. Now the tales will mean somethin' tah yah."

And so it was that the summer passed, and by the time I was to leave, I was sure that my very own Gran was one of those who lived in both worlds. She was an 'other,' only part human. She would call Maldowwyn her father. (I still insisted on calling him the Angel of the Waters; it made more sense to me.) There were times when she would look out over the sea and not hear when I spoke to her; her eyes were seeing something that I could not see. At these times she was very beautiful as she looked to be one with nature. The day finally arrived when I was to return to my home. I did not want to leave this place of peace and understanding. Gran was up earlier than usual, and she hurried me along as she told me that we were going to the sea one last time before we left.

Stepping out into the cobblestone street, I soon realized that it was still dark and very foggy. As we made our way along the road, I could hear the waves crashing on the shore, beckoning. Beads of water clung to the rocks barely visible as morning light inched into the sky. I clutched Gran's hand, as I felt sure that something

was about to happen. We were standing at the water's edge with the waves lapping at my good shoes. Suddenly, I saw a figure rising out of the water before us. Coming through the mist was a lovely, young woman, her body glistened, and droplets ran over her breasts and down her legs.

"Welcome, sister," said Gran. "Where will yah be goin'?"

"Kildundee," she said in a rather husky voice.

"Here is some clothing," said Gran as she untied the bundle which she had been carrying. "Get dressed, and ah will send yah on your way."

I was amazed and said not a word until the woman followed Gran's instructions and set out on the road into the rising sun.

We stood in silence for a time, and then I finally asked, "Where did she come from?"

"Seal Island," was the simple reply. "She heard the call of her ill child and heart-sick husband. She needs to return."

"Ah don't understand, Gran."

She spread a blanket there on the shore along with the morning meal and told this tale as I settled myself comfortably against her side.

BRIGIT

CHAPTER ONE

Once upon a time when the world was still new, after the of the great, giant lizards, but before the disappearance of dragons and wizards, there was the beginning of human circumstances. The time when peoples were still developing into the race of promise.

They were struggling because they had alienated themselves from the Powerful Creator and were trying to make their own laws by which to govern themselves. Tyrants seemed to be the ruler of the day, mostly kings or warlords and they imposed beliefs and behaviors upon their subjects.

One such warlord was King Clog whose lands were part of a large island. The countryside was mostly rock and mountain but the green that hung about as trees and grass were startling in

contrast to the blue of the great northern sea. It was a fair land to behold but a harsh one in which to live mostly due to King Clog and his wizard Caulder. The army had spent much of its time

battling a great, large race of men that went back to times forgotten and had finally succeeded in suppressing them. There was much celebration at the victory for this feud had been going on for generations and Clog was determined to be the one to annihilate this race.

At about the same time as this victory, a daughter was born to King Clog. He named her Calinda, meaning 'with beauty,' for she was like a white rose in a patch of nettles. However, at her naming

ceremony, Caulder became alarmed by a vision. He saw the woman Calinda, in the embrace of one of the defeated. Could one have escaped? He took a piece of burnt wood and drew a picture

of this creature, the large frame of a man and the head of a lion complete with a flowing mane. He hung it up so that none would ever forget their enemy.

Whatever love that could survive in Clog's small heart was for Calinda, and, she grew free and happy unlike the other subjects of her kingdom. She was even allowed to walk freely in the woods

close to the palace walls as long as it was in sight of the guards.

One day Calinda decided to walk farther than she had before and feeling a bit of an imp, she hid from the guard who tried to keep up with her. It was just about sunset, and she walked in a stream for a while to cover her footprints and hid in a cave that seemed to appear out of nowhere. She thought she was very clever, until she tried to leave and found it quite dark. She could not see a thing, the woods seemed to have closed in around her, and the moon was completely shrouded.

Calinda turned back to the cave for shelter and was surprised to see a faint glow coming from inside. She cautiously looked around, but there was no one that she could see; however, in a

corner was a lit oil lamp and a fur mat had been laid for her. She sat and pulled it up around her protectively, for she knew that someone else had to be there.

"Who is there?" she asked in a small voice.

"I will leave you some food. Do not be afraid. It is my pleasure to share what I have," came the calm reply.

"You will not eat me?" asked Calinda, but she knew he would not.

He had the most wonderful voice she had ever heard, and he had immediately put her at ease.

"I do not make it a habit to go about eating beautiful maidens. What is your name?" he said.

"I am Calinda, and yours?"

"Lowenvir."

"Well, Lowenvir, do I get to meet you?" asked Calinda.

"Maybe next time. For now I will get you some food and stand watch outside."

The next morning, Calinda awoke to the marvelous sound of birds singing. She had never heard this before; there were no birds near the palace. A simple breakfast was by her side but no sign of

her host. She ate and felt a little hesitant leaving without a word of gratitude so she whispered, "Thank you" and ventured out of the cave. Once she found the stream, it was easy to find her way to the path leading home.

The palace guards had been out all night looking for their princess, and they were amazed to see her walk out of the woods toward them.

"Are you well, your Highness?" asked the captain.

"Yes, quite," replied the princess.

"Were you in the woods all night? We have been searching that area, and there was no sign of you."

"I knew that I could not make it home in the dark, so I slept in a cave until dawn," explained Calinda. She did not mention her protector. She didn't know why; maybe she wanted him just for

herself, a gallant hero.

The time, after her return to the palace was busy, and there was the purification she needed to endure for being so bold as to disobey her father and wander off alone. However, every night

she had a longing to hear Lowenvir's voice tell her that she would be safe. Finally, she knew that she had to

meet him again. On a clear June day she set out for the woods. She was very excited and started to run as though she were being drawn forward. It was not proper to feel this way about any man let alone a man she had never seen.

She managed to lose the guards again and started exploring. Everything looked different. She found the stream and followed it, but it did not lead her to the cave. Instead it led her on and on and

yet nothing looked familiar. She doubled back and sat on a rock at the edge of the stream. Lunch time had come and gone, and she had forgotten to eat, so she went hungry. Pulling some bread and cheese out of her mantle pocket, Calinda relaxed and ate. Why was everything so strange? Maybe it was just the time of day that changed the scenery.

After resting a bit, she started back upstream. Calinda was sure that she was wading in the same stream, but the sun's rays began to shorten, and the shadows began playing tricks with her eyes.

The trees took on regimented shapes and looked like sentries standing guard. Each boulder became an entrance to a cave or a tunnel. This fascinated her, and she even tried to walk into an

opening, hoping that it would lead her to Lowenvir. But, alas, there were no openings. By this time, it was quite dark, and she again was lost. Things looked hopeless, for Calinda had wandered from

the stream, and she could not find the cave to shelter her. The princess sat on the hard, damp ground and started to cry; she was cold and hungry.

"Please don't cry, your Highness."

It was the voice she had heard in her dreams. Was she dreaming now? "Lowenvir? Where are you? I have been searching for you all day," sobbed Calinda.

"I know, but I could not come before now," he replied. "Why the tears? You are safe. I wouldn't let anything happen to you."

"I feel so much better. I know that all will be well now that you are here. I am just a little hungry."

"Of course, follow me." With this a shadow moved ahead of Calinda, and she followed into the cave which had not been there earlier.

On this evening there was a lantern in the corner, the fur mat and coverlet, a silk pillow and an embroidered shawl in which to wrap herself. Looking around, Calinda realized that she was alone. The lantern only lit her corner, so she was a bit startled when the shadowy figure of Lowenvir suddenly appeared in the darkness at the far end of the cave.

"I will leave this soup for you," he said.

"Please, don't leave me! My purpose for coming here was to spend some time with you," explained Calinda.

"If you will come to the edge of the darkness, get the soup and return to your corner, I will gladly stay."

Nothing had ever tasted so good, not even the best pastry in the palace, and Calinda sat on her fur mat well aware that she was being watched as she slowly sipped this most welcomed meal.

She lifted her eyes in gratitude over the edge of the bowl toward the dark corner and her gracious host.

"Would you like more?" asked Lowenvir.

"No, not now," replied Calinda. "Please, talk to me. Tell me about all of this. Why couldn't I find this place when it was before me all along; and why couldn't you come for me until now?"

"I don't know that you will believe me. I don't know that you can understand, or that you should even be aware of this," continued Lowenvir.

"My gallant friend, it is too late. I am here, and I cannot deny you exist, nor ever forget you," responded Calinda.

"But that is exactly what you should do, forget all of this - especially me."

"Why? Why can't you tell me?"

"You are a princess, your father is king. He has decreed that your people believe certain things or now believe in certain things. Some wizards have maintained power and, as with your father, they have made sure that his subjects follow their decrees," Lowenvir started.

"And you are part of what is not safe to believe?" asked Calinda.

"Yes. It was better to retreat to this other world."

"And our worlds join for a short time. It is only during that time that I can find this cave or that you can come to me," asserted Calinda.

Lowenvir was surprised that she had already become aware of this. "Yes, so you see, this is especially dangerous for you. If your father ever found out that you were acquainted with one of his outcasts, it would not be pleasant for you."

"Do you live in this world alone?" asked Calinda.

"Oh, no! My neighbors are those who have existed from the beginning of creation. For some time now, people have been punished for believing in them, so they stay here all the while keeping an ever watchful eye. Their thoughts are always for what is best for all of creation. They are the protectors."

"And you?" asked Calinda.

"I am considered different. However, I am as any mortal, part spirit, part animal. This world is very new, and species have come and gone. Creation is still deciding which shall survive. It has mixed many animals to achieve a strong human. It made no difference to the Powerful One who loves us all; we are all his children, but we, among ourselves, could not accept each other and so survival was difficult. I am the last of my people. Like the huge lizards of old, I will not longer exist. You come from us; you are our survivors. We all had our beginnings from the same Creator, yet, I have been driven back into the shadows," explained Lowenvir sadly.

"Did my father drive your people away?"

"He and other rulers for a long time; but I am in good company, the spirits care for me."

"And me?"

"And you when you are here."

"I like that. For some reason, I feel that I belong here. Do you think that I will ever meet the others?" asked Calinda.

"You already have. They were all around you in the forest."

"Will I ever see you?"

"I think it would be best if you didn't."

"But I think of you as my dearest friend," objected Calinda.

"It would be safer for you if you didn't," With that Lowenvir grew silent and retreated to the farthest, darkest corner of the large cave.

Calinda started to silently cry. She felt for Lowenvir's loneliness, and she wanted him to understand her empathy as well as her own need for a true friend. "Good night, Lowenvir. My dreams are of you," whispered Calinda. There was no response, but she was heard. They both fell asleep snug in their own corners.

Calinda woke up about an hour later, and the thought that Lowenvir was asleep so near increased her curiosity. What harm would there be in a little peek? She covered the lantern until she was quite near and could hear him breathing. Then she uncovered the light just enough to see her

sleeping friend. She gasped and dropped the lantern. All was dark as Lowenvir leaped up, realizing what had happened.

"Don't be afraid, Calinda. I won't hurt you," he comforted.

"You are the terrible one, the one I have been warned about all my life. You are hated and feared by all," cried Calinda, as she stood trembling.

"The choice of what to believe is yours. I will lead you back to your mat. Do not be afraid as I touch you. I understand your fear."

Calinda startled as a fur covered hand touched hers, but somehow she felt comforted by this hand which was so warm and strong.

"When morning comes, you will be in your world on the path to the palace. Goodbye, Calinda," said Lowenvir as he left the cave to stand guard outside.

"No, wait! Please, I didn't mean to offend you. Please come back!" pleaded the princess, but there was only the wind which had suddenly started whistling through the trees.

A dejected young woman made her way passed the guards and into the door of the main hall. Not only had she upset and disappointed Lowenvir, but what would she tell her father?

"Calinda! Have you been in the woods all night again? What did you learn from the last time? You spent all those hours in penance with the Druid wizard, you drank the potions and went through

purification, yet you went out into the woods alone and at night. You deserve whatever may happen to you!"

Calinda stood before her father with bowed head; all she could think of was how harsh his voice was in comparison to Lowenvir's velvety tones. She would gladly go through all those rituals if only he would speak to her again.

As the days went by, Calinda became more confused. The things about her did not seem important, and the teachings of her childhood no longer rang true. Her father's war councils were

barbaric in contrast to the peace of the other world, and Caulder's rituals lost their power to cast a spell upon her.

There was only one thing of which Calinda could be sure, she had to be with Lowenvir again. Somehow, she had to make him accept her; she wanted desperately to talk about these new feelings. Everyone around her was afraid of something or someone, and this did not seem right. There was no one to understand except Lowenvir.

Calinda sought out quiet, dark corners in which to sit and think. Most of the time she thought of Lowenvir and his appearance filled her dreams. He was no longer frightening as his leonine features and long yellow mane became familiar to her. She would wake up wanting to reach out and touch him.

The day finally arrived when Calinda defied all of her father's rules, and she set out once again for the woods. This time she waited until dusk and sneaked out of a hidden door. Soon she was sitting on a rock by the stream waiting for the slit between day and night when she might slip into Lowenvir's world. A firefly danced around her, and she watched it disappear into the mist.

Following its lead, Calinda simply walked into the other place.

"Thank you for your guiding light," she said.

"You're welcome. I am Faye, Calinda. I thought you could use some help," said a lovely woman, as Calinda stared, not believing her eyes.

"The cave you are looking for is there. He needs you as much as you need him. You two mortals are very precious to us. Make him happy, Calinda." With that Faye changed back into a firefly and twinkled on her way.

Calinda slowly walked into the cave and stopped as she saw Lowenvir standing with his back to her. She had never seen him standing in the light, and his size amazed her. Everything about him amazed her, and as he slowly turned, she drew in her breath.

"You are so beautiful," she said as he looked at her with his cool, blue eyes. "Now we can start again as friends, in the light, face to face."

He held out his hands and led her to the fur mat in her corner. They spent the night talking, and by morning they were hopelessly in love. She would have stayed with him, but he would not let her.

Their goodbye was tender and full of promise. Calinda was sure of one thing; she would return, for she longed for the grace and peace of Lowenvir's cave.

CHAPTER TWO

When Calinda had disappeared from the palace again, her father sent an alarm across the countryside. His allies, the four neighboring kings, came to his aid. The handmaid whom King

Clog had ordered to spy on his daughter had followed Calinda into the woods. When she disappeared, Tessa ran back to report.

"Your majesty, one minute she was sitting on a rock, and the next minute she walked into the mist and was gone."

"Get the wizard! Bring him before me!" ordered Clog.

When the king and wizard put their heads together, Caulder whispered, "This is just what I was trying to avoid by doing away with all the old beliefs. The prophecy I saw at Calinda's birth is about to begin. We must do all we can to save her from her destiny."

"I will never allow that beast to have her. I will kill him first," declared Clog.

They decided to begin their search with a worship ritual. The soldiers and kings gathered outside the walls

of the palace on the mound ringed by stones. The druid wizard entered the circle with a large, stuffed likeness of Lowenvir, for he had faced that creature before and declared him one of the outcasts. He called on the forces of wat and destruction and started a chant that was taken up by all in the inner circle. By the time it was over, every soldier knew whom they must kill -Calinda's kidnapper.

Just as dawn was about to break, Tessa led the armies to the spot where she had last seen Calinda. Caulder ordered all to hide and be very quiet; as the first shafts of light touched the spot, Calinda and Lowenvir appeared. They were saying their goodbye when the army rose up before them. Lowenvir wrapped his great cloak around Calinda, and they retreated into the spirit world just as the chink in time closed.

The soldiers charged in confusion as the cry of 'Kidnapped! We must save the kidnapped princess!' made them all the more fierce.

However, there was no enemy for the one they had vowed to kill had vanished. A retreat was sounded as King Clog had to change strategy.

"We must draw him out," stated Caulder.

"Obviously, but how?" questioned Clog.

"It will not be as difficult as you might think," the wizard answered.

When Lowenvir knew they were safe, he unwrapped his cape and let go of Calinda. But she held onto him and smiled into his eyes.

"My wish had come true. Now, I must stay with you," she said.

He just smiled at her and said, "We shall see."

"There is no way they can reach us, is there?" asked Calinda.

"I don't think so."

"Good!" And with that Calinda led the way to the cave and started making her corner very comfortable.

As the days went by, she also became familiar with her wonderful surroundings. This magical forest had easily become her new home and all the trees, flowers, ferns and animals seemed to be her friends. She revelled in love, not only the love between Lowenvir and her, but also her deep love for all living things. How different this was from her father's rule.

Faye would visit her from time to time. They would talk of the Tautha de Danann and all the spirits which had been forbidden to her. She learned to walk in the stream and call Maldowwyn, Father, and pet a fawn and marvel at the flowers and call Faye, Mother. She opened her heart and mind and found the beauty in all of creation.

It took Lowenvir only a short time to realize that he could never let Calinda go. She had filled his life with joy; she was the promised one. His people were the favored of the spirits. They had always

fought to preserve and protect the delicate balance of nature, but when the battle was lost to the likes of King Clog, Lowenvir survived in loneliness. The Tautha de Danann assured him that

they would not see him suffer throughout all of his life.

And so it was that Calinda's need to stay a part of this world and Lowenvir's need to love brought them to

stand before each other and vow. She promised to always share everything in his life, good and bad, and he opened his life to her, allowing her to become a part of it. Theirs was a mighty and pure love.

The spirits were well pleased, and they all took form as they celebrated the promises which were exchanged. They brought food and wine, and there was a great party. All watched as Lowenvir placed a lovely floral garland, which he had lovingly made on Calinda's head. She seemed a bit embarrassed at first, but then she removed an emerald ring from her finger and placed

it in his hand. "I will make you a cord for that," she whispered as she kissed his cheek.

The next morning, while she was looking for lashing fibers to weave, Faye appeared and started walking beside her.

"May I help?" she asked.

"I am always grateful for your help," responded Calinda, and as she watched in amazement, Faye raised her hands and caught the sparkling sunrays.

"You may want to see these, my dear," she said as she held out a handful of golden, crystalline fibers.

"I have never seen anything like them; they are beautiful."

"Yes, the source of light," answered Faye.

With deft, loving fingers, Calinda wove and intertwined a shimmering cord for her emerald ring and hung it around her beloved's neck. Lowenvir held her close, thanked her, and vowed that he would never take it off. The lovers enjoyed their new life and happiness reigned.

King Clog met with his allies and convinced them that it was urgent to rescue his daughter. He offered her hand to the one who would rescue her. This was the first part of Caulder's plan.

The next part was to anger the spirits, so that they might come forth and let down the walls between the worlds. It was decided to attack the weak and defenseless, for it was well known that the Tautha de Dannan protect and save. The army marched forward, cutting trees and flowers, killing deer and rabbit, leveling all in their path with ruthlessness. Nothing was spared.

Indeed, such devastation caused a reaction.

Vulcawwyn was the first of the spirits to rage across the worlds, as his tongues of fire rushed in to purify the landscape. The flames crept toward the

towns and roads, but there was no help, for the armies were waiting for the opportunity to capture Lowenvir and rescue Calinda.

Faye was beyond comfort as the destruction of all flora and fauna continued; these were hers to protect and she had failed. Lowenvir promised to do what he could to stop King Clog.

Arial was the next spirit to unleash her anger, as she sped between the heat of the fires and coolness of the heavens. The winds howled and fanned flames; smoke made night of day. Maldawwyn, usually content to stay in his confines, rose up as Arial raced over watery surfaces, exciting the waves. The spirits were totally affecting the mortal world so that all barriers came crashing down.

This was what King Clog and Caulder were waiting for. The army attacked through the smoke causing so much chaos as possible.

King Rufic was the first to reach the lovers' cave and his only thought was to claim his prize. He lifted the struggling princess over his shoulder and made his escape as soldiers attacked a fighting, snarling Lowenvir.

The men were armed with swords and daggers, and although they delivered many blows, Lowenvir's size, strength, ferocity, fangs, and claws evened the battle. The physical pain he was suffering was nothing compared to his panic as he saw Calinda being carried off, and his determination to rescue her and stop King Clog kept him on his feet. The soldiers continued coming at him six at a time, replacing those in the cave who had fallen.

Just as Lowenvir could no longer endure, he heard the screams of the army as Vulcawwyn built a wall of flame behind him. They fled back to their camp, glad to have survived.

Faye rushed into the cave to find an unconscious Lowenvir. She touched his wounds. Then taking his belt, she went to the stream.

She placed the belt beneath the water and asked her brother to give special healing through his waters. She then filled a flask and brought it back to the cave. She bathed the wounds and poured some water between the soft parted lips.

"I thought I was dead," whispered Lowenvir as he opened his eyes.

"We wouldn't let that happen, not when there is so much for us to right," said Faye as she stroked his head with healing hands.

"She is gone, Faye. She is gone."

"I know."

"I must find her."

"When you are well and strong. Rest now," said Faye. She brushed her hand across his eyes, and he fell into a deep healing sleep.

Slinging his prize on the floor in front of her father's throne, King Rufic claimed Calinda as his wife.

Clog gloated over the victory as his daughter sobbed and pleaded.

"No, please. I'll accept any punishment, any purification but not this."

"Stupid girl; you'll do as I tell you. You will go with the one who freed you. Take her now. This feast will be your wedding celebration," ordered King Clog, as Rufic carried her off.

Poor Calinda. There was nothing she could do but sob as she cringed on the fur skins strewn on the bed.

"Why are you not happy? You should be grateful that I took you from the monster. When you were kidnapped, we all vowed to avenge your father."

"Kidnapped? I was not kidnapped! I went to Lowenvir freely with all my love. We lived together with the blessings of peace and happiness. You took me from my home," cried Calinda.

"I am a man of honor. I do not take what is not mine. I have been tricked by your father. He no longer has my allegiance," vowed Rufic.

Storming out of the bedchamber and back to the Great Hall, he threw open the huge wooden doors and bellowed a war cry. "You made me a fool. She belongs to another. Our allegiance is over."

"I would do anything to keep her from that creature. It is not right; she was under a spell," started Clog.

"You lie! She went to him freely, in love," interrupted Rufic.

"He is a hated beast; he has no right to her. I will see her dead rather than be with him," threatened Clog.

"My people were killed because of your lie. My land is in flames because of your lie. It is over. I now return home," proclaimed Rufic.

He was the first to leave the Great Hall but soon all the kings followed him, leaving Clog with the wizard and Calinda.

"Have I lost the cause, Caulder?" asked Clog.

"Not as long as you have me to advise you and Calinda is in your hands."

"Aye, she is the key."

CHAPTER THREE

Lowenvir healed quickly just as the land began to recover; however, his only thoughts were of Calinda. He had no choice but to go to face her father. He also believed that the wall between the worlds had to come down; the mortal world needed the good spirits.

"And what plans are going through your brain, Lowenvir?" questioned Faye as she entered the cave on her daily visit.

"I was thinking of Calinda, and how easily she accepted me and you. There is hope for them, isn't there?"

"There is always hope."

"Wouldn't it be wonderful if the worlds could be one, if I could walk freely in that other place, if you and all the spirits were accepted and known and loved?"

Faye went to Lowenvir and took his face into her hands. She looked lovingly into his deep blue eyes and said, "It is no wonder that we love you; your heart is fair and courageous. I wish that you

were the chosen race. If that were the case, then that other world would be a much different place. Then maybe it would be possible for the worlds to join. But then, you know, it would be heaven."

"Faye, is Calinda at the palace?" asked Lowenvir.

"You are going to defy the ban and go for her?"

"I must."

"The war may start again. The humans will suffer more hardship, and the land will have difficulty making any kind of recovery."

"Are you telling me not to go? Do you think they would be better off with their ignorance and violence instead of your balance and peace? We may need one final battle to correct this injustice,"

stated Lowenvir.

"And you are ready to stand as our champion, to right a wrong brought about by fear and ignorance, and to also rescue Calinda?" asked Faye.

"I am now preparing," admitted Lowenvir.

"I will tell you now that the hope of the human race is the joining of your intelligence and courage with Calinda's love and openness. It is your offspring which will prevail. You must follow your instinct and your heart; it is the true course. The Tautha de Dannan will be with you, and I will stay at your side," promised Faye.

The next dawn found Lowenvir and Faye slipping into Calinda's world. They moved along the path to the palace, but Faye decided to go ahead as the firefly. She quietly sped off and quickly returned to buzz in Lowenvir's ear.

"Things are different at the palace. There are few guards, and it is very quiet. The armies are gone. It should be easy to get into the inner court."

"I think it might be a trap; they may be waiting for me."

"I will go in and look around," said Faye as she flew off again. Lowenvir waited at the forest edge until she returned.

"There are no guards that I could see in the courtyard and only two at the palace door. There is no sign of Calinda or Clog. If you can get to the walk-in door of the gate, I will let you in. Please be careful. For like you, I think all is not right. I will go ahead of you and try to warn of danger."

Standing against the gate, Lowenvir waited. Finally he heard the latch and pushed open the door. Faye had taken a human form and pointed to the two guards.

"Faye, there is a horrible aura in this place," stated Lowenvir.

"Yes, it is the forces of evil. They have as much to lose by this showdown as we may gain. After being in here, I must warn you that this may be a far different war than you or I imagined. You may still turn around and leave," suggested Faye.

"As long as Calinda is in there, I have no choice but to continue."

"Then we move forward with caution."

Lowenvir quickly disabled the guards at the doors, and they entered the Great Hall. Sitting alone in Clog's throne was Caulder.

He said, "Welcome. I have been waiting for you. So you were not willing to leave things as they are? What is it that you want?"

"Calinda. Where is she?"

"Not here, my brave fool. I must commend your courage, but neither of you or your spirit allies have the heart for what is ahead of you. So that you know that I am fair, I will now let you walk out of here," gushed the wizard, as black bile trickled out of the corners of his mouth.

"I will not leave without Calinda," vowed Lowenvir.

"Then you shall not leave," threatened Caulder as he turned into a frightening dragon before Lowenvir's eyes. Almost instantly, a long forked tongue lashed out and pulled in the firefly which had been circling the throne.

Lowenvir lunged forward only to be lashed from behind by a huge scaled tail. Indeed, this was something he had not imagined. As he tried to regain his balance, a large talon grabbed him around the waist and threw him against the far corner. Staying very quiet,

Lowenvir lay in a heap until the breath returned to his body. Faye was gone, and his enemy stood ready to

kill if he moved. Looking around from his spot on the floor, Lowenvir realized that there were many eating tables and benches along the walls. He rolled under one and then another as a huge dragon forearm crashed through each one. Finally, Lowenvir reached a shiny object which had caught his eye. It was a dagger, small, but more weapon than with which he had come.

The dragon was making terrible sounds, and Lowenvir added his roars to the noise. It echoed and reverberated around the room as Lowenvir rolled behind the throne. Reaching over the high-backed chair to clutch his prey, the dragon was surprised as a dagger found its way deep into his chest between two scaly plates. He staggered backwards as Lowenvir stood to receive another attack.

Crashing to the floor, the dragon started bleeding. The red liquid ran over the huge body and turned into serpents before Lowenvir's eyes. They crawled out and over everything, hissing and ready to spread their venom.

"The evil ones," exclaimed Lowenvir, recognizing his enemy. But they did not attack him.

Instead they crawled out of the windows and slithered under the doors out beyond the gates, infesting countryside and poisoning streams.

As Lowenvir stared in amazement, the dragon turned back to Caulder, and a firefly flew out of his ear. She disappeared through the crack in the door, leaving a riveted Lowenvir, who could not move through the room full of crawling creatures. When she returned, Faye had news confirming what Caulder had said; Calinda and Clog were not there.

"Faye, what does all this mean?" asked Lowenvir.

"It is a catastrophe. I am afraid that from now on evil will live in this world along with the Tautha de Dannan. It will be up to the humans to decide whom to follow. Their plight is dire," she warned.

"But at least now they have a choice, before this you were suppressed," reminded Lowenvir.

"You don't understand. The wall that separated us also separated evil from this world. They only came forth if called on in ritual. Now it is all one."

"Then we must teach the mortals what is right," comforted Lowenvir.

"We must leave here; we must see what we can do," suggested Faye.

Stepping carefully Lowenvir slowly made his way across a floor that seemed to be writhing below his feet. They left the palace and immediately noticed that a musty odor in the air had replaced the sweet smell of flowers.

"Arial is very sad; the air is polluted," said Faye.

"Yes, I can smell the serpents," agreed Lowenvir.

And as they were about to cross a river, Maldowwyn rose up in anguish as his waters were poisoned. "What has been unleashed this day will always be with us," he intoned as he struggled for life.

"Caulder's plan made him a victor no matter how the battle went," observed Lowenvir. "You are being devastated, and I am no closer to finding Calinda. Go, Faye, attend to your brothers and sisters. I will go on alone. Please know that your cause will always be my cause."

Never had Lowenvir felt so alone. He was now in a desolate world which had been ravaged by war, fire, and now pollution. The smoke still hung in the air, holding in the putrid smell of the poisoned water. As he walked along the road, he gave little thought to his appearance, forgetting that he was still a dreaded outcast.

with a prize for whoever might capture him. He could only think of Calinda and that he had somehow betrayed his spirit allies by convincing them to leave their world. What would become of them as the conflict between good and evil raged?

Being preoccupied, Lowenvir did not sense those who were tracking him on either side of the road. The smokey haze was good cover, and the rancid odor distorted his sense of smell. By the time he noticed the snare across the road in front of him, it was too late, and a large, wooden cage came crashing down on top of him. It was quickly tied down to the trees along the road, and he was quite secure. His captors ran off, leaving Lowenvir thrashing at the crate and growling in despair.

It did not take long to loosen the bars, and Lowenvir was about to make his escape when an army surrounded him. He braced for battle when the king came through the ranks to stand before him.

"Stand clear! Let him be," ordered King Rufic as he recognized Calinda's lover. "I owe you an apology. I don't usually take what belongs to another. I am truly sorry for my part in all of this."

Lowenvir knew this was an honest man and made the decision to trust. It was difficult for him to trust, for there had been little experience except with the spirits and Calinda. However, he needed help, and this man was offering truth.

"Do you know where Calinda is?" asked Lowenvir.

"No, I left her with her father that same night when I learned that she had not been kidnapped, and that I had been tricked. I would no longer be a part of Clog's treachery," explained Rufic.

"All this ruin about us is still part of Clog's treachery. Does he hate me this much?" asked Lowenvir.

"Yes, I heard vile threats against you that night as I left the palace."

"And so you must all suffer because of me and his hatred."

"You are right; my people are suffering. There is little food, and now they are getting sick by drinking the water," said Rufic, "And to make matters worse, we have been overrun by snakes."

Knowing what pain this must be causing Maldowwyn whose waters were always pure and healing, Lowenvir knew that he had to do something. Rufic seemed like a good and reasonable man, so he decided to confide in him.

The two men walked together as Lowenvir told Rufic of the Tautha de Dannan and their mission of goodness and protection. He spoke of the crumbling of the wall between the worlds, Caulder, and the release of the evil spirits upon that world when he stabbed the dragon.

"Now, everyday, every man must battle the evil spirits," concluded Lowenvir.

"Well, we can begin by clearing out the snakes and being on guard against treachery. Will the Tautha de Danna still help us mortals?" asked Rufic.

"If you wish them to," replied Lowenvir.

"Then let's get started," said Rufic as he ordered his men to dig several large trenches.

Lowenvir worked side by side with this man, and it felt good to have companionship. They bagged, clubbed, and raked snakes

in the trenches; they used nets and started to clear the rivers and streams. As a trench was filled they buried the snakes. And so it went until much of the forest, fields, and waters were free. The

reptiles retreated to distant parts of the isle, knowing that their presence would not be tolerated.

King Rufic and his people started to prosper as they had won favour, and the spirits smiled on them. Lowenvir remained in their company until all was well and then sadly bid farewell to a friend, his first human friend besides Calinda.

Lowenvir set off again on his quest. Not knowing where to go, he decided to head toward the sea. The sun was shining, and Arial was sending a cool breeze to blow through his long, yellow hair.

Shaking his head from side to side, Lowenvir thought he heard a buzz; then he smiled as a firefly landed on his shoulder.

"Faye?"

"Of course, who else?" came the reply as the lovely young woman materialized.

"You have returned to me! Where have you been?"

"And why haven't you called for me, for our help?" questioned Faye.

"I was ashamed for what my violence had done. I needed to make amends."

"But I told you that we would be at your side."

"And I nearly destroyed you," admitted Lowenvir.

"Now, because of you, Rufic and his people once again believe in us and call on us. The air once again smells of flowers, and Madowwyn will grant you your heart's desire, for you have won favour. Oh, I almost forgot, he has located Calinda."

"Where is she?" asked Lowenvir urgently.

"She is with her father on a small island just off the coast. Almost two days travel."

"Then we must hurry," said Lowenvir as he started to run toward the sea.

It was quite dark when they reached the shore. Maldowwyn was waiting for them, gently pacing to and fro as the waves came into shore and then went out.

"There, on that island," said Faye pointing to a small dot of land. "Clog is in the dwelling on the top of the rocks, Calinda is in a pit under the hut. There is no way to her except through him." Then

Faye became very serious and spoke quietly. "Nothing will be safe as long as Clog is allowed to live. He is now completely evil and our dreaded enemy. Somehow he must be destroyed."

"Well, if the only way to Calinda is through him, that may happen," countered Lowenvir.

"You have won our favor. You have won our gratitude. Now you have our blessing."

With that, Lowenvir set off across the icy water to that small piece of land. His love of Calinda warmed him as he grew closer and closer. Powerful arms and legs stroked through the water easily as Maldowwyn parted the waves, and he was barely tired when he arrived on shore. Climbing with ease, he scaled the rocks to the top of the cliff.

Being as quiet as possible, Lowenvir crept up to the hut. He burst into the room only to find Clog seated

facing the door, waiting for him. Clog had taken on an evil appearance, his face was twisted in a maniacal smile, and his eyes were wild with a frenzied look.

"Come in, come in. You think you have come to claim your prize. Well, look at her before you die, for I will never allow a union between you." With that, Clog led the way to an opening in the floor which was covered by a wooden grate. "Go ahead, talk to her, but she will always remain just out of reach."

Kneeling, Lowenvir placed his head close to the grate and focused his eyes on the scene fifty feet below him. There was a

cavern, well lit and quite comfortable where Calinda and twelve handmaidens had been kept prisoner.

"Calinda?" called Lowenvir.

She immediately stood up and reached toward the grate. "My love, be careful," she cautioned. "I'm afraid there is nothing you can do for me."

"I will get you out. I promise, I will keep you safe." With that, Lowenvir leaped to his feet and faced Clog. "Prepare to die, for if

that is the only way to free her, then so be it."

Clog just stood with his hands behind him, defiantly facing his executioner. One swift swipe of Lowenvir's clawed hand opened a vital vein, and Clog fell. A terrible rending sound echoed

throughout the island as Lowenvir stood over his victim. Too late he realized that Clog had been holding onto a lever behind his back, and when he went down so did the lever. It opened

floodgates, and the little cavern below was filled with water before Lowenvir could rip the grate out of the floor.

"No!" reverberated with the roars as Lowenvir's anguished cries could be heard over the sea and throughout the land. he had lost her; he had lost everything. All that was left was the garland he

had made for her. It kept bobbing on the water as it floated about and then followed the current out into the sea.

Running to the edge of the cliff, Lowenvir dived off into the water to find the garland. An hour later he awoke on the shore with his head in Faye's lap. He thrashed about trying to get back into the water.

"Maldowwyn does not want you. He brought you back to me on the mainland," explained Faye.

"Why? Why was I allowed to be so close, to speak to her, to promise to keep her safe and then lose her so swiftly? Why was there such hatred? Why could love not prevail? Is hatred greater

than love? Faye, my heart is breaking. I cannot go on. Let me die."

"It is not over, my son. It is not over. You have done much for us. You have freed us and made us a part of the human's life once again. You have done away with a vile evil at great cost to yourself. You are our champion, our victor; you have won favour with all the Tautha de Dannan."

"All that means nothing. I am alone and desolate. What then does it mean to win favour?"

"It means that you will be denied nothing; that you will be granted your heart's desire," explained Faye once again.

"How can you say that when my heart's desire lies dead at the bottom of the sea?"

"And you shall be granted dominion over death," said Faye cryptically as she faded away.

CHAPTER FOUR

"Dominion over death, Dominion over death? What could she mean by that?" questioned Lowenvir, as he paced the shoreline.

Staying where Faye had left him, he had kept watch for some reason over that island of death. It had been two nights, and still he could not leave that spot. Darkness and the cold night air were all he had for company until he heard hoofbeats. There had been a time when he would have hidden from strangers, but Lowenvir no longer cared for his safety.

"Lowenvir, is that you?" asked a voice out of the darkness. "What are you doing here? " It was King Rufic, and he was alarmed at seeing his friend in such a desolate state.

"Rufic?"

"Yes. May I join you?" Rufic asked as he dismounted and brought bread and fruit to share. "What has happened?" he asked when he had settled himself next to Lowenvir.

"She is dead. Calinda is dead by her father's hand. You warned me of the depth of his hatred, but I could not understand such evil. It was frightening to see it in him."

"I am so very sorry, my friend. The two of you deserved a long happy life. I could see immediately how much she loved you, but he could only see that you were different. I heard his threats to kill

her but did not believe that a father could do this to his own child. Indeed, we must always be on our guard against evil, if this is what it can do."

"Rufic, my life is over. I will stay here until the angel of death is merciful," declared Lowenvir.

"Why not join me? We are on our way to my neighbors to help clear their lands of the serpents and pass the warnings of evil and announce the blessings of good. You brought us this hope; it is only fitting that you now ride with us," suggested Rufic.

"No, my part in this saga of creation is over; I gladly pass on the torch. You are a true, gallant hero and the hope for our land. Ride in victory," was Lowenvir's cry, as Rufic galloped off.

Staring out over the sea to the island, Lowenvir had to admit that he was finally going mad, for there seemed to be a faint glow coming from inside the rocky shore. What cruel hoax was this? By

morning his hallucinations were totally engrossing for not only did the island glow from its hollow center, but a mist of steam surrounded it.

As he watched, with the first rays of sun, it seemed to Lowenvir that creatures were climbing the rocks and diving into the water. It was a scene of total glee and he was enthralled by their antics. He could not clearly see what form of creature they might be. They could be human; yes, he could see the round of the head and the slope of the back as they dived off the rocks or sat on the shore.

"Where did they come from?" Lowenvir wondered aloud. "No one could survive on that barren rock. There was nothing when I was there, no one left," he puzzled.

His fascination was like a magnet and pulled him into the water. He had to swim slowly for the cold stunned his senses. However, as he got closer to the island the waters warmed. Now, what madness was overtaking him?

Lifting his head out of the water to take a breath, Lowenvir was startled to see a set of eyes staring at him as a creature glided alongside of him and then disappeared under the water. By now his curiosity had overcome grief and spirited him onward to the island's rocks. He climbed to the top where the view of the shore was the best. There he watched the delightful creatures with lovely slick, brown fur and large woeful eyes frolic in and out of the water.

"Maldowwyn is very proud of them," announced Faye as she appeared beside Lowenvir. "Aren't they lovely?"

"Yes. There is something about them. I don't know.... something very human. Like me, part human."

"Like you," mused Faye. "Yes, now she is like you."

"Faye, where did they come from?"

"Count them," she suggested.

"Thirteen! There are thirteen. Faye, it is Calinda and her friends!"

"Yes. I could not tell you. You had to recognize them. Maldowwyn would not accept Clog's cruelty. He could not be a part of it. He would not be the cause of the loss of these young precious lives.

And so this world has a new, wonderful creature. However, they are not a stable form and could possibly change back to a human at any time."

"Faye, what are you trying to tell me? Which one is she?"

"She may just want to stay here unless..."

"Unless what?"

"Maldowwyn is a loving, caring father and has created a wonderful home for them, so she needs to be reminded of her previous life."

"Tell me what I must do!"

"You must offer something that was precious to her, something that she would respond to. Do you have anything?"

Lowenvir thought and grew silent.

Faye offered, "I know of something, Lowenvir. I helped Calinda make the cord."

He clutched the emerald ring which hung around his neck. "It is all I have left of her," Lowenvir hesitated. "I promised to never take it off."

"Look at me and listen. This is necessary. She must desire to return. You have always given us all of your courage, all of your ability. You have even been our hope; you gave Calinda all of your love. Now I ask you to give her all of your faith."

Lowenvir slowly took the ring from around his neck and kissed it.

"Now, throw it into the water and call her name," instructed Faye.

With tears flowing, Lowenvir thrust his arm out, flinging his precious gift into the waters. He watched as the fibers of sunrays glowed through the mist. Finally, with a mighty roar he shouted,

"CALINDA."

As he watched in amazement, a lovely brown head ascended from the depths through the circlet of glowing rays. It cleared the water's surface and thrust upward with the ring around her neck.

Suddenly she was there; Calinda took form before his eyes.

Lowenvir fell to his knees, and lifting his arms, he thanked Maldowwyn for his compassion and generosity. Then running down the rocks, he met Calinda as she came ashore. They

embraced, and Calinda reached her hand up to stroke his cheek, saying simply, "I love you, Lowenvir."

"Forever and always," he responded.

They swam back to the mainland to start the life that would fulfill the prophecy of the Tautha de Dannan

The Eye Saw

The eye saw

But the heart knew

The ear heard

But the mind received

The hand felt

But the soul perceived

The man reasoned

But the child believed

EPILOGUE

Vincent's voice trailed off to a whisper as his shaking hands closed the cover of the book. Handing Jacob to Father, he simply said, "I must leave."

With that he raced through his underground world toward the magical crystal cavern. Dominion over death, dominion over death pounded in his head as his feet pounded the earth. The day of travel which it took him seemed interminable.

He burst through the opening in the wall and with a mighty roar shouted, "CATHERINE."

END