

## Chapter Five

Drawn by the echoing cries of distress filling the Temple Healing Wards and reaching even the seclusion of the Devotionary, the Elders came quietly along the corridor in which Evondair stood glaring in forced silence upward at the sunlight shimmering in the afternoon winter sky. So lost in introspection was he that he did not take any notice of them until the youngest of the Three, Zraylaunyth, touched him upon the shoulder lightly and drawing back his hood to gaze at his friend with open concern.

Evondair recoiled from his touch instinctually, but when he turned and gazed into the youthful Elder's remarkable pale cerulean eyes dappled with gemlike cobalt, and saw in his empathetic stare all the dismay, revulsion, fear and frustration he felt himself, he could no longer withhold the flood of emotion that had been threatening to overwhelm him for the better portion of the day. Covering his face with trembling hands, he moaned in misery as the turbulent battle between Healer and Warrior lashed within him; yet he knew he did not need to speak a word in explanation. As the Elder gazed at him, he also gazed into him, touching the essence of his being and comprehending the vicious onslaught of opposing emotion and purpose that had beset him from the moment he stepped into the Devotionary to join Gairynzvl's band of Liberators.

"The Shadows have usurped the harmonious proclivity of your nature, Evondair, but do not despair. Your Purpose is being fulfilled. Draw strength from this knowledge and from we who support you."

A sharp cry of pain pierced the hush that answered these reassuring words and as they turned to gaze into the Healing Ward with apprehension, Kaylyya was led from the outer vestibule to stand with them. Her snowy-jade eyes met Evondair's deep viridian and he did not reach to hide the tears still evident in the depths of his stare, but as they shared the unsettling moment with unspoken understanding blossoming between them, one of the Healers shouted in surprise.

Forced into a state of combative agitation by the pain caused through the cleansing his wounds, Gairynzvl had once again revived into semi-consciousness. Cursing in furious Dlalthe blended with vehement Celebrae and incensed common tongue, he knocked aside the attendant Healer who was rinsing one of his hands in a solution of salt, curative minerals and water; then rolled sideways in an attempt to escape the treatment table.

"*Chrys-galnuth raach lyyr-echitck, viperous Healer! Volgralnuch shalee!*" His insensible speech and fierce determination to be free from them betrayed the gravity of the

situation and it took three Healers laying over him to begin to subdue him. Flailing his wings viciously, he struck the surgeon full in the face, sending him reeling; then he twisted beneath the weight of the Healers piled on top of him and bit one of them with all the ferocity of a trapped wolf, hissing at him aggressively while the other Fey screamed in pain and retreated.

Together with the remaining Healers who rushed into the chamber, drawn by the noise of the startling commotion, Evondair attempted to help restrain his friend, but, in spite of his unstable condition, his strength was bolstered by survival-driven instinct and sheer panic. Cursing at the golden-haired Fey with belligerent Dalth, Gairynzvl lurched upwards forcefully; knocking his head against that of the nearest Healer and sending him stumbling backward in dazed confusion. Thrashing vigorously, he twisted and kicked; hissed malevolently at one of the attendants before striking him ferociously over the head with his wing; then he grasped one of the Healers sprawled across his chest, throttling him with both hands while he cursed at him with shockingly vulgar Celebrae.

In the midst of the chaos, Evondair turned and looked at Kaylyya curiously, his thoughts returning to the tranquility with which she had enchanted him, entirely soothing his distress and leaving him in a blissful reverie unlike any he had ever experienced. Capturing her astonished gaze with his, he shouted to her over the chaos filling the chamber.

“Are you able to calm him?” His question drew the attention of the Elders, who had placed themselves between the dangerous malefey and the graceful newcomer and, when they turned their united stare on her, the weight of their joined gazes was profound, though she looked beyond them, watching the panic-stricken, wounded Fey with an expression of uncertain trepidation. For an interminable moment, she seemed only to stare at him and Evondair wondered if she had even heard his question amid the pandemonium Gairynzvl was causing, but then she closed her eyes and, very quietly, began to sing.

Initially, the delicate, ethereal sound of her voice was barely perceptible; like a whisper in a crowded, noisy room; nonetheless, in spite of the onslaught of profanity, she did not increase the volubility of her song, nor did she move closer to ensure the struggling, incoherent Fey to whom she sang would hear her. After a moment, the others turned to stare at her, transfixed by the melodious intonations softly filling the Healing Ward.

Gasping audibly for breath, Gairynzvl paused at last, turning his head as his unfocused gaze sought the source of entrancing music filling his being with surreal calm. The language she used was unknown to any of them; even the Elders stood motionless as the sound of her captivating song blended in their thoughts with an underlying, harmonious tone that echoed indistinctly with the beguiling sound of distant birdsong.

Shaking his head, Evondair forced himself to look away from her, fully aware of the beautiful void into which she could lure him if he listened too intently. Jostling the Healer at his side, he gestured at their patient who was gasping from exhaustion, but had otherwise become quiescent and was lying on his back, his wings spread wide across the table and hanging lax over its sides while he stared blankly at Kaylyya, utterly transfixed by her mesmeric singing. Refocusing their attention away from the enchantress who continued to harmonize with nature itself, he suggested they take full advantage of the spell under which their patient had fallen in order to close his wounds, but before the surgeon could take up his implements, the Elders stepped forward.

“How did he come to bear these wounds?” They looked to Evondair and he no longer hesitated to answer.

“They were produced by the ironwork of the Great Gate.” Several astonished gasps answered this pronouncement, but no one moved. Bending closer to see the injury to Gairynzvl’s hands more clearly, Zraylaunyth closed his eyes with poignant emotion as the moments leading up to the collapse of the gate replayed in his mind. Straightening, he turned to meld telepathically with the other Elders, sharing what he had seen so they, too, understood the significance of what had taken place. Then the First spoke.

“The Gate was created as an impenetrable barrier between the Darkness and the Light, without lock or key. Constructed by both sides to protect each dominion from infiltration by the other; the Ancients fashioned a spell of protection that no Reviled could contravene. Only through an act of inestimable self-sacrifice could the Gate be sundered.” He said no more, but in his silence, the Second continued.

“The Reviled, as is their nature, utilized a more ruthless and unsophisticated deterrent; inlaying the bars of the Gate with blades that would not grow blunted by the passage of time.” Astonished beyond comprehension at what she was hearing, Kaylyya’s song wavered and then stopped as she stared round her in wonder, but, in her silence, though it was mere seconds, Gairynzvl once again began to moan. “Sing, Enchantress; we must close these wounds before he loses the use of his hands.” The surgeon prompted with urgency marking every word, but before she could draw breath to begin again, the Second Elder stepped forward and raised his hands.

“Your skills are not required, Surgeon.” A dubious expression answered this declaration, but as the other Elders also stepped forward, the remaining attendants and Healers retreated with inquisitive reverence.

*“The One shall face an Insurmountable Challenge; yet the Capacity of his Love will be Measured by the Depth of his Wounds.”*

The First spoke, repeating a prophecy from the days of the first Ancients. Then the Second continued.

*“Sacrifice will Liberate when Hope falls into Shadow.”* As the Second also raised his hands, the Third completed the prophecy.

*“Light shall Heal, but the Wounds will ever Remain as a testament to the Purpose of The One who walks in Light and Shadow.”*

Raising his hands as well, their conjoined aura’s melded into a shimmering, radiant glow and, as if summoned by the influence of the resplendent glistening, the winter sun broke through the veil of clouds, which had filled the sky throughout the afternoon; its unhindered intensity streaming into the Healing Ward through the open shutters of its many windows. Scintillating ribbons of light reached downward, kissing the crown of Gairynzvl’s head, then spreading outward to envelope his entire body, reflecting from his nebulous wings and sparkling across his mud-spattered clothes, and when the luminous glimmer reached his hands, he gasped sharply.

Arching upward from the treatment table upon which he lay, he was held suspended, cradled by the Light as it enwrapped him, circling his hands, his arms, his entire body much as it had done during the Prevailation. Those gathered round watched in awe-struck wonder as the deep lacerations crisscrossing his hands began reflecting the shimmering light as if glowing from within. Then, as the Light’s incandescent glimmer seemed to amplify through the influence of the Elder’s unified auras, the wounds on Gairynzvl’s hands, inexplicably, began to close.