

The Bloodstone Miracles



J.H. Sweet

Clock Winders Series

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book are from the Revised Standard Version.

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The Bloodstone Miracles

Noontime in the Peacock Garden

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“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined. ‘While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.’”

—Isaiah 9:2, John 12:36

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Chapter One

Jasper Diamonds and Other Legends

While lying on her bed and reading a book, Zin Summerhaven craned her neck to see the clock on her nightstand, after which, she swiftly stowed the book in her pod pack hanging on the back of her desk chair, before clipping the pack onto her belt as she also donned a vest, jacket, and boots.

Rushing downstairs to the kitchen, after grabbing a couple of apples and four homemade snack bars to stuff into her pack to take with her, Zin was halfway out the back door when she heard her mother's voice calling to her from the parlor. "Zinnia, dear! A moment please, before you leave!"

Zin's mother, known to most people of her acquaintance as simply Em (or Mom to Zin), was the famous writer, E.R. Tremaine. Because her upstairs office had recently taken on a certain amount of the chill of the freezing nights and cold windy days, which were somewhat unusual for Alabama in only the second week of October, Em had lately taken to writing in the parlor, at a small desk very near the fireplace.

At first merely peeking into the parlor (just her head, with the rest of her body to one side of the door), in the hopes of getting away quickly after hearing whatever her mother wanted to tell her, Zin glimpsed the entire puck troll family of Doyle Mansion all sitting on little hassocks along the fireplace hearth and eating thick slices of strawberry layer cake each pretty much dwarfing the tiny pucks, especially the smallest, Lista, who, though still merely a toddler, was already incredibly fast at running. So too were her magical skills advanced for her age, being nearly equal to those of her older brother and sister, twins Pipac and Kisi; though it would still be some time before Lista would surpass her momma and papa, Heike and Pizzo, in magical abilities.

“We’re having a brunch-fest,” Em said of the cake, indicating a half-eaten slice on her desk that was sitting beside a half-empty glass of milk. “There’s more in the fridge, if you want some.”

“No thanks,” Zin replied, having eaten plenty of cake since her sixteenth birthday dinner two days previous. There had been three large cakes for her birthday, to account for the appetites of the pucks, plus the five human guests who had come to dinner, along with gryphon sisters, Magsen and Halli (the respective protectors of Zin and Em), and the gnome family living in a treehouse in the back gardens of the mansion. One of the five human guests had been Luis Abril, age twenty-one, a special friend to Zin, though not yet of the romantic sort because that wouldn’t end up coming along in their relationship for quite some time.

“Come in and sit down for a minute,” Em stated, gesturing for Zin to take a seat on the divan adjacent to the desk.

What Em wanted to tell her daughter had to do with a certain former nemesis, a nineteen-year-old girl named Eizel Gibson from Supercity Ten in Ohio. In the same way that Em was a gifted wordsmith, and Zin was a fabulous magician, Eizel too was gifted, in having the ability to plant thoughts and dreams into people’s minds. She was also starting to develop the ability to read thoughts and dreams, a skill rather slowly coming along these days because Eizel no longer wanted to use an enhancer elixir that a sorcerer friend of hers had developed to heighten her skills.

Evidently, Eizel was newly saved, now part of God’s family forever and saved from Eternal Death. And with being saved, she was no longer an enemy, and had even expressed a desire to help the godly people she had once fought against in working with the vicious sorcerers who were still in charge of the Supercities and work camps worldwide.

“Are you kidding?” Zin stated incredulously, upon hearing that Eizel was supposedly saved. “This is the same girl who’s been an evil menace to me and my friends on any number of occasions, and who has even tried to kill me.”

“I know,” Em replied, “but according to your Aunt Vini, she’s now saved, and intent on being godly, and separating from her former little clique.”

Zin's Aunt Vini (not really an aunt, but definitely a close family friend) lived at the twin plantations, also known as Netherwind and Laurelstone, located about fifty miles from Doyle Mansion, where Zin went to school and where one of her best friends also lived, Vini's granddaughter, Quinlyn Brinker.

"I'm not the only one who's going to have trouble accepting this," Zin told her mother, shaking her head when specifically thinking of Quin, the current Protector of Dragons. "Eizel was the one basically responsible for all those dragons getting killed at Lake Atitlán last year."

"I know," Em responded. "But we're all going to have to find a way to accept this. God gives people second chances, so we should too."

"What if it's a trick of some sort?" Zin expressed, in full well knowing the power of Eizel's gift. In fact, it wasn't a stretch at all to imagine her capable of deceiving great numbers of people.

"I think Vini would be able to tell if Eizel was hoodwinking her," Em answered.

Zin knew this to be true. In addition to having unicorn powers, her Aunt Vini had amazing discernment as a gift. Plus, being incredibly close to God (and very like His Son in being nearly fully sanctified), surely God would have told her if this was a deception.

"According to another reliable source," Em went on, "so far in the last few weeks, Eizel has only used her gift for good. She's planting only good thoughts and dreams, and helping sick and injured people manage their pain with thoughts of soothing and comfort that can, evidently, even help them heal."

The additional reliable source happened to be sixteen-year-old Heather Finn, also a gifted person, and one currently undercover in pretending to work for the sorcerers, while actually being on the side of the godly. Heather had a jewel gift connected to the black star sapphire, giving her the ability to draw on shadows as shrouds and making her nearly invisible when she chose to be. In addition to stealth, Heather's tears produced star sapphires that others could use as magical shrouds.

Having somewhat gotten over the initial surprise, though it was still a little hard to believe that Eizel wasn't still a menace, Zin said, "Okay,

whatever, but I'm not planning to cozy up to her like a friend. And I'm certainly not going to let my guard down around her."

"Very wise," Em agreed. "I think it's a good idea to take care around her, especially because it sometimes takes time for people to change."

"And the angels rejoice when a single soul is saved from hell," Zin suddenly remembered from the bible, though she couldn't quite remember where she had read this.

"Luke 15:10," Em said. "That's a good way to look at this. Rather than dwelling on any past instances of malice, we should think of the angels rejoicing." With Zin nodding, though a little skeptically because it was hard to imagine anything outweighing a lot of instances of Eizel's malice, Em added, "So, what are your plans for the day?"

Being ahead in her studies, Zin was taking most of October and November off from school to work on a few projects. This, her mother already knew, though she didn't know details. "I'm meeting up with Luis," Zin replied. "We're going to look for the Jasper Diamond." Although the Jasper Diamond was mostly a legend, many people believed the stone to be real.

Em was smiling as she said, "Morgan Scull sought the Jasper Diamond. I think he actually found it, but kept quiet about it." (Morgan Scull had been a gifted artist, with painting as his specialty, before he died at age twenty-nine in a demon attack at the twin plantations where he made his home.)

Piszo was nodding, and waving to get Zin's attention as he slipped from his hassock while setting down his fork and wiping strawberry frosting from his mouth with a large napkin. Retrieving a sketchpad and pencil from one corner of the parlor where he had a little art studio set up, Piszo wrote "Ask Luca and Pone" on the pad before showing it to Zin. Pucks didn't communicate telepathically like magical creatures such as wind horses, thunderbirds, and rookhs (giant magical blackbirds); nor did they speak aloud like gryphons, instead relying on either writing things out or miming.

"Thank you, Piszo," Zin said. "I'm heading to Lion Mountain anyway, so this is perfect."

Luca and Pone were two male puck trolls that had once worked with Morgan Scull, as kind of assistants to him in helping to mix his

paints, clean brushes, and so forth. After Morgan's death, the pair had decided to work with a potter.

"Say hello to your Uncle Sam for me," Em stated, while receiving a goodbye kiss on the cheek from Zin. As with her Aunt Vini, Zin's Uncle Sam was not really an uncle, but merely a close family friend, who was also the said potter. "Oh, and take him a few red oak leaves for his designs," Em added. "He asked for some quite a while back, and I keep forgetting to send them." Although Lion Mountain (located in Tennessee) was chock full of trees, there were evidently very few red oaks, which were also known as Spanish oaks.

The estate of Doyle Mansion held twelve large Spanish oaks, all of which were starting to turn red because of the recent cold weather, though none were yet dropping leaves. Retrieving from her belt pack a palm-size cube that turned into an airbike as she unfolded it, Zin hopped aboard to rise into the air to pluck two dozen red oak leaves to take to her uncle, who would end up using them in various ways in his work. She stored the leaves in a vest pocket, instead of her belt pack, which was designed to hold all sorts of things, even large and heavy items, which meant delicate things often didn't fare so well amongst the bulky clutter. *He wants leaves, not crushed leaves*, Zin's mind told her as she zipped the vest pocket, before also buttoning up her jacket against the sharp and steady north winds of the midmorning.

Setting off to Tennessee, the cold and wind actually didn't bother her, thanks to the fact that airbikes of recent design had a built-in protective aura, much like that of thunderbirds, wind horses, gryphons, and such, that acted to shield people riding them. Also, most airbikes were now stealth models, sharing their invisibility with their riders, along with their soundlessness, which had always been a feature of airbikes, except when they were hungry for the trash that fueled them, in which case, they made noises like those of rumbling stomachs. Having just fed several hunks of cardboard, three old steel cans, a pair of worn-out socks, and a mound of potato peels to her bike, Zin was good to go for a good long time, probably three months or so given the excellent efficiency of her newer-model bike.

Thanks to the stealth feature, which she switched on as she zipped over farm fields on the outskirts of the Rubble City that had once been Montgomery, Zin didn't as often these days need to travel with her

protector along. Magsen actually didn't mind staying home, the break giving her time to catch up on her reading. Though the travel took longer than if Magsen were carrying her (because gryphons were much faster than airbikes), Zin didn't mind, particularly in being able to enjoy the scenery below better at a more leisurely pace. Plus, airbike-riding gave her plenty of time to think, an advantage when working on magical endeavors of various sorts, both in her lab in the subbasement library of the mansion, or out in the wilds, as in the case of her current project, having to do with Twelve Miracles and which she was just starting on this very day.

Zin reached Lion Mountain in about ninety minutes, at just around lunchtime. She would have been quicker, since the speeds of airbikes were improved of late, except for meeting a strong north headwind for most of the journey.

Luis greeted her at the door of his small cabin, taking her jacket and belt pack to hang on a coat tree by the front door as he ushered her inside.

"Oh, that's really nice," Zin remarked of the iron coat tree that looked remarkably like a real tree, and was basically a work of art in having knots, leaves, a bark-like texture, and even an intricate iron bird's nest perched in one of its branches. "And new, I don't remember it from before."

"Yes, I just got it from Bernadette," Luis replied. (Bernadette Hayes was the local blacksmith, who tended to do a lot of artistic work in between practical jobs such as horseshoeing, gate building, and mending farm equipment.)

The apples and snack bars Zin had intended for their lunch would end up being saved for later because Luis had made vegetable soup for them. "And cheese biscuits to go along with," he stated while setting out a plate of them.

"Yummy, cheese biscuits," Zin answered, as they smelled absolutely wonderful.

After saying grace, the pair dug into lunch, talking as they ate, specifically about the Twelve Miracles project they were planning to work on together, which actually involved much more than just looking for the Jasper Diamond, though the diamond would be their starting point.

“So tell me more about the book,” Luis stated.

“I brought it,” Zin said excitedly, jumping up to retrieve the volume from her belt pack; though this took some doing as it had slipped down to underneath her bedroll, blanket, and a sack of walnuts and pecans she always carried for protein snacks. “And I need to remember to eat this orange,” she said, still digging, “probably before the apples, so it won’t go bad.”

“You know, most of the newer pod packs are designed with compartments,” Luis remarked, with a smile. In fact, he was very pleased with his new shoulder haversack that was highly efficient in having seven storage compartments, including two that were ideal for more delicate items in having stiff sides, padding, and security straps.

Zin actually loved her older pack, and wasn’t planning to replace it anytime soon. Plus, she always had plenty of pockets in her vests, pants, and jackets to store things that needed to be organized or protected. “Here it is,” she said, placing the book she had finally recovered next to Luis’ soup bowl.

“*Jasper Diamonds and Other Legends* by Rose Armene,” he stated, as he opened the book.

“I can’t believe I missed it before,” Zin said of the book she had never noticed in the subbasement library, despite being incredibly familiar with the Legends section.

“The copyright is only this year,” Luis remarked, indicating the date on the copyright page.

This, Zin also hadn’t noticed. “Huh, a really new book; we hardly ever have any at the mansion,” she said. “I’ll have to remember to ask my mom about it, if maybe it was borrowed from the Labyrinth Library.” (The main entrance to this enormous sprawling library was still located beneath Laurelstone Manor.)

“The sticker inside the back cover says, ‘Doyle Mansion SB Library, Alabama,’” Luis stated. “I’m assuming ‘SB’ means subbasement, as opposed to the upstairs library.”

“Yes,” Zin said, still baffled, since she hadn’t known of any new acquisitions in the past year, other than a handful of borrows that would end up returned to their libraries of origin once Magsen, Halli, Pizzo, or whoever had borrowed them was completely through with them.

“So the walls of New Jerusalem, our future heavenly home, are going to be made of jasper diamond,” Luis said, getting them back on track as far as their project. “But right now in the world there is only one Jasper Diamond, a magical stone that can shapeshift to look like just about anything.”

“Correct,” Zin answered. “And according to the legend, it’s traveling around looking for something.”

“So we’re starting with the Jasper Diamond,” Luis went on, “but it’s not really the legend we’re going to be focused on, which has to do with Twelve Miracles.”

“Right,” Zin said, her eyes shining with excitement, as she flipped pages in the book before pulling from a vest pocket a small blue decorative keepsake box that was about the size of two standard decks of playing cards stacked one upon another.

“Ah, the famous Chinese puzzle box,” Luis said, taking it from Zin and opening both secret compartments in less than four seconds.

“Show-off,” Zin scolded with a smile, as it had taken her roughly fifteen seconds to get into both compartments the first time. (A person without magical skills might have struggled for a couple of hours to open the tricky box.)

Luis’ speed at this task had to do with the fact that he was a powerful sorcerer, albeit, a converted one, converted to Christianity that is, which was why he was allowed to make his home on Lion Mountain, which was guarded by nature spirits that could easily discern the evil inside human beings, and thus were able to keep the Mountain safe from the likes of sorcerers and other miscreants.

“The Bloodstone Miracles,” Luis said, reading the title of the seventh legend in the book.

“And I think this might be the stone,” Zin said, in a hushed sort of tone, as though she might disturb the polished gemstone she had just gingerly retrieved from the smallest of the two compartments in the puzzle box. (The larger compartment was presently empty.)

“It’s less polished than other collectible rocks,” Luis remarked, taking carefully into his hands the smallish stone (not much larger than an ordinary raspberry) that was buffalo-gray in color, with hints of green thrown in, and bright red markings of various hues.

“Like the polish happened naturally—from wind and water out in the wilds—instead of in a rock tumbler,” Zin stated.

“Or from sand over the years,” Luis input.

“And speaking of sand,” Zin answered, flipping pages in the book back to the first legend, “it’s actually a character in the ‘Jasper Diamonds’ story. A sand wisp is looking for the Jasper Diamond; but since the stone is looking for something too, they keep missing each other.”

“What is the stone looking for?” Luis asked.

“Others of its kind, I think,” Zin replied. “But whatever it’s looking for, I have a clue for us to follow up on,” she added, showing Luis Pizo’s note that she had brought with her. “So we’re heading for the pottery studio after lunch.”

“Okay, but back to the other legend,” Luis said. “You think the Bloodstone, which can help enact Twelve Miracles, is connected to the Jasper Diamond.”

“I think it can make a miracle happen with regard to the Jasper Diamond,” Zin answered. “When I was praying about the Bloodstone, and the Twelve Miracles, God led me to look in my foreshard. And I saw what I thought was the Jasper Diamond—pinkish in hue, and about the size and shape of a tomato pin cushion. So this is where we start, I think, if God means for us to help bring about the Twelve Miracles, which I think He does.”

“Maybe the Bloodstone can help the Jasper Diamond find others of its kind?” Luis speculated.

“Or the miracle might be something even grander,” Zin eagerly said.

“Miracles don’t all have to be grand,” Luis replied. “They can be small and still be really important.”

While Zin knew this to be true, she couldn’t help hoping that something spectacular might happen, particularly because many miracles described in the bible were completely amazing, like the sun standing still, manna raining down from heaven, and small amounts of food being multiplied to provide for thousands. So too were three young men thrown into a fiery furnace, later emerging completely unharmed and not even smelling like smoke because God had protected them.

Zin had brought along her foreshard, a magical crystal that often allowed her glimpses of future events, for various reasons. Sometimes the visions acted as warnings, such as when she was about to have a run-in with a longtime nemesis, nineteen-year-old Tanner Ellison, who was none other than Eizel's sorcerer friend who had made the enhancer elixir for her. Tanner was actually the head of a little band of miscreants that often gave Zin and her friends trouble; and with regard to foreshard warnings, she had gotten a recent one indicating that she would have an encounter with Tanner in the near future.

"Out over an expanse of water," Zin told Luis. "And I'm pretty sure you were with me at the time."

Neither Zin nor Luis was all that worried with regard to the upcoming encounter, especially as a pair. In truth, Tanner had only once gotten the better of Zin in a duel; and although Luis was only slightly older than Tanner in biological years, he was actually three hundred years more advanced in sorcerer skills, from having lived that long under a curse, one that didn't allow him to age, but did allow him to learn and grow in other ways. Luis and Zin also had God on their side when dealing with the likes of Tanner, so they didn't often have much to fret about when it came to adversaries.

After washing the lunch dishes, the pair headed to Sam Dellinger's pottery studio, on foot, since it was only about two miles from Luis' cabin, and both felt like they could use some fresh air and exercise. While the day was still cold and breezy, the sun was out, and the tree-lined path was fairly well shielded from the worst of the winds.

On the way, the pair stopped briefly at the technology lab of seventeen-year-old Chase Linn (who was most often called Linn and who was one of Zin's best friends) to say hello before heading on.

At the studio, as Zin gave her uncle a hug, Luis greeted Sam with a particular triangle hand symbol (made with thumbs and forefingers) that was catching on all over the world at this time amongst the godly, not only as a way of saying hello and goodbye, but also as a means of offering general well wishes.

After giving Sam the red oak leaves, Zin and Luis went in search of Luca and Pone, who were behind the studio in the kiln and firing-pit area, where Sam's firebird protector, Beme, was firing about sixty pots, plates, bowls, cups, and such. The visitors smiled to see the pucks

throwing sticks at the firebird, while shaking scolding fingers at him over his techniques.

Beme was taking no notice of his critics. Having fired Sam's pottery for decades by this time, he didn't care one bit if the pucks thought the spacing wasn't right, or the temperature. They were also trying to tell him that ashes were falling on certain of the pieces, a fact which Beme had already observed, but didn't fret over, particularly in knowing that Sam favored the look of ashes mixed with various clays and glazes.

When finally able to catch the attention of the pucks, Zin and Luis explained that Pizzo had sent them, with regard to Morgan Scull and his search for the Jasper Diamond, which Luca and Pone did know about, including details.

Being fonder of miming than of writing things out, after hopping onto a tree stump, the puck pair proceeded to put on what amounted to a highly amusing and detailed little play (lasting about twelve minutes), to demonstrate to Luis and Zin what they knew about the Jasper Diamond.

Morgan had indeed gone on a quest to find the stone, which he managed to locate. The diamond evidently liked to visit magical objects all over the world, also impersonating them, even to the extent of temporarily taking on their magical tricks. Though completely intrigued by his find, Morgan didn't try to take the Jasper Diamond home with him, instead leaving it to its roaming. However, upon returning home, Morgan discovered that the diamond had followed him. Though it didn't stay around all of the time, because it evidently still liked to travel, the Jasper Diamond sometimes liked to watch Morgan paint, doing so periodically until Morgan's death, after which, it decided to meld with his final painting, becoming part of the picture. And as far as the little pucks knew, it was still part of the painting to this day. While Luca felt the diamond had found whatever it was looking for, like some sort of peace and contentment (particularly because Morgan's work was known for instilling peace), Pone thought the stone was probably still in search of something, but had decided to use the painting as a sort of waiting spot until deciding to head out again on its search.

By the time they finished miming out their story, the pucks were exhausted, and pretty well famished, so they headed into the studio for a

little snack consisting of grilled cheese sandwiches, apple slices, bananas, and chocolate pudding. Though declining the offer of like fare, Luis and Zin did accept Sam's invitation to sit and have cups of cocoa with him, after which, they would be heading to Netherwind to see the painting in question, which was currently in the possession of Louetta Nolan, who had been Morgan's mentor.

Luca and Pone decided to go with them. In truth, the pucks often visited the twin plantations, to check in with Louetta and visit Morgan's grave. Outside of the pottery studio, after bidding Sam farewell with the triangle hand symbol, Luis shapeshifted into a rookh, one specifically known as Westerwing, as this was the form he had been trapped in for three hundred years while under the curse. While many sorcerers had advanced transfiguration stills, not many chose to transform into magical creatures, mainly because they couldn't also take on the magical abilities of the likes of gryphons, thunderbirds, and such. Plus, larger forms took more energy to hold. However, since Luis had lived so long as a rookh, he could actually become a rookh, and for lengthy periods of time, with full rookh powers including the ability to communicate telepathically with other creatures. Plus, he was even faster when traveling westward because the curse had originally doomed him to travel only in westerly directions, until the sorcerer in him managed to overcome that obstacle.

Luis had decided to fly them to the twin plantations in order to move their endeavor along more quickly. And it was indeed a speedy trip, taking less than three minutes to reach Louetta's studio, located in the same garage apartment at Netherwind that she had lived in now for several decades, the garage itself below the apartment having long since become part of her studio, not only because people never used cars anymore, but also because she badly needed the space for both her work and some of Morgan's.

As Luis and Zin greeted Louetta with the triangle hand symbol, which she returned, the pucks headed to an upstairs section of the studio in which twelve of Morgan's paintings were displayed, some on easels and some hung on walls. Several enormous kittens from a couple of Louetta's paintings were scampering about the studio, these having long since been brought to life by Pizzo who, like Luca and Pone, also enjoyed coming to the studio, mainly to visit Louetta whom he had

known since she was a little girl. Though each about the size of a full-grown sheep, the kittens were actually being very careful about the artwork. So too was a footstool-sized hippo careful when he emerged from his painting to frolic with the kittens.

After shedding their jackets and declining an offer of tea, and upon explaining why they had come, Zin and Luis shortly followed Louetta to the area of the twelve paintings, the visitors along the way admiring several lovely wall murals done by their host. Roughly the same age as Zin's mom, Louetta was just about as famous in being a fabulous trompe l'oeil artist, which meant her work was incredibly lifelike. Much of Morgan's work was lifelike as well, including the painting in question, the subject of which was a china cabinet and at which Luca and Pone were staring adoringly. One door of the cabinet was open to better display the contents.

"The china is mostly blue willow in pattern," Louetta remarked, "though Morgan added several other pieces, for a contrast of colors."

"So the scenes on the blue willow set are of a Japanese tea garden," Zin remarked of the incredible detail that made each bowl, plate, and cup look very real.

"Yes," Louetta answered, "and the other pieces are garden in theme as well, but perhaps more like an English garden."

"Well, that would fit with this little hedgehog figurine over here," Luis stated, pointing to the ceramic creature, who seemed to be hiding behind a gravy boat sporting roses and violets as a motif. A nearby red glass swan also seemed to be hiding, behind a porcelain vase that was pansy in theme.

"I might not have known from simply looking at a painting of a china cabinet," Zin remarked, "that Morgan's art has the effect of cooling tempers and settling conflicts."

"That's the beauty of most of his work; it's not like 'in-your-face' obvious," Louetta stated. "But because he was gifted, the effect is certainly pronounced."

"Gardens are often peaceful places," Luis input thoughtfully, in considering that the theme of the china cabinet might be both obvious and subtle at the same time with regard to instilling peace.

Luca and Pone were nodding in agreement, as Louetta added, "Morgan chose to use his gift in the service of God, not to make money

or become famous; though he did become famous after his death when his work became even more in demand.”

Luis and Zin couldn't see any sign of the Jasper Diamond in the china cabinet. When Zin remarked as such, Pone pointed to a bird's nest sitting in a soup bowl. Inside the nest was an alabaster egg, pale gold in color with hints of rose and soft streaks of gray. Per Pone's miming, Luis and Zin discerned that the egg had not been part of the original painting, the nest having been empty, as though waiting for something. The Jasper Diamond had evidently decided to make use of the nest as its home, perhaps temporarily (per Pone's estimation), or permanently (by Luca's guess).

Whether or not the nest in the painting would end up being a long-term home for the Jasper Diamond had yet to be determined. In the meantime, the stone did still occasionally like to roam, which it would end up doing on this day. Zin gave a small gasp of surprise as the egg suddenly transformed into the Jasper Diamond and lifted itself from the nest, then floating slowly out of the cabinet door, and out of the painting entirely, to hover in front of her face, before taking off on a zigzagging course through easels and bits of furniture on its way downstairs to exit the studio.

Luca was wildly gesturing for Zin and Luis to follow the stone, which they did in short order, hastily bidding Louetta and the pucks goodbye, while trying not to trip on the hippo and kittens in their haste to grab their jackets and depart the garage apartment in a running pursuit of the diamond, which picked up speed outside the studio on a trek toward Netherwind Manor, which it entered via a side door, then leading its chasers up the side stairs to enter the magical mezzanine floor, the hallway of which contained doorways to other realms.

“The Jasper Diamond can evidently open doors on its own,” Zin breathlessly remarked, as they raced up the stairs.

“It's evidently a powerful stone,” Luis answered, equally out of breath.

Passing several doors in the hall, the diamond stopped in front of what appeared to be an empty section of wall, but that actually held the invisible door to what the godly were calling the Mystery Realm, since they hadn't yet figured out a better name for the mysterious land that many felt likely held materials for the building of New Jerusalem, in the

form of twelve vast gemstone canyons, caves holding huge quantities of precious metals, a virtual sea of golden glass, and an expansive lake housing a dozen enormous oysters containing pearls that many speculated might be for the gates of that future heavenly city. Also situated in the Mystery Realm were three magical pyramids called Zoe, Chronos, and Moira. Twenty-four additional pyramids, known as Myramids, made their home in another region of the land.

Despite being able to open doors, the Jasper Diamond didn't do this with the door to the Mystery Realm, instead waiting for Zin to use Reveal Powder (from a pouch in a jacket pocket) to briefly expose the invisible door, before using a magical key (retrieved from a vest pocket) to unlock the door and open it. While Zin had made the Reveal Powder in her lab, the key, which could unlock just about any door, had been found in the larger compartment of her Chinese puzzle box, the box itself having been discovered in a secret wall niche on the third floor of Netherwind, which was currently occupied by Merri Tremaine, the daughter of Em's brother, Kip, who made his home these days in Antica, a realm accessed by one of the other doors on the mezzanine.

No sooner was the door opened than the diamond whizzed through it, followed by Zin and Luis who ended up on a rocky plateau central to the twelve gemstone canyons. The door on the other side, built into a boulder on the plateau, was like its mezzanine counterpart in being invisible. But since Zin had plenty of Reveal Powder, this would pose no problem for the visitors when wishing to return to home. With the sun high overhead, Luis and Zin guessed the time to be approximately noon in the Mystery Realm; and the crisp, but not too cold, breezes made the season feel like autumn.

The Jasper Diamond very swiftly took off, which prompted Luis to turn himself into Westerwing so that Zin could hop on. Thus, they followed the whizzing stone out over one of the canyons (containing glittering sapphires of many blue hues), then down into an area of mixed woodlands and grassy plains (presently fall-like in colors), to eventually reach a valley adjacent to the oyster lake. From the lake, it was but a short jaunt to the area of the three pyramids, over which the diamond soared, with Luis and Zin hot on its tail. Beyond the pyramids lay the sea of golden glass, which many felt might be for the streets of New Jerusalem; and just beyond that, they came to a gigantic gorge, the

center of which contained a pile of sand roughly the size of a large warehouse. While it might have taken over two days to reach this area on foot (because airbikes didn't work in the Mystery Realm), the diamond and rookh had made the trip in right around seven minutes.

"Sand," Zin said, slipping from Luis's back as he shifted back to his human form. Recalling more of the "Jasper Diamonds" legend, she added, "The sand wisp in the story was gathering sand because each of the magical diamonds would be formed from an ordinary grain of sand. From here, that pile looks like ordinary sand." They had stopped on the edge of the gorge, not entering because the Jasper Diamond hadn't done so, but was at this point simply quietly hovering beside Zin's shoulder.

Luis was smiling as he remarked, "God made people out of dust, so why not Jasper Diamonds out of plain sand?"

"So, I'm guessing that we get to help make them," Zin said in absolute delight and wonder.

Of course, God never needed any help, but the gifted had learned over the years that He sometimes did allow others to help, including with important projects. In fact, Zin and Luis had both helped to build the Zoe Pyramid. Plus, Zin had been on the team that constructed the Chronos Pyramid. However, she felt surely this project was going to be different, more in the realm of the miraculous, as opposed to that of hard work.

Retrieving the puzzle box from her jacket pocket, Zin carefully removed the Bloodstone, which felt very warm in her hand. "The red markings are supposed to represent Jesus' blood in the Garden of Gethsemane," she said quietly, "when He was in agony and sweat drops of blood before being taken into custody for His trial and crucifixion."

This prompted Luis to look in his pocket bible to read aloud Luke 22:43-44. "And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground."

"According to the legend in the book," Zin went on, "a drop of Jesus' blood actually landed on the Bloodstone, which is why the Twelve Miracles are possible. Otherwise, it would be just like any other bloodstone gemstone in the world."

The red markings on the stone somehow looked brighter to Zin in the Mystery Realm, and she wasn't sure if this was because the sun was shining on it in a certain way, or if the Bloodstone now held something of a magical hint, as though perhaps in anticipation of performing a miracle.

"From what you've told me so far," Luis said, "I'm assuming that the Bloodstone can make miracles happen, but not on its own."

"It needs some human involvement," Zin agreed nodding, "like someone making the decisions, or pushing the right buttons, or saying the right things. In the legend, the stone didn't perform the miracles. It was on a journey, searching for something, kind of like how the Jasper Diamond was searching for something."

"Maybe searching for the right person to help bring about the Twelve Miracles," Luis input.

Suddenly feeling nervous, Zin said, "I'm not sure what to do, where to start."

Luis didn't particularly have any good ideas, except to say, "There must have been some reason that the Bloodstone came to a magician."

"Like by Providence—it was somehow meant to be," Zin answered.

"Yes," Luis replied, "but what I mean is that maybe the right buttons to push or the right things to say are magical things."

"But my magic isn't miraculous," Zin argued. "I don't perform miracles. The magic that God allows magicians to use is short of miraculous." Specifically thinking of the Realm of Sextessence (accessible by one of the doors on the mezzanine) where magicians sometime visited to get resources and answers to questions, she added, "There's a reason our magic is based on sixes, because that's a human number, stopping just short of seven, which is a godly number. Amongst magicians, godly magic—that which is inexplicable and in the same arena as miracles—is often called Seven Magic, which is unattainable, untouchable basically." Zin was correct in her assessment. However, while Seven Magic was untouchable by magicians, certainly they could be touched by God's magic, as anyone can be.

Since Luis obviously still hadn't gotten his point across, he tried again. "But that's probably what the Bloodstone can do—get a magician across the hump of sixes and into the realm of Seven Magic."

“Oh, I see, of course,” Zin answered. “If the stone is related to miracles, then I don’t need to worry about what I think I’m capable of. And a magician is definitely capable of transforming things, though not usually sand into diamonds.”

Zin and Luis hadn’t even touched on the issue of faith, which many people in the bible had to have in order for miracles to happen. But the reason this pair didn’t need to consider the faith factor was because it was a nonstarter with them. They both definitely had great amounts of faith, enough to move mountains even, or great sycamores.

“Transformative magic,” Zin mulled. “That’s actually pretty easy.” She was specifically thinking of some of her favorite tricks such as making playing cards and chess pieces come alive, to grow to life size and protect against such things as gremlins and hobgoblins. It also suddenly came to mind how she had once turned a rose into a hat. However, this sowed a small seed of doubt because the hat had reverted back to a rose after twenty-four hours. So too did the chess pieces and playing cards always shrink again, generally after only a couple of minutes of being animated. *There are always limitations*, she thought. Longevity spells were a good example, as they always had a time limit, such as those placed on cut flowers to keep them fresh. In the case of the chess pieces and playing cards, the spells were designed to include reversion so that these items could easily be carried in pockets, then be reanimated when needed.

But sometimes spells are permanent; they don’t always revert, Zin’s brain reminded her. This was true in the case of making pens and pencils write by themselves to take dictation. She never had to redo the charms to make the pens and pencils continue to perform their tricks.

Deciding that, instead of pondering, she should just try, Zin did exactly that. With the Jasper Diamond still hovering beside her shoulder, as though patiently waiting for something, she retrieved a pouch from her vest pocket that contained sixty charmed dandelion seeds, which were excellent seeds to use for transformative magic, in coming from a plant so highly transformative in nature. Indeed, in looking at a dried dandelion, one could hardly believe it to be connected to its fresh, silky-yellow younger self.

While keeping the Bloodstone clasped in her right hand, without particularly thinking as to number, Zin placed three of the magical seeds

onto her left outstretched palm, then lightly blowing across them in the direction of the sand pile in the distance. This swiftly produced a cloud of bright yellow light sparkles, which rose from her hand and took off in the direction of the pile of sand. Growing as it traveled, the sparkly yellow cloud soon became large enough to cover the pile, much like an enormous dandelion umbrella, before slowly settling over the sand. In the same way the three seeds had disappeared from Zin's palm when her breath touched them, the yellow sparkles disappeared into the sand, as though completely absorbed.

When nothing happened, Zin again had a small doubt. *I'm missing something*, she thought. *So what am I missing?*

As if in answer, the Jasper Diamond suddenly knocked into her shoulder, as though giving her a soft punch. While the impact wasn't hard enough to cause her body to move, being startled, Zin did lurch sideways, knocking into Luis, and giving him a start, particularly because he too had been lost in thought.

The jolt from the diamond, which led to the bump with Luis, was enough to give Zin's brain a nudge in the right direction. "Of course," she said aloud. "In the same way that the Bloodstone came to a magician, there's a reason that this magician invited a sorcerer to join the project."

"Providence," Luis responded, smiling. "It was meant to be."

"Teamwork," Zin then said, specifically thinking of how she had, the previous year, worked with a sorceress on several magical projects, including that of activating the Chronos Pyramid, which was key to allowing the four time-travel portals in the world to work. And it had not only been helpful to work with a sorceress, it had been crucial, as Zin would not have been able to complete the task on her own.

On the subject of teamwork, Luis offered, "That's one of the reasons human beings are on earth—to help one another." (Some of the other reasons include spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ, fighting against evil, and demonstrating to God what kind of citizens we will eventually be in heaven.)

If Luis hadn't had over three hundred years of experience as a sorcerer behind him, he might have had similar reservations to Zin's with regard to his magic. While he, like many sorcerers, was adept at transforming things—such as people into the likes of lizards and

rodents, and bringing things to life like sticks and rocks—he had never performed any miracles, such as the making of diamonds, which took great numbers of years to form in the earth. Without any particular reservations, and because his faith was great, Luis’ mind was more on the miraculous, in specific, that there was scientific evidence to prove that God had made the granite rocks of the earth in a mere instant. In fact, the radioactive isotopes trapped in these rocks couldn’t have been there if the rocks had formed gradually.

So time has nothing to do with this, Luis’ mind told him, as he retrieved his staff (a collapsible model) from a jacket pocket, just as Zin was placing another three charmed dandelion seeds on her left palm, while also slightly repositioning the Bloodstone in her right hand that had become somewhat sweaty from the nervousness and anticipation of the upcoming miracle, about which, she too had great faith.

At the same moment Zin blew once more on her left palm, Luis used his staff in conjunction with a transfiguration incantation—one designed to work on inanimate objects like stones and twigs, as opposed to people or animals—the words of which, being in some ancient sorcerer dialect, were unintelligible to Zin.

Along with a crack of thunder, a bright orange flash issued from the head of Luis’ staff (in a long streak like lightning), the orange light melding with the yellow sparkles of Zin’s new dandelion cloud, basically turning the sparkles into livelier versions of their former selves, not only in color, but also in movement. Indeed, as the now orange-tinged flashing sparks met the sand pile, they didn’t just settle over it, but began stirring the sands, like diving shovels, in almost a ferocious fashion.

After only a few seconds of stirring and churning, the grains of sand began to transform, each into a lovely cut diamond, but with soft edges instead of sharp. Though most were the same size as the original Jasper Diamond, and roughly the same shape, some of the newly-formed stones differed, including ones that might have been likened in size and shape to cantaloupes, large avocados, and pattypan squash.

Based on the rapid transformation of the sand particles into Jasper Diamonds, Luis and Zin could immediately see why the gorge had to be so large. Although some were still in the process of transforming, the glittering rosy-hued stones were fairly filling the massive expanse,

which, in a matter of only about ninety seconds, was completely filled to the very brim. This left Zin and Luis rather thankful that they hadn't entered the gorge to help enact the miracle, as they might have been crushed during the transformation process.

The magician and sorcerer were left smiling as the original Jasper Diamond suddenly left them to fly out over the gorge and basically dive into the masses to join its new family. Carefully tucking the Bloodstone back into the Chinese puzzle box, Zin gave a small sigh of satisfaction to have the first of the Twelve Miracles complete.

Before heading for home, Luis and Zin shared the orange from her pack, also noting as they gazed out over the landscape that some of the Jasper Diamonds were already practicing their shapeshifting skills. In fact, four of them had just hopped out of the gorge to sit on the rim only a short distance from the position of the magician and sorcerer. As the pair watched, the four stones together formed the walls and roof of a structure resembling a small rectangular greenhouse, about six feet in height. When four more diamonds jumped from the gorge to join the endeavor, the structure nearly tripled in size. A group of diamonds rising up from the center of the gorge to hover about twenty feet above the masses of other stones ended up forming a flower that swiftly took the shape of an enormous fresh dandelion, though one crystal clear with a rosy tinge, rather than yellow.

"I think that might be their way of saying, 'Thank you,'" Luis speculated.

"Or maybe just, 'Hello,'" Zin responded, giving a short wave to the dandelion diamond cluster.

On the flight back to the doorway on the plateau, Zin wondered if the final events of the Endtimes might be on the near approach. *Was this miracle necessary now because Jesus is about to build New Jerusalem?*

Except time is really mysterious, Zin's mind told her, everywhere, and especially in the Mystery Realm. She had actually time traveled to help build the two pyramids in this strange land, and again when returning to activate the granite one. Plus, no matter how much time was spent in the Mystery Realm, persons visiting always returned home to discover that three minutes only had passed in their own realm.

Today would be no exception to the three-minute rule. In fact, by the time Luis and Zin briefly stopped to say hello to Zin's Aunt Merri (called an aunt, even though she was really an older cousin) in Netherwind's kitchen, and then made their way out of the house and across the side lawns to return to Louetta's studio, Luca and Pone had barely made it to Morgan's grave, each carrying a white carnation (Morgan's favorite flower) obtained from one of Netherwind's greenhouses.

Louetta, just setting out tea in the upstairs studio, was anxious to hear about their adventure, as well as something about their overall project, since Zin and Luis hadn't had time to explain about the Twelve Miracles on their earlier visit to the studio.

Enjoying scones, cinnamon toast, and ginger tea, Zin excitedly described not only the Bloodstone project, but everything that had happened after they followed the Jasper Diamond out of the studio.

"The sand turning into diamonds was definitely a miracle," Luis stated, "since what happened was more than what magicians and sorcerers are capable of, even working together."

"I agree," Louetta replied. "In fact, it sounds more like what genies are capable of. I've always thought they were little miracle workers."

A small giraffe about four feet tall from one of Louetta's paintings was sitting nearby on a sofa reading a book, while occasionally pushing his little reading glasses a bit higher on his nose. Observing the reading giraffe, Luis and Zin were smiling, because the scene was a bit comical; though they were trying not to laugh, as they wouldn't have wanted to hurt the giraffe's feelings.

Zin was still incredibly excited over what had happened with the Jasper Diamonds. "A transforming miracle, like something from the bible, like water turned to wine!" she gushed.

"But on an even larger scale," Luis remarked, equally enthralled, "a whole gorge full of diamonds!"

Luca and Pone made it back to the studio for the tail end of the tea, during which, they polished off the scones, toast, and six slices of butter brickle bread that Louetta had procured from the pantry for them. The pucks were planning to stay for a bit, to watch Louetta work on a mural and maybe mix a few paints for her, so they wouldn't need Luis and Zin to take them back to Lion Mountain. They would end up catching a ride

home later, probably on one of the gryphons residing at the twin plantations.

As Zin and Luis were helping Louetta clear away the tea, Luca and Pone moseyed over to the area containing Morgan's paintings. After stopping in front of the china cabinet one, they ended up rushing to the kitchen area to get the attention of Louetta, Zin, and Luis, who hurried to the painting to see the Jasper Diamond once more snuggled into the bird's nest, this time not taking on the appearance of an alabaster egg, but staying in diamond form.

Luis and Zin were both rather surprised. "I would have thought it would want to stay with the other diamonds," Zin stated.

"Maybe it got used to the freedom of traveling," Louetta offered, "so it wants to do more exploring before settling down with the others of its kind. And this is just where it likes to wait between taking trips."

Luca and Pone simply thought the stone had fallen in love with Morgan's painting, and so couldn't help but come back, at least for a time before eventually leaving to join its new family.

While Louetta was wrapping up a couple of slices of butter brickle bread from the pantry for Zin and Luis to take with them, Zin took the opportunity to make use of her foreshard in a quiet corner of Louetta's studio. Peering intently into the crystal, after only about six seconds, she began to see a series of very clear images, which she was able to describe a few minutes later to Luis and Louetta.

"A fleet of W'eeper sailing ships," Louetta responded, astounded, "and the lead ship was Harvey's Ghost. Why, you're going to see my brother, Albert. He must be part of your next miracle."

Admiral Albert Nolan was the leader of the W'eeper, the underground navy that wasn't actually secret anymore, having been exposed when taking part in the massive uprisings (some twenty months past now) that had liberated massive numbers of slaves from the Supercities and work camps worldwide.

Luis and Zin were as amazed as Louetta that the day would turn out to be something of a family affair, with a pair siblings involved (at least indirectly) in the first two of the Twelve Miracles. And the magician and sorcerer would definitely be following up with the second miracle right away since Albert's current location, according to Louetta, was in

the Polynesian Triangle, at a spot a couple hundred miles south of Hawaii. “That’s about four hours earlier than here,” Luis stated.

Zin was smiling and nodding as she said, “Which means we can go today because there will be plenty of daylight left.”

Chapter Two

Walking on Water

Since there was no hurry, after bidding Louetta and the pucks farewell, Luis and Zin set out on a fairly leisurely trip west, enjoying the lovely scenery of America's Desert Southwest, then the California Coast, before heading out over the open ocean.

The water expanse got the airborne pair thinking about water miracles, of which there were many mentioned in the bible.

"Like the man in Second Kings who bathed seven times in the Jordan River to be healed of leprosy," Zin stated.

Both Peter and Jesus walked on water, Luis answered telepathically.

Deciding this was a perfectly good way to communicate (especially in somewhat windy conditions), Zin responded by thought. *In Exodus, Moses brought forth water from a rock.*

Real water to sustain lives, Luis replied, *but also symbolic in representing Jesus, the Living Water.*

Jesus told the woman at the well that He was the Living Water, Zin answered, before pulling out her pocket bible in order to reference John 4:10-14.

"Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink," you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?' Jesus said to her, 'Every one who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'"

Zin barely had time to read half of the passage (which she would finish later) before needing to stow her bible because they had reached

their destination, the deck of Harvey's Ghost, upon which Westerwing softly landed while simultaneously turning himself back into Luis as Zin slipped nimbly from his back.

Albert, who had just finished having lunch, wasn't at all surprised by the visitors because Louetta had given him a heads up by walnut (a common communication device of the day) that Zin and Luis were on their way; though she hadn't given details.

Before getting into specifics, Luis and Zin accepted an invitation to tour the ship, which was one of the smaller vessels in this particular fleet of the W'eeppers (a term short for Water Keepers, by the way).

Zin was smiling the whole time they were being shown around, both above and below deck, in remembering seeing photos in an album at home of Harvey's Ghost, which had at one time resided in miniature form inside of Doyle Mansion after being shrunk down by a sorcerer. Having been sized back up by another sorcerer, the ship was now fully employed in service, actually leading a godly fleet of which many of the boats were made from wood that had once been part of Noah's Ark.

The ships were all of older designs—complete with masts, sails, riggings, and such—rather than anything more sleek and modern. This was because those who had built most of the W'eeppers' vessels fully believed the prophecy that complex machinery and electronics were not going to work in the Endtimes. Since this was already proving to be true—with gremlins wreaking havoc all over the world, EMPs produced by leviathans (underwater dragons) causing problems, and sorcerer-made magnetism mixers hindering machines and devices—many people held the view that the world was already in at least an early stage of the Endtimes.

Due to the aforementioned issues, no planes at all were active in the world at this time, which was why having a navy was so important; though the sorcerers were seriously lacking in this regard, in not having the ability to build older-style vessels. Thus, they were still relying on nyregs (demonic winged beasts) for travel and use in battle. So too were flash dragons (sometimes called fake dragons or falsies) starting to be used by the sorcerers, despite being difficult to handle from having an even nastier temperament than nyregs. In case we might be wondering, airbikes (and airbuses, airboards, and so on) were able to work because they had very few moving parts, having been cleverly

designed by gifted technologists with help from magicians. However, in the event these conveyances stopped working in the future, large horse farms were in operation, and had been for decades actually, from certain people having good insight as to what might be in store for the human race that had gotten way too dependent on gadgets, conveniences, etc. in the past century or so.

Harvey's Ghost, a Boston clipper, was a little weather beaten from having seen quite a few battles, but was still a totally seaworthy craft. Many of the sailors on board—who greeted the visitors with the triangle hand symbol—were enjoying a lunch of apples, submarine sandwiches, and snickerdoodles. Zin and Luis, still full from their earlier tea with Louetta, declined the offer of lunch, even the cookies, though they were still warm from the galley ovens and smelled delicious.

This particular fleet was comprised of about fifty ships, which was actually somewhat large for normal naval operations.

“Are you out on military maneuvers, or maybe playing war games?” Luis wanted to know.

“No,” Albert responded. “In fact, we're working on a puzzle; and I thought getting a lot of ships involved might help me solve it, kind of like getting more heads together for brainstorming.”

“And we're working on a project,” Zin stated, “which might somehow be related to your puzzle.”

As it turns out, this was completely correct, as Zin and Luis soon discovered when Albert related that he and his sailors were trying to raise leviathan scales (shed by the beasts over many years) from the ocean floor. However, they were having some difficulty.

“You know how things in the water are lighter and easier to lift,” Albert said, “well, leviathan scales are evidently an exception. They are super heavy in the water, like great rocks might be on land. They're also difficult to locate because they are camouflaged to look like sand, rocks, plant life, and so forth. Also, they are shapeshifting, just like the leviathans themselves, so some of the scales aren't even full size. We have been able to find them using rose-colored glasses, but so far we haven't been able to get any of them to budge, not even with the strongest of winches.” (In case we might be wondering, rose-colored glasses were designed to see through camouflages, including invisibility.)

Although God hadn't given exact instructions as to how to bring this about, He had evidently been the One to direct Albert, by way of giving him a prophetic dream, to undertake this endeavor.

"The few scales over the years that have been found washed up on shores, or maybe put there by angels, are incredibly light," Albert went on to say. "Plus, they are tougher than dragon feathers. And anyone wielding them can, by mere thought, get them to shift in shape and size, to incredibly small, then back up to full-scale size."

"So they are something God is giving His children for future battles, to use as shields," Luis cleverly deduced. "The shapeshifting abilities would prove incredibly useful—carry in pocket when not in use, then deploy as a shield when needed. The smaller ones could be used by individuals, and the larger ones could maybe shield an entire troop."

"Exactly," Albert agreed. "Of course, leviathan scales might be better used on land by the Underground Army, but only after the Weepers manage to harvest them. So we just need to figure out the puzzle."

The wheels in Zin's mind were already whirling, not necessarily yet on solving the puzzle, but more on the need for shields for use in battles. While almost nothing could compare to the massive military uprisings that had nearly emptied the Supercities and work camps worldwide, she knew that more great future battles were inevitable leading into the End of the Age.

"So God has set us a puzzle," Albert said good-naturedly. "And why not; after all, He has given us brains, which He expects us to use."

Zin's brain wheels suddenly changed direction when she thought to ask Albert, "What else have you tried, other than just hoisting?"

"Nothing yet; we just got here yesterday. And the scales seem to get even heavier when we apply the winches to them," Albert replied. After a pause, he added in a leading sort of way, "Any advice or help from a magician or sorcerer would be very welcome."

At this point, Luis didn't have any great ideas, except to look to Zin, particularly because levitation was so firmly grounded in a magician's domain.

Except Zin knew this wasn't going to be an ordinary sort of feat for her. "Because the water is somehow the key," she said shortly, by way

of explaining that she didn't think a lightening or levitation spell would work to raise the scales.

Coincidentally, a small pod of leviathans happened to be looking on at the operation, and snickering. Only a couple of the creatures were in their larger forms, which very much resembled the detailed description found in the bible in the Book of Job. The pair, looking very much like ferocious dragons (though with water wings instead of air wings), were roughly the size of full-grown blue whales. The rest were each about the size of a human fist and looked exactly like rainbow clownfish, which happened to be the form most leviathans preferred to stay in.

As she removed the Bloodstone from the Chinese box to hold in her right hand, Zin wasn't at all surprised when an answer suddenly popped into her brain. "We don't raise the scales," she said. "We move the water instead."

While this might have sounded a little ludicrous to anyone else, Albert and Luis both had great faith. Plus, both had seen quite a lot of amazing things over the course of their lives; thus, Zin's idea rather quickly seemed completely plausible.

"Okay, so our diving teams have done a little mapping since we arrived," Albert offered. "The area containing the shed scales is nearly perfectly circular in shape and is exactly twelve nautical miles wide. It seems the leviathans have been coming here, perhaps for centuries, to shed their scales because there are literally hundreds of thousands of them down there on the ocean floor."

"Interesting," Zin said in response, not at all worrying about the massive amount of water that needed to be moved, since she didn't think size mattered at all when it came to enacting a miracle. Nor was she at all concerned with the huge pair of leviathans that several sailors had just spotted and were pointing out to Albert who swiftly grabbed a spyglass in order to get a better look at the two that were about three miles from Harvey's Ghost at this point, and seemed to be staying put.

"Well, I don't think they are here to help us," Admiral Nolan remarked to a midshipman, "but I also don't think they're going to interfere."

"No, they're just watching us," the midshipman agreed.

The leviathans were outside of the area in question, as was the entire fleet of Weepers at this time. Having made their approach the

day before from the south, the vessels had encircled the area containing the scales, staying mainly on the edges while doing their mapping and the first few tries at hoisting.

Zin and Luis were able to see the two dragons without using a spyglass once the creatures were pointed out to them. “Oh, they have really good camouflage,” Zin said, as the dragons did very much resemble sea waves and foam to the untrained eye.

“That’s why not many people notice them,” Luis remarked.

“That, and the fact that they are tiny most of the time,” Albert said, being fully aware of the leviathans’ penchant for staying in clownfish form. In fact, his longtime protector, a halcyon named Sima, who was presently soaring high overhead, often let Albert know by thought when leviathans (in whatever form) were near.

As Zin’s fingers unconsciously stroked the smooth Bloodstone in her hand, the wheels in her mind once again began to whirl. *A circle is a godly shape, along with a triangle, which is probably why we’re in the Polynesian Triangle. And twelve is a godly number. Two sixes equal twelve, so this is definitely something a magician would be capable of, as long as I double up on the factors involved. And it’s water. Water tricks are pretty easy for magicians; though they usually involve escapes, like from a water tank or a submerged trunk, not the moving of water. Except....* Blessedly, her brain had just hit on the old trick of moving water from one drinking glass to another across a room.

Of course, that’s it, she thought. And the area involved is even circular, like many drinking glasses, so this should be easy.

With the Bloodstone firmly clasped in her right hand, Zin reached with her left into a front jacket pocket to retrieve two items, which happened to be small pieces of mirror that had mobility spells attached to them. Albert and Luis never actually saw the mirrors (of course, because magicians are wily in this way). The pieces were pinched between Zin’s fingers as she made two sweeping hand motions out towards the section of sea in question, as though commanding the water to move away with these simple gestures.

When nothing happened (other than her sweeping arm taking on a slight blue glow), Zin, while smiling, gave a look to Luis that seemed to say, “Well, what are you waiting for?”

Luis right away got what the look meant, especially since sorcerers are more than capable of moving water, even in large amounts, at least short term; in fact, he had once diverted the flood waters of a river away from a house just long enough for the residents to escape before the waters swept the home away. After swiftly taking his staff out of his jacket and unfolding it, while pointing the staff toward the circular area and uttering a short incantation, Luis performed a spell intended to move the water.

When nothing happened (other than the staff taking on a slight green glow), as magician and sorcerer looked at one another, they both telepathically projected the word, *Teamwork*, after which, they performed their spells together.

Wow, third time's a charm, Albert thought, as he watched the water being emptied out of the circle, as though a gigantic glass was being drained. He would have made the comment aloud, except for being speechless for the entire seventy-two seconds (which Zin timed) that it took for the water to be removed from the enormous cylindrical area, leaving only moist sand and rocks at the bottom upon which lay the leviathan scales, now looking less camouflaged than they had when under water. (In addition to the edges being clearly visible, the scales now held something of a tortoise-shell pattern and coloring.) In fact, the harvesting teams would not need to use the rose-colored glasses in order to locate them.

Since the sea around the circle was more than capable of taking up the water, the W'eepers barely noticed a rise in the waters surrounding their vessels. Inside the cylindrical area, the towering walls of water, seemingly being held back by nothing at all (other than magic), were roughly two miles high. Perched on the very edge, the sailing ships seemed in no danger of falling into the empty circle, particularly because whatever invisible barrier was in place was not allowing any sort of waterfall action over the edges, but was more just keeping the water held back like a gigantic glass wall might.

Finally finding his voice, Albert remarked. "It's a miracle, like Jesus calming the seas."

The second mate of Harvey's Ghost happened to be nearby, and she said, "More like the parting of the Red Sea, to my mind."

“I didn’t know how to set a time period on this,” Zin told Albert, “but I assume it will last until you harvest all of the scales. A standard water-glass trick generally has fifteen hours before it automatically reverts.”

“That should be plenty of time,” the second mate stated.

“But how are you even going to get down there?” Luis wanted to know.

The second mate was smiling as she said, “We have a supply of airboards.” In truth, quite a few tech people in recent months had been busy making airboards, which were very like surfboards, but meant for the skies rather than the seas. The ones in the W’eeper’s possession (some three hundred in all) were being used by ship crews for both recreation and exploring. In addition to sailing the skies, the boards could be used to skim the waters, and so were very practical for naval use. Plus, they were as foldable as airbikes, and so could be easily carried.

Albert declined the offer of Zin and Luis to stay and help with the harvest. “No we have enough manpower, but thank you.”

However, just as the pair was thinking of leaving (with a sack of snickerdoodles the ship’s chief cook had just presented to them), a dawn pigeon landed in the crow’s nest of Harvey’s Ghost, delivering a message to the quartermaster who had climbed to the nest to keep watch on the leviathans that were now swimming away, seemingly no longer interested in what the W’eeper’s might be doing.

Dawn pigeons were magical birds that liked to carry messages for people. Being much faster than carrier pigeons, and the message kites that some godly people used to send letters and small parcels, they were a good way to communicate, especially when needing to be discreet, because walnut conversations could easily be overheard.

The message was for Albert who, after alerting certain members of his crew to signal to the other ships, told Zin and Luis, “We’ll need to briefly delay our harvest because we’re about to have company. And you’ll probably want to stick around for a bit, or you might get caught in the fray.”

Heather had sent the pigeon to alert Albert to expect an attack by Tanner and certain members of his little clique whom she had overheard making plans for an assault on this particular W’eeper’s fleet.

This was actually the encounter that Zin had been forewarned about from looking in her foreshard; and, as expected, being “caught in the fray” didn’t particularly trouble either her or Luis, the pair simply being glad they were there to help counter this malice.

Tanner had his usual cronies with him on this day, to include Kemp Fischer and Devin Helm, both sixteen, and Penelope Coyle who was fourteen. All were gifted individuals, misusing their gifts in service of the sorcerers, with Kemp having control over fire, Devin being water gifted, and Penelope having powers much like those of a wind horse. All four were riding nyregs on this day, which they usually did when needing to travel long distances, in this case, from Supercity Eight in the U.S. (in Illinois) where they had been holding a meeting.

After getting over the initial shock of seeing the huge “empty glass” in this patch of sea, Tanner, using a spyglass much like that of Albert’s, was also surprised to see Zin and Luis on the deck of Harvey’s Ghost. He had been avoiding this pair of late, in not having had much luck against them during various skirmishes in recent months. In seeing them here, he was wary; but not to such an extent as to want to flee. He had come with a purpose—to disrupt whatever the navy fleet might be up to on this day—and he certainly wasn’t planning to leave without at least giving this a shot, which he initially did by drawing his staff and sending strings of fiery-green energy blasts toward the sails of ten of the ships below.

The blasts were easily deflected by flashing bursts of energy from mirror cannons, mounted on decks and rails of the ships, which were being wielded by cannon experts. Flute weapons were employed next to counter fireballs that Kemp began shooting at the W’eeper from the palms of his hands, the music from the flutes rather eerily resounding amidst the wind and waves of the sea. Deck drums next came into play, sounding like great booming drumbeats, especially when meeting with and deflecting some of Kemp’s larger fireballs.

Penelope had begun directing great gusts of wind at the ships, in an effort to capsize them, which might have been effective since the W’eeper basically had no time to lower their sails, which they often did during storms to prevent overturning. However, she quickly found her gusts completely stilled, diminished to the point of being barely a soft breath of a short breeze. This was Sima’s doing, the halcyon not only

having the power to calm sea storms, but also well able to counter the likes of Penelope. In truth, Sima could have rendered the powers of a wind horse largely ineffective over the sea; though she wouldn't have likely ever seen a need to do this, since wind horses were all godly creatures, intent only on following God's commands.

Tanner, having not personally ever gone up against anything naval before (because he had only recently been widening his scope of malice to include those on the seas), was a little surprised at the expert resistance he was meeting. He shouldn't have been. In addition to being fully outfitted with both light and music weapons, the W'eeper's vessels were fully manned by sailors incredibly seasoned in combat, not only against the likes of gifted miscreants, but also against hordes of demons, flocks of nyregs (even supersized ones on occasion), packs of gremlins, etc.

Luis had shifted to rookh form and had taken off with Zin aboard. This, Tanner noticed and was incredibly wary of; however, he didn't notice when Westerwing crashed into the side of his nyreg (from the west) because of the sheer speed, looking more like a streak of smoke than a giant blackbird.

Tanner, knocked from his nyreg during the impact, was caught by Penelope who managed to direct her nyreg to fly underneath her friend. Although her wind was currently rendered ineffective, she could be helpful in other ways, including catching Tanner and flying him back to his jolted nyreg to remount.

Zin and Luis were forced to back off, in order not to be in the way of the W'eeper's fire, which was fully needed to continue to counter Kemp, who had continued to shoot flaming balls, even though he wasn't making any kind of contact with the ships because of the precision of those using the cannons, drums, and flutes.

Devin had not been inactive during this time; in fact, he was raising huge waves from the ocean to crash over the ships in an effort to disrupt the defense. And because Tanner had recently made an enhancer for him (in pill form), his powers were currently five times what they ordinarily would have been.

The great waves, Sima couldn't calm. While she had power over wind at sea, she couldn't still waves unless they were storm-produced. However, there was a creature nearby who could do something to

counter Devin. This happened to be a twelf, a twelf being a twelfth elf child born to a family and given special powers above those of his or her siblings. These powers included water manipulation, and to much more of an extent than anything Devin might be capable of, with or without an enhancer. In mere seconds, his waves were stilled, and his malice rendered basically as ineffective as that of Penelope.

Kemp was quite surprised when each of his fireballs suddenly started meeting huge orbs of water shooting up from the sea to douse the flaming balls. Switching to a fire stream, he again ended up thwarted when a snaking sea twister rose out of the water to overtake the stream, putting it out in mere seconds. Though the orbs and twister were part of the twelf's intervention, the miscreants actually thought the W'eeppers were using some sort of new weapon, one as yet unfamiliar to the sorcerers and their followers. Rendered as inert as Penelope and Devin, Kemp soon joined his friends in retreating, which Tanner was encouraging them to do by comm-cube (a communication device). Though angry and disappointed, the young sorcerer was not interested in prolonging an encounter in which he and his cohorts were being thoroughly trounced.

Luis had lowered into the "empty glass" to hover and keep out of the way of the weapons fire from the ships. In this position, he and Zin glimpsed the twelf, whose name was Levegõ, behind the wall of water. Levegõ was inside a submerged ship very silvery and sleek in design, much like an elongated bubble that was also translucent, which was why they could see the twelf inside, and why the ship made Zin think it was very like a bubble. Noticing that he was being noticed, Levegõ simply gave Zin and Westerwing a nod before turning his ship and heading away from the cylindrical area.

The airboard operations began a short while later as Zin and Luis were leaving. The endeavor would take less than eight hours to complete, mainly because those doing the harvesting were shrinking the larger scales telepathically before placing them into sacks to be transported to various cargo holds, the sacks being incredibly light since the scales out of water each weighed no more than a feather. In truth, fifty ships were excessive, which was why Admiral Nolan commanded half of the fleet to head back early to their headquarters in a hidden spot near Easter Island. In later praying, to thank God for the miracle and

ask Him what to do with the scales, Albert was given the understanding that they were indeed, as suspected, going to be used as shields, but at a future time; and so for now they simply needed to be stored and kept safe. With regard to the “empty glass” in the sea, the glass refilled itself exactly twenty-four hours from when the magic was first enacted, taking exactly seventy-two seconds to do so. By this time, the Weepers had long since left the area.

But getting back to Zin and Luis, their trip home to Doyle Mansion was incredibly fast, even though Luis was heading east and not west. In truth, part of the reason Magsen hadn’t needed to take Zin as many places in recent weeks was precisely because Luis was so fast. In addition to getting places quickly, he could basically outrun any danger that might present itself.

At right around the time the magician and sorcerer were setting down on the back lawns of Doyle Mansion, Tanner was parting from Kemp, Penelope, and Devin over Supercity Eight where all three lived, before heading to his own home in Supe-9 (in Indiana). As he took a rather leisurely pace the rest of the way home, Tanner’s mind was in suspicion mode because it was obvious to him that the Weepers had known they were coming. *How else could they have been so ready with their weapons?* Tanner had long considered the possibility of a spy within his ranks, but had of late ruled out Penelope, Devin, and Kemp, mainly because Penelope was too daft to be a spy, and Kemp and Devin were too afraid of him. Tanner’s younger brother (his only sibling) had acted as a spy against him at one time, but was no longer in the picture because Tanner’s parents and brother had moved to a self-sustaining ranch in Colorado.

Heather came to mind as the most likely suspect, not only because Tanner knew she wasn’t afraid of him, but also because she hadn’t spent much time with the group in recent months, in supposedly being busy with her job as a Stone Hunter. The sorcerers had all kinds of hunters working for them—Dragon Hunters, Unicorn Hunters, Magician Hunters, etc. Stone Hunters specialized in tracking down jewel-gifted individuals, like Sapphire Boys and Diamond Girls, to bring them either willingly or unwillingly into the service of the sorcerers. Devin was a good example, his gift being connected to a pearl; though a hunter hadn’t needed to either catch or convince him of anything. Being raised

by an elite family in Supe-8, he had basically jumped at the chance to join in with the sorcerers, in seeing this as an opportunity to raise his family's status and gain more privileges.

Having once been thought to be a good Stone Hunter, Heather was actually turning out not to be so skilled in her craft, in recent months only managing to catch one jewel-gifted person, who had managed rather quickly to escape sorcerer custody. *There are lots of people with jewel gifts in the world, Tanners mind told him. So why hasn't she managed to catch any others?*

Not only did Tanner suspect Heather of being a spy, but of actually working with Zin and Luis. Of course, the pair being on Harvey's Ghost on this day had nothing to do with spying, but Tanner didn't know this as the wheels in his mind continued to spin.

Somehow in recent months, he and his friends had lost all of the shroud stones Heather had previously given them. "I haven't cried lately, so I don't have any extras," she gave as an excuse when Tanner asked for more. Being smart enough to know that she could cry at will had set off a suspicion sensor in his brain; though he had given her the benefit of the doubt at the time in thinking that maybe she just didn't fully trust him, in the same way that he didn't trust her, and so hadn't wanted to provide the group with the ability to shroud themselves around her. Plus, he knew that her work with the sorcerers on various projects was often as secretive as his was, and for this very reason people were wise not to completely trust one another. Since she could be working undercover for the sorcerers in various ways, ones that might even include stealing back the stones she had originally given them, Tanner wasn't inclined to accuse her in an outright manner of being a spy; at least, not quite yet.

But she was seen with a dawn pigeon a couple of months back, Tanner remembered, by way of still suspecting her. Since the birds only worked for the godly, her claim of hoodwinking the bird, by means of something like bee charming, sounded pretty hollow. So too had she said she was intercepting a message, not sending or receiving one, which to Tanner's mind also sounded very suspect.

Heather would end up being exposed as a traitor in less than a year; however, having a network of spies inside the Supes, with some even

being converted sorcerers, she wouldn't end up all that hindered in her efforts to continue to help the godly.

Zin and Luis had made it to Doyle Mansion in time for dinner, which was just being placed on the table; well, two tables actually since a puck-sized one, complete with five chairs, sat atop the larger table, and to one side. The tabletop table and chairs had been recently crafted by the treehouse gnomes as a gift for the pucks so they could all sit comfortably while having their meals with the rest of the family.

While everyone was enjoying eggplant parmesan, salad, and homemade Italian bread spread with creamy butter, Em related the news of the day, such as what work had happened in the greenhouse and fall garden, and that Lista had escaped the estate and made it nearly three miles before Em managed to run her down. The tiny puck was grinning as the story was told by Em, who was herself smiling while trying to maintain a slightly scolding tone, since it wasn't yet safe for Lista to be out on her own with such dangers as hobgoblins, gremlins, and flash dragons ever present these days. Blessedly, Em was a fabulous runner, and could most often manage to catch up to the little scamp. Other times, Halli and Magsen were sent after her.

Zin and Luis told that they had had a productive day as well, but only gave a few details with regard to working on their project, such as that they had paid a visit to the Mystery Realm and that they had seen two leviathans on a trip to visit the W'eeppers in the Polynesian Triangle.

The snickerdoodles were shared around after dinner, the pucks particularly enjoying them. Then everyone helped with cleaning up the tables, dishes, and kitchen.

Luis accepted Em's invitation to stay the night, since a guest room was easily readied, and he and Zin were planning to get started early the next morning with continuing work on their project.

After helping her mother make up the guest bed, and setting out fresh towels in the guest bath, with Luis in the parlor engaged in a discussion with Halli over Milton's *Paradise Lost*, which they had both recently read, Zin headed downstairs to the subbasement library, dodging in the main hall a game of toss going on between Pipac, Kisi, and Lista, who were mainly tossing around various non-sharp sewing items. Lista was already throwing things as far and as fast as her siblings these days, and so the three were enjoying a little lively indoor

practice; though Em, dodging a thimble and a tomato pin cushion, ended up intercepting one spool of thread in midair. “I need the blue,” she explained, “for your mom’s new skirt.”

Em was still busy making puck clothing in her spare time (as she had for years now), and was heading up to the sewing room not only to finish the pleated skirt for Heike, but also to cut out material for a vest for Pizzo and a pair of capri pants for Kisi.

Magsen was reading in the subbasement library while lounging on an oversized divan. Glancing up as Zin entered, she gave her charge a smile and a wink before returning her nose to the novel she was presently engrossed in.

After returning *Jasper Diamonds and Other Legends* to the Legends section, Zin searched the Magical Creatures section of the library for information on twelfs, which she found in a book called *Elves: Sea, Land, and Otherwise*. Elves were, of course, not much like those in children’s storybooks, especially since most were the same size as human beings. However, they did tend to have somewhat pointy ears, so that particular part of elven lore was at least accurate.

Zin did manage to find some information (though scant) on twelfs who could evidently become invisible, if they wished to. And in addition to being water gifted, they were skilled in both metallurgy and mathematics, to include biblical numerology it seemed.

Numbers are incredibly important in the bible, Zin’s mind reinforced to her, since she was already well aware of this. And they might be important with regard to the Bloodstone Miracles. She was specifically thinking of the fact that there were going to be Twelve Miracles. *Plus, the circle was twelve nautical miles across. And the seventy-two seconds that the glass took to drain is divisible by twelve.*

For the time being, this was all her mind could make of the puzzle, mainly just that the numbers were important somehow, but not particularly in what way they might be important. And with regard to numbers in the bible, this was a mystery that even devout bible scholars sometimes puzzled whole lifetimes over without coming up with any perfect answers.

Gleaning more information from the book, Zin learned that elves not only liked to travel by boats, which they were experts at building, but also airships. *The airships mainly look like clouds, and the water*

ships look a lot like bubbles. It's no wonder that people hardly ever see them. She also learned that twelfs often use their water manipulation skills to propel watercrafts, rather than using traditional means of propulsion such as wind, various fuels, or mechanicals like water wheels.

Her mind turning to the leviathans they had seen, Zin next pulled out her pocket bible to read all of Job 41, which she felt was an amazingly-accurate description of the creatures, particularly as to their being completely unstoppable, which she felt these water dragons probably were. However, she was puzzled by the fiery part of the description since, as far as she knew, no one had observed the fire of leviathans, or at least hadn't told stories or written about this factor if they had.

Except...maybe as related to lava in the seas, her mind pondered, as the passage about fire definitely made her think of this. *So could leviathans be related to some of the volcanic activity taking place in the oceans? Could the dragons maybe keep lava hot, or be responsible for some volcanoes becoming active? Maybe they stoke the volcanoes somehow.* This sounded plausible to Zin, especially since certain active volcanoes were known to be dragon nurseries.

In considering that dragons (of the regular sort) were set to help remake the earth with fire in the Endtimes, Zin was now pondering the possibility of leviathans also doing something key. *The Book of Revelation describes one-third of the living things in the seas dying,* Zin thought. While some people believed this might have already come to pass—from pollution, fishing, red tides, and such—many people felt the event was still in the future. *Plus, a third of the ships in the seas at that time will be destroyed.* Though no one could know exactly how things were going to play out in the future (because only God knows), Zin did wonder if maybe leviathans were going to do more than just disrupt electronics. *Maybe they will be the destroyers of sea life and ships.* It was well known that merpeople could call and command leviathans; but as far as Zin knew, no others could do this. Except God, of course, Who's in charge of all of the magical creatures in the world. *What if they all have a part to play in the Endtimes?* This was something she had actually pondered before (though not necessarily with regard to

leviathans). In fact, quite a few people in the world these days were thinking along similar lines.

Though being a little tired, and yawning, before heading upstairs to bed, Zin again read Job 41:18-21, the fiery part of the description of the leviathan. “His sneezings flash forth light, and his eyes are like the eyelids of the dawn. Out of his mouth go flaming torches; sparks of fire leap forth. Out of his nostrils comes forth smoke, as from a boiling pot and burning rushes. His breath kindles coals, and a flame comes forth from his mouth.” *Yep, sounds a lot like lava to me*, her mind told her.

Upstairs in her room, Zin read the bible again for a time, also praying, especially to thank God for the two miracles of the day that were absolutely amazing. And yet...it almost seemed to her that she had forgotten to be amazed, like she had just taken everything in stride, as though things like this happened every day.

Praying again, she once more thanked God, also asking Him to help her be properly amazed next time. *At least as reverent as I should be*, she added, before closing her prayer with, *I pray this in Jesus’ glorious name, Amen.*

Just before dawn the next morning, as she and Luis were having oatmeal and bananas for breakfast in the kitchen, Zin remarked, “This all seems way too easy so far, the miracles, I mean.”

“With God,” Luis replied, “anything is possible. And things don’t have to be a struggle. At least, the miracles in the bible weren’t usually described that way, as being hard work or overly complicated.”

“No, you’re right,” Zin agreed. “I guess I’m just used to things being more complicated.”

Fifteen-year-old Kiana Jackson had just arrived in the back gardens, dropped off by a wind horse, and was on the back porch knocking at the kitchen door.

Declining the offer of breakfast as Zin let her in, Kiana said, “I had an omelet and fruit salad at home. I’m here to puck-sit for the day.”

Although Kiana was from a mothership community in Ohio, she tended to get around quite a bit, especially to visit her friends in Alabama. To give everyone else a break from chasing after Lista, Em had hired Kiana to puck-sit for the specific reason that Kiana possessed incredible footspeed as one of her gifts. (In fact, she was so fast that she could even outrun low-swooping flash dragons for short distances.)

Another of Kiana's gifts was auto-writing, where she simply let her hand write out what God might be telling her heart, mind, and soul. Quite often, she had no idea what her hand was writing until she ended up reading the words afterwards. For persons with this particular gift, this was how God tended to give them instructions, for both their own actions, and sometimes those of other people, which would turn out to be the case on this day.

Pulling a journal out of a pod belt pack, Kiana read aloud an auto-writing entry she had scratched out earlier while having her omelet and fruit salad. "For the next of the Twelve Miracles, Luis and Zinnia need to go back in time two years to the fish farm east of Supe-7."

As her friends simply stared at her in surprise, Kiana added, "Short and sweet, but boy it sounds intriguing."

Zin didn't know why she should be surprised; if God had involved pucks trolls, Louetta, and Albert in the first two miracles, why not Kiana in the next one. "Well, um...so I guess we need to get to Laurelstone, to use the Time Key and portal there," Zin ended up saying.

"I can take you back, by unicorn," Kiana offered. "I would think this might be part of the reason I was given the message for you, plus the fact that I was coming here today."

To this revelation, Zin and Luis were even more astounded, as they hadn't known Kiana could now call unicorns. (It wasn't something she was advertising; nor should she.) But, in fact, quite a few time-travel trips these days were being taken by unicorn, which was incredibly convenient, so that people didn't have to plan around use of the four portals or the Time Key.

After quickly cleaning up the breakfast dishes, Zin and Luis followed Kiana out into the back gardens. Since time travel took no time at all in the present to complete, with people always arriving back at nearly the same instant they left, Kiana could easily go with the pair of miracle workers and not be late for puck-sitting, particularly because she had arrived a half hour earlier than expected, which was before the pucks had even had their breakfast. So there was plenty of time.

In a mere instant, two glowing golden unicorns arrived to light up the back gardens nearly as much as the breaking dawn. With Luis and Zin atop one, and Kiana riding the other, they were soon off, coursing

through a time conduit filled with scrolling, soft lights of many colors. They felt no movement at all from the travel, other than perhaps a slight tickle in the brain, as they were carried back two years, and specifically to the fish farm east of Supe-7 (in Missouri), in what seemed to be about three minutes to the minds of the riders.

“The unicorns always know where they are going, and exactly when to arrive; it’s like God tells them somehow,” Kiana remarked just before they arrived at their destination to slip from the creatures’ backs in a brushy area very near one of the largest ponds belonging to the fish farm.

The unicorns simply vanished in soft blinks of light as their riders’ feet touched the ground, this being a good thing so as not to draw attention to the new arrivals, who were all three crouched behind bushes in order not to be seen by three members of the ESS (short for Enforcement Services Squad) who, under the direction of the sorcerers of Supe-7, were the cruel head taskmasters of this particular work camp.

The time travelers needed to be careful. At this time, the Supercities and work camps were still in full swing; and most of the populations of the earth were still enslaved inside them. After the uprisings, only about ten percent remained; and things were much different because the sorcerers were not anxious to have any more of the workforce leave, since the cities certainly couldn’t run themselves without workers. Thus, people were being treated much better than before, even to the extent of the sorcerers and their cronies looking the other way with regard to certain infractions, such as people owning and reading bibles, which were still fully outlawed, along with all other practices relating to Christianity. In case we might be wondering why some people had chosen to stay, the answer was pretty simple. Many of these folks had actually been born and raised in the Supes and work camps, and so these places still felt like home to them. Plus, they were now pretty much able to dictate their own terms with regard to things like employment, housing, food allowances, and such.

With the three fish-farm taskmasters was a thin man with reddish-blond hair, probably in his mid-thirties, who was rather shabbily dressed. Obviously, he was one of the slaves of the camp; and he had been caught with a bible in his possession.

“So we’ll let you get back to work,” the tallest of the ESS said to the man, “if you can walk on water. Isn’t that something your bible teaches, that if you have enough faith, you can walk on water?”

“Otherwise, we’ll hold you under until you drown,” the shortest of the three chimed in, “and that will teach others not to break the law.”

“I didn’t break any of God’s laws,” the man dared to say.

“Then you’ll be proved innocent, by walking on the water,” the third ESS stated.

“Well, go on,” the tallest ESS said, “prove yourself innocent.”

Luis had already pulled out his staff, and Zin was reaching in a vest pocket for a pinch of levitation dust, made from superfine bits of sparkling earth harvested from a dust devil in the Arizona desert. As Zin flicked the pinch in the direction of the slave, energy from Luis’ staff carried the dust the forty-five feet needed to land on the man’s shirt collar, just as he stepped from a small floating dock into the pond. Except, he didn’t end up in the pond, but rather, walking on top of it, a full ninety feet on a diagonal path to reach one side, where he then took off running in the direction of a fifteen-foot high camp barrier made of metal poles spiked on both top and bottom and fixed closely together, with the spikes at the bottom being buried some five feet into the earth.

The man was running in full well knowing that despite the fact that he had just walked on water, he was not going to be let go because these particular ESS were known for singling out certain people to torment and then kill, this serving not only as a source of amusement for the cruel men, but also as a means of keeping the rest of the workers terrified and in line.

The ESS, after only a short pause from being startled at the walking on water, had taken off after the man, also drawing guns to shoot at him. Blessedly, two of the guns had been recently jimmed by gremlins at the camp, and so didn’t work; and the wielder of the third gun was a poor shot, especially at a moving target.

As Zin and Luis began running in the direction of the man who was trying to escape, Kiana too sprang into action, yelling, “Hey, you three clowns, over here!” With this, she took off running in the opposite direction of her friends. The two ESS whose guns didn’t work ended up chasing her, while the third, who had slowed his stride to reload his gun, kept on after the escaping man; but only for a short time because Luis,

changing into Westerwing as Zin hopped aboard, knocked the gun-wielder flat, before also scooping up the running worker to carry both over the spikey barrier.

Kiana actually wouldn't need Luis to return for her. Passing three ponds and a row of tents, not only was she running so fast that she basically looked more like a streak than a person, she also managed to hop onto a unicorn she had just called, the creature then disappearing in front of the eyes of several startled camp workers. The unicorn then reappeared a fraction of a second later about twenty miles south of the camp at a spot right next to Westerwing, who was just dropping off the now-freed slave at the entrance to a magical pocket, basically a mini-realm opened up by a gifted cartographer to act as a place of refuge for God's children. Pockets often held vast acreage and large communities, as in the case of this one that was currently home to some thirty thousand people.

Meanwhile, back at the camp, in thinking that the humans who had just thwarted them might not be too far away, the three taskmasters were just setting loose six megahobs (giant hobgoblins) from a paddock, with the intent that the hobs would chase down the escapee and whoever might be helping him. However, the megahobs were incredibly riled up, in having briefly felt the presence of the unicorn that Kiana had escaped on. Evil creatures of all kinds were terrified of unicorns, particularly their light, which could easily dissipate the likes of megahobs and demons. Being in a fit of panic, the hobs turned on the three men, basically tearing them to shreds in less than twenty seconds. As a result of the demise of these three, new taskmasters would end up being sent to the fish farm, in the form of less-bloodthirsty men, with one even being a member of the Underground Army who had long worked undercover in the Supercities and camps, while patiently waiting for the uprisings, during which, he would end up being crucial to freeing most of the slaves in this camp.

Kiana called a second unicorn for Zin and Luis so that they could all return home, which they did in short order, arriving in the back gardens of Doyle Mansion where barely a blink of time had passed, and where the unicorns simply disappeared in a soft flash of light after depositing their riders beside the garden tool shed.

Having coffee in the kitchen where the pucks were enjoying a breakfast of waffles, sliced peaches, and granola bars at a little bench situated on a wide sill in the bay window, Zin and Luis related a few details about their project to Kiana, who stated, “Wow, real miracles! That’s amazing!”

The pucks, listening in, were nodding, as they too felt that things like Jasper Diamonds made from sand and people walking on water were definitely miraculous.

“But, you know,” Kiana added thoughtfully, “Alex once told me that people were eventually going to be able to walk on water, and fly, when they learned the Secret of Rainbows, whatever that is exactly. It evidently has something to do with how the blood circulates in the body.”

Fifteen-year-old Alex Rodriguez from Lion Mountain was himself able to fly, having learned the skill from solving the mystery as to how the Chinese dragon can fly without wings. However, he wasn’t able to walk on water, which meant he hadn’t yet learned the Secret of Rainbows; at least, not in its entirety, though he had managed to figure out a few things with regards to this in the past year or so.

“That’s interesting,” Luis remarked.

While Zin too thought the information about Alex and rainbows was interesting, she had just thought of something. “I didn’t take the Bloodstone out for that last miracle. It was still in the puzzle box.” She basically hadn’t had time to think before needing to help the poor man who was about to be drowned.

“It must work from just being in the vicinity,” Luis stated, as it made perfect sense to him for the stone, having a drop of Jesus’ blood on it, to be incredibly powerful.

“Well that’s good to know,” Zin replied, as it would definitely make things easier going forward, since two hands were sometimes needed to perform magic.

Kiana had just heard the news about Eizel, whom she mentioned in connection to Birch Hathaway, a seventeen-year-old living in West Virginia who had the power to calm storms, and who was part of the circle of friends that included Kiana, Zin, and Luis. “They’ve been hanging out together some,” Kiana stated in a somewhat surprised tone.

Zin too was surprised, as she wouldn't have thought Birch a likely person to make friends with someone who had once been a terror to him, and quite a few of his friends.

This was the first Luis had heard that Eizel was saved, the news having not reached him yet; and he was naturally skeptical about whether it was real, or if she might be deceiving people. "She's very powerful," he warned, "maybe even more so than we might think"

Kiana wasn't skeptical at this point, since she didn't think that Birch could be fooled any more than Zin's Aunt Vini could be. "But I'm still surprised he's hanging out with her," she stated. "I don't mean like a girlfriend, more like they're just spending time together. And he's telling other people to give her a chance."

Birch happened to know a thing or two about making mistakes. And he knew about receiving God's forgiveness, no matter how badly he messed up, when he was truly repentant, which he felt Eizel was. Also, he knew the torment of having to live with past mistakes, some of them incredibly large in nature. Plus, all people make mistakes; no one is perfect. So when people were truly making an effort to change and do better, he didn't feel they should be shunned, but more that they should be encouraged and given a chance.

As they finished their coffee, with Kiana heading outside to play in the sandbox with Lista, Zin's mind turned back to the miracles, which still seemed to her to be easy so far. *Even with being led by God, Who often makes things easy for us, and even with help from others.* At this point, she was starting to wonder if she might be missing something, like something important. *Like maybe I'm in the middle of a dream and this isn't even real,* her mind briefly pondered, before she was brought back to the realization that she was truly awake when her mother came through the kitchen door scolding.

"Zinnia, you didn't make your bed, and you left laundry on the floor."

"Sorry, Mom," Zin answered, scurrying upstairs to tidy up her room, and then place a load of laundry in the washing machine in the basement, also folding a load of towels from the dryer before stowing them in a linen cupboard on the second floor, after which, she did a little dusting in the hall on the third floor.

With regard to the miracles being easy so far, Zin would soon discover things not to be so easy after all; however, this would not be due to the difficulty of the project itself, but more because life sometimes tends to get in the way of even some of our best efforts.

Chapter Three

Share Bins and Teraphim

Luis had been sweeping the back porch and weeding in a flower bed while Zin performed her chores. Returning a pair of gloves he had borrowed from the tool shed, he met Zin as she came out onto the back porch. She had just taken a peek into her foreshard, and had something rather surprising to tell her friend about the next miracle. “It’s the share bins I’ve been working on in my lab.”

The share bins were a project Zin had been focused on for about three months. In being eager to share the abundance of produce from Doyle Mansion’s gardens and greenhouse, she wanted to be able to send food to certain places in the world that were experiencing shortage, for various reasons like drought, sorcerer malice, or just a lack of resources such as manpower, seeds, and tools. If the experiment worked, Zin was planning to make additional bins for nearby Wharton Farm and the twin plantations, since she knew they were also anxious to share what they were able to produce with folks who truly needed it. Already, regular trips were being made by gryphons, rookhs, and thunderbirds carrying pod packs to take things to certain communities in Russia, Africa, China, and other places struggling to produce enough food. If the bins, which worked in pairs, were to function as Zin intended, the trips would be unnecessary, since the food, after being placed into the origin bin would be delivered instantly to the receiving bin. And if the bins worked with food, they could probably be used to share other items as well, like clothing and medical supplies.

As the magician and sorcerer headed down to the subbasement library, Zin added, “I haven’t been able to get the bins to transport yet, but the vision in my foreshard actually showed them doing this.”

Luis had known Zin was working on this project, but he too was surprised that the share bins would end up being part of the Bloodstone Miracles.

“And there was something else,” Zin said, as they entered the lab area of the library. “The food ended up multiplied somehow on the receiving end.”

“You mean more arrived than was sent?” Luis stated.

“Yes,” Zin replied. “Like one potato was sent, then a pile of potatoes ended up in the bin at the other end.”

Luis was smiling as he said, “A multiplying miracle, like what happened in the bible with the five barley loaves and two small fish, how they were increased to feed thousands; and there were leftovers.”

“It’s a provision miracle too,” Zin answered, “like when taxes needed to be paid and Peter found a coin in the mouth of a fish, exactly where Jesus told him to look for it.”

“There are all kinds of examples like that in the bible,” Luis said, “such as when the little bit of flour and oil never ran out for Elijah and the widow of Zarephath.”

“But a multiplying factor wasn’t even part of the original idea or design of the share bins,” Zin stated. “I started with pod boxes so that a lot would fit inside on both ends, but I never thought about any sort of increase at the far end.”

In fact, Zin’s Uncle Otto (a real uncle in being Em’s youngest brother), a gifted architect, had designed and made the first three sets of share bins for her, using the triangular architecture that he and his colleagues often used to construct pod buildings that generally appeared very small from the outside, but that often held vast spaces inside, the godly magic of this being similar to what gifted technologists used to make pod packs.

“It just seems very strange,” Zin added, her brain still puzzling.

“Anything is possible with miracles,” Luis answered. “Again, this is probably God helping humans get past sixes, dimensional triangles, and other limitations to achieve greater things. Or maybe He’s trying to get us to think ‘outside the box,’ if you’ll pardon the pun.”

“Okay,” Zin said with a smile, as she was now starting to get excited about the end result of her project being even more wonderful than she had imagined. “So I was already working on one of the miracles before I even read *Jasper Diamonds and Other Legends* and decided to try to help bring about the Twelve Miracles. That’s interesting.”

“Things don’t always happen in a straight line,” Luis remarked, specifically thinking of time travel, how human beings often ended up going back in time to make certain things of the future come about as God intended them to.

“True,” Zin responded. “And maybe the vision in the foreshard was a way of God telling me to add a multiplying factor to the magic involved. That’s easily done,” she added, her brain focusing on multiplying spells she had performed in the past, ones that weren’t permanent, but that she now assumed could be made so with help from the Bloodstone, and the assistance of a sorcerer.

Luis had several times in his life used reproduction hexes, though he was a little skeptical of applying a type of magic meant for ill to something as godly as one of the Twelve Miracles. *It’s meant to be used for good in this case*, his mind told him. *Some bad things can be used for good.* This was the case with a lot of the magic used by converted sorcerers. In fact, Luis had once employed a reproduction hex to get people to exit a building that another sorcerer was about to set fire to. *But no cockroaches in swarms this time*, he thought, *just vegetables and other good things to help people. And no cursed buttons either*, his brain added, in recalling a bit of mischief from his youth when he had made the buttons on a fellow sorcerer’s waistcoat duplicate themselves whenever one was unbuttoned, so that the man was never able to shed the waistcoat until the curse was lifted.

One of the reasons it had never occurred to Zin to add a multiplying factor to the share bins was because the multiplying tricks of magicians were never permanent. They always had a time limit attached; then reversion happened. So fifty rabbits hopping about, perhaps to distract a pack of gremlins or a demon horde, would end up being just one rabbit again at the end of, say, ninety seconds.

And speaking of rabbits, Zin had a quite a few shed rabbit hairs stored in a cabinet precisely because they were excellent for multiplying spells (since we all know how fast rabbits can reproduce). Plus, being small, the hairs were easy to work with. And they didn’t have to be white to work; in fact, brown and gray were better as far as blending in to enhance the secrecy of certain tricks. Rabbit hairs could work for speed spells too, which was another reason Zin liked to keep a supply of them.

Retrieving a dozen gray rabbit hairs from the cabinet, while shielding what she was doing from Luis (because she didn't want to give away certain of her secrets), she added two hairs each to the six share bins, one top and one bottom, while using a tricky little melding spell to make the additions permanent. As she worked, she was thinking that the speed aspect of the hairs might be as important as the multiplying factor with regard to the function of the bins, since they would need to work over long distances.

Following Zin's path along the row of bins—while exaggeratedly pretending to hide what he was doing from his friend, in order to tease her about the truly unnecessary need for secrecy (because he wasn't planning to steal any tricks from her)—Luis used his staff to place reproduction hexes on the sides of the boxes, choosing the sides so as not to interfere with what Zin had just done to the tops and bottoms.

The bins, each the size of a smallish crate that might easily be carried by one person in not being any larger than about four standard shoe boxes put together, had hinged front panels to provide easy access to whatever contents might be inside. Otto had made the boxes out of some sort of lightweight metal that was pale with a bluish tint. *Probably some type of titanium alloy*, Zin guessed as she worked, though it didn't particularly matter because the magic would have worked on any material—plastic, wood, metal, whatever. But being metal would make the bins highly durable, and thus was a good pick.

Zin next performed a transport spell on the bins, simply by placing a magic compass inside for exactly six seconds each, after which, Luis again shadowed his friend to place an enhancer charm overtop each transport spell.

As with the walking-on-water miracle, Zin never removed the Bloodstone from the puzzle box; though the box was handy in her vest pocket, and thus was as close as she felt it probably needed to be to help enact the miracle.

Next heading upstairs to retrieve some vegetables to test the function of the bins, Zin and Luis passed a genie flitting down the stairwell and carrying a small shoulder satchel. This wasn't unusual, as genies often visited libraries to repair books, using various little tools in their satchels to do so.

With Zin and Luis being in something of a hurry, they barely gave a nod to the visitor, who returned the greeting by offering the triangle hand symbol, which Zin hastily returned.

An acorn squash and a kohlrabi were sitting on the kitchen counter; and so the magician and sorcerer wouldn't have to visit the gardens, greenhouse, or root cellar to obtain what they needed to perform the first test of the share bins.

Dashing back down to the subbasement, they again met the genie, this time flitting up the stairwell to exit the house.

That was quick, Zin thought, giving a wave instead of a hurried triangle symbol this time. Since genies were often quick, she didn't think anything more of the visit.

Selecting a pair of bins to work with, Zin took a deep breath as Luis moved the receiving bin across the library about fifty feet.

As he headed off with the bin, Zin was distracted by a slightly eerie feeling, as though someone else might be in the library with them. It wasn't exactly like having goosebumps, or raised hair on the nape of the neck, but more just a feeling of some sort of magical presence. Glancing about the expansive room, though not investigating between any of the long rows of bookshelves, Zin dismissed the feeling as being from the recent visit of the genie, particularly since she knew the pucks and gnomes were all in the garden, and Halli and Magsen were both in the upstairs library. In being anxious to get on with the experiment, Zin didn't worry further, particularly because the eerie feeling rather quickly faded.

Facing the origin bin corresponding to the receiving bin that Luis had just moved and had placed on the floor, Zin placed the acorn squash into the box, afterwards closing the hinged panel. At the very moment the panel snapped shut with a small *click*, a fairly loud *thump* sounded from the bin at Luis' feet.

Bending to open the panel, Luis discovered the bin to be completely filled with acorn squash, which he then began to remove, and which amounted to quite a large pile when the bin finally proved to be empty a couple of minutes later.

Though this was exactly the result they had been hoping for, Zin and Luis were both practically speechless.

The *thump*, Luis surmised, had been from the bin filling so quickly with the squash (being heavy and sizeable) because when they next performed a test with the much-smaller kohlrabi, only a slight *thud* was heard; and the pile formed this time, from Zin helping Luis empty the bin, was considerably smaller than the pile of squash. In deciding to count the produce, they discovered there to be exactly seventy-two kohlrabi and seventy-two squash.

With the pile of squash being considerably larger than the box they came out of, Zin surmised that the pod aspect of the bin was working perfectly. “So pumpkins or watermelons would still fit,” she stated. “The people receiving them would just have to keep pulling them out until all were unloaded.”

“Seems so,” Luis agreed.

In case we might be wondering, the bins could only work one way, with the origin bin not being able to receive, and the receiving bin not being able to send anything. Also, no living creatures could either travel in or be multiplied by the share bins, because of various parameters and safeguards God set within the realm of the use of magic. So no cats, birds, puck trolls, snoils, ladybugs and such could be in any way affected if somehow entering the bins. The same was true of the resizing trunk located in the attic of Laurelstone, as no living creatures that might end up inside it would be either shrunk or sized up.

Zin and Luis next made a plan to perform a test out in the real world, not just in the subbasement library. However, before enacting the plan, they each carried an armful of the acorn squash and kohlrabi upstairs to the kitchen. After replacing the ones earlier borrowed on the counter, they headed out the back door to the root cellar with the rest, meeting on the back porch as they did so, Kiana and Lista, who were shaking sand from their hair and clothing.

“We can move the kohlrabi and squash for you,” Kiana offered, with Lista nodding, as they found out about the two piles that needed to be moved from the subbasement library to the root cellar. “Then you can get on with whatever else you need to do.”

“Thanks,” Luis and Zin replied simultaneously, as they again headed downstairs to each carry a bin upstairs and outside into the back gardens.

Inside, Lista rather quickly got busy engaging helpers for the moving task, which made Kiana laugh. Though she was well aware that one of the gifts of puck trolls was the ability to bring artistic creations to life, it still amused her to see a figure from a tapestry, two smallish statues, and a hobby horse all animated and heading down the stairs to help with the carrying. The hobby horse, now sporting two empty laundry sacks slung across his saddle by Lista, had belonged to Otto as a small boy. The statues, a porcelain shepherd and shepherdess from the parlor, were each carrying empty cloth totes that usually held such things as yarn and knitting needles. The tapestry figure was a woman in long robes carrying a basket also from the tapestry that had been temporarily emptied of its piles of grapes.

Downstairs, Kiana was somewhat surprised to see Lista lifting an acorn squash over her head to toss into the sacks on the hobby horse that the shepherdess was holding open for her. She shouldn't have been surprised, in having earlier observed the little puck hoisting fairly heavy buckets of sand when working on a sculpture of a smiling whale wearing a floppy hat.

The task was finished rather quickly from the extra help, after which, Lista settled the horse, statues, and tapestry figure again into their proper places.

Outside, Zin had deposited the origin bin on a work table inside the greenhouse, as Luis placed the receiving bin into a pod sack, which he would end up carrying to a newly-formed earthship community in Western Australia that was struggling to become self-sustaining due to demon and nyreg attacks orchestrated by local sorcerers. Not only were the demons tearing up tools and water tanks, acid spit by the nyregs was destroying the vegetation and polluting the soil. While a thunderbird had recently adopted the community, and the people had weapons to help bring these menaces under control, it had proved difficult to start over again several times with regards to growing food. Thus, the share bins would be an enormous blessing.

Zin and Luis would be keeping in touch by walnut as they conducted their experiment, with Westerwing setting off only moments after the bin was secured in the sack, which he carried clutched in his talons.

As Zin watched her friend depart, a flower pot sitting on its side on the table suddenly caught her eye. The circular shape of the opening was what had drawn her attention, reminding her of the hand symbol she had earlier offered the genie, which had turned out much more like a circle than a triangle, for as hastily as she had made it. *Something about circles...something important*, she thought, as her mind also flitted to what Luis had said earlier about things not happening in a straight line.

Though something in her brain was telling her the circular shape was important, she didn't have time at the moment to ponder further because Luis, calling to her by walnut, had just arrived at the earthship community in Australia, having gotten there super speedily from traveling mainly westward. It was actually the middle of the night in Australia, but the community had several watchmen awake around the clock these days, so Westerwing's shortly-after-midnight arrival wasn't too inconvenient.

As Luis let her know that the bin was out of the sack and ready to go, Zin grabbed a sweet potato and a carrot from nearby baskets, placing the carrot first into the bin before closing the front panel.

"Got a pile of carrots here," Luis said almost instantly, which absolutely thrilled Zin who then immediately put the potato into the bin and shut the panel.

"Wait, wait, wait!" Luis cried, with laughter in his voice, as he hadn't yet removed the carrots, which were now in a jumble with what seemed to be at least a couple of bushels of large sweet potatoes. He was cautioning because he could very well picture Zin quickly shoving all kinds of things into the bin in her excitement over the experiment proving successful. "Let us get the carrots and sweet potatoes out before anything else goes in, so we can keep things separated," he said.

Zin could definitely see her friend's point, especially since the two tomatoes she had just grabbed might easily be crushed by the likes of potatoes or squash. Over the walnut, she could hear a couple of people in the background getting excited over the provisions for the hungry community. In fact, a couple of the kids waking up the next morning would imagine Santa Claus to have visited in the night; though, of course, they soon were told it was God providing for them, to Whom the people in the community gave great thanks and praise both in their prayers and in worship services.

Patiently waiting for go-ahead signals from Luis, upon sending the tomatoes, a butternut squash, and three red potatoes, on a whim, Zin placed a bunch of green grapes in a basket, then setting the basket inside the bin and closing the panel. Upon opening the bin on his end, Luis discovered a whole herd of baskets containing green grapes, stacked one atop the other in neat little rows. When Luis gave her the next signal, Zin placed a pair of gloves into the bin, which also arrived in perfect shape and in stacks of multiples.

“So the bins won’t even need to be adjusted to send other things,” Zin said in an amazed tone over the walnut. She shouldn’t have been amazed, since this was, after all, a miracle.

Heike and Pipac happened to be working in the greenhouse, and soon began bringing other fruits and veggies to Zin. Plus, by miming, the pucks offered to make the ongoing deposits inside the bins, possibly also getting the gnomes involved to help, while timing these activities so that the deliveries happened more often in daylight than in darkness on the receiving end.

Three zucchini and a couple of pears were ready to go and would be sent by the pucks, who were rolling their eyes and shaking their heads at one another over Zin telling them about the interval timing of sending things. *Well, duh...Pipac was thinking. Of course we have to wait for them to unload things on the other end. I mean...really. We’re not without common sense.*

Luis returned to Doyle Mansion about five minutes later, as Zin was in the garden shed gathering a few items to send.

“Seeds, plant starts, trowels, pots; if you have any extras, they could pretty much use it all,” Luis said.

“We always have extras,” Zin replied.

The people in the Australian community had walnut devices, and so could communicate with the folks at Doyle Mansion. They also liked to use dawn pigeons, this being a better option to communicate with the pucks who never spoke; though the pucks could get the gnomes involved in using the walnuts if they needed to, particularly when setting up the initial time schedule as to when items would be sent, each day for a while, then probably reducing to two days a week later on. It had already been decided on the receiving end that when they got things under control in their own community, they would pass the bin off to

another settlement nearby in need of supplies. In the meantime, they would be sharing things around the best they could in the region.

With regard to real walnuts, the pucks ended up sending some through the share bins, along with pecans, peanuts, and filberts that were also available. Several of the kohlrabi and acorn squash would also end up going, along with apples, okra, asparagus, and eggplants.

Zin and Luis soon decided to take another share bin to a large farming community in Croatia that was struggling, for similar reasons to the one in Australia, to include fire slugs in cahoots with the sorcerers destroying crops and barns. Blessedly, a gryphix living in the area had recently killed the slugs, and a cloudbird had doused the last several fires. But it had definitely been difficult to recover from the destruction. The sorcerers these days were pretty keen on trying to destroy a lot of self-sustaining settlements, in the hopes that this would drive people back into the Supercities. However, the ongoing malice was actually serving to make many people more determined to never again have to live under the rule of these cruel men. Plus, God was definitely still helping His children, even as He had during the time of their enslavement.

While the table in the greenhouse was a good spot for the first bin, it was decided that the second should go on a bench in the root cellar. And with Zin deciding to go with Luis (because she was ready for a little outing), Kiana, Lista, Kisi, and Pizzo would be sending things through, with Kiana keeping in touch with her friends by walnut, so as to get the initial go-ahead, and so that she and the pucks could get used to the interval timing of sending the items.

It was early evening at the farm in Croatia, which was home to nearly five hundred people, and so wasn't a bad time for Zin and Westerwing to arrive with the bin, which was received with great enthusiasm, as were the supplies. In fact, Kiana and the pucks were enjoying hearing the background squeals of excitement over the tomatoes, onions, okra, potatoes, peppers, cucumbers, apples, pecans, etc.

Most people of the community spoke English; though even if they hadn't, this wouldn't have been a problem because Luis was fairly well fluent in the Croatian language, which was actually a blend of three

dialects. In truth, being originally from Denmark, he knew many European languages.

On the way home a short while later, Zin and Luis stopped briefly at the White Cliffs of Dover to watch the sunset, and pray to thank God for the fourth of the Twelve Miracles, after which, they enjoyed a snack of Louetta's butter brickle bread, which had fared well in Luis' haversack, in not being crushed as the snack bars in Zin's were. But in her opinion, many crushed foodstuffs were just as good as non-crushed ones. They weren't likely to run out of food in their travels, as Luis always kept raisins, dried apricots, cashews, and almonds in his pack. He also kept a supply of water; plus, Zin always carried water purifying tablets.

"The bin project being done is a miracle in and of itself," Zin remarked as they ate. "I actually thought I was going to be at it another six months, at least."

The pair made it back in time for lunch on the back porch with Em, the pucks, Kiana, and the gryphons. (The gnomes most often preferred to eat in their treehouse.) Otto arrived shortly, dropped off by a rookh. He still called Doyle Mansion home, though he was hardly ever there for as much as he traveled to work on architectural projects practically all over the world. In fact, he had just overseen the completion of an underground military facility in Ethiopia, and was set to head to Northern Canada next to design a hospital.

Otto was pleased to learn that the share bins were a success. While Zin and Luis mentioned "miraculous" in their conversation about the bins, they didn't talk about the Bloodstone. For some reason, it just didn't seem to come up. Later, when thinking about not mentioning the Bloodstone, Zin associated this with the almost too-easy nature of how the miracles were coming about. *We don't seem to need to think about how they are happening; they're just happening, like almost on their own. But really by Providence*, her mind added, *in keeping with God's Overall Plan, the Clock of the Universe ticking along.* Not just metaphorical, the clock was an actual device. *An Instrument of Providence*, Zin decided as her ponderings continued.

The third set of bins was set to go to Netherwind after lunch, for the magicians and gifted technologists there to make more of them, which would actually be a pretty easy task from being able to start with a working prototype. Currently, fourteen magicians and nineteen

technologists lived at the twin plantations, in various pockets and actually at Netherwind Manor, which still had a sizeable magicians' lab in its basement. With diligence, these hardworking people would end up making hundreds of the bins over the next few months. And although they could never get the bins to work in both directions, because the function was always meant to remain one way, they were able to make several enhancements to the design to include built-in communication devices, and indicators on origin bins to let senders know when a receiving bin had been emptied and was ready to accept something new. Various sizes of share bins were also made, as well as ones constructed of different materials.

Magsen offered to drop off the set of bins to Netherwind, since she had planned to visit the Labyrinth Library in the afternoon anyway. As she flew away a short while later, carrying the boxes in a netting sack, the metal of the bins glinted brightly in the sun. For some reason, this got Zin thinking of how metals, like numbers, were important in the bible, though probably in more symbolic ways than numbers, which Zin felt were both symbolic and scientific in the bible.

Zin was distracted from her thoughts when Heike suddenly threw a large dirt clod directly at Zin's belt pack, which was hanging on the back of one of the porch chairs. The clod dislodged something small that had been clinging to the pack, something that looked like a reddish-gray leafhopper bug, but that swiftly changed shape as it began to run down the porch steps and across the lawn.

Heike threw a second clod at what was now a smooth clay figure in the shape of a man roughly knee high with large eyes and wearing a sort of headdress. The clod, though making contact, had no effect; neither did fist-sized rocks next thrown by both Heike and Pipac, the rocks merely bouncing off the running figure, and not even making a chip in the creature that scampered over the garden wall nearly as quick as lightning.

"What was it?" Zin asked. She had been so surprised that she hadn't moved.

"A teraphim," Otto responded, having risen from his chair where he was reading a newsletter.

"Has it been a thousand years already?" Halli questioned from a nearby spot on the porch where she had been napping.

“Apparently,” Otto answered.

“Wait, what’s a teraphim?” Zin asked.

“A family idol in the form of a statue,” Halli responded. “Most were made from clay in the ancient past, and they acted as good-luck charms for the families who used to worship them. But the one we just saw was a special kind of teraphim because the sorcerers of old put spells on thousands of them to make them stronger, give them extra abilities, and animate them so they could get around easily to do their work.”

“Which included not only bringing good fortune to certain people through sorcery,” Otto chimed in, “but also harm to the enemies of the families the teraphim were devoted to.”

“But a really powerful magician of the past placed a curse on the teraphim,” Halli went on. “No one knows the exact date because the written records aren’t super clear. But the spell rendered them inert for a thousand years, at the end of which, they would gain their powers back.”

“So the time must have come,” Otto stated. “There’s a book on teraphim in the upstairs library if you want to know more about them.”

Zin did indeed want to know more about them, as did Luis who had come out onto the back porch from helping Em, Kiana, Kisi, and Pizzo clean up in the kitchen after lunch.

Grabbing her pack and brushing off a bit of dirt clod, Zin followed Luis inside and up the stairs to the library, where they easily found the book in question, which had information on teraphim in general, along with the special kind that had been enhanced by ancient sorcerers.

A whole chapter was devoted to warning about the danger of idolizing all sorts of things—money, people, good-luck charms, whatever—which never turns out good, not even for the recipients of the luck, as they quickly find themselves enslaved to sin and in the service of Satan. While a person might think everything is fine and dandy to start with, he or she will always end up meeting some tragedy from engaging in idolatry.

As they skimmed an historical section of the book, Luis stated, “So even godly families were drawn to the favors and good fortune the teraphim could bring them, which then often led to horrible sins like greed, pride, drunkenness, and adultery.”

Noting a picture in the book, Zin said, “The statues given out at the Oscars were teraphim, though not of the clay kind like the older idols.”

Flipping to a later chapter in the book, the researchers discovered more about the enhanced teraphim. When shapeshifting smaller, they could look like just about anything. Preferred forms seemed to be insects, small lizards, sometimes rodents; but they also sometimes masqueraded as household items such as coffee mugs and salt cellars. Whatever form they decided to take, they always retained a clay look. As bugs, they sometimes hitched rides with people.

“I wonder if the leafhopper one hitched a ride back with us from Croatia,” Luis speculated. This was a good guess, as not many of the enhanced teraphim had been in North America at the time the curse was put on them, having been concentrated in Europe and the Middle East. Now free from the curse, they were spreading out all over the world in search of descendants of the families they had once been attached to.

Perusing the book further, Zin and Luis discovered that when shapeshifting larger, the teraphim had to retain their created form, which always resembled a human figure; though, of course, the features could be wide varying—fat, skinny, short, tall, large noses or small, and the same with ears, feet, etc. While most of the statues were between six inches and two feet tall when created, they could grow to a hundred times their natural size. However, although capable of outright physical attack, they actually preferred to work more inactively, through use of whammies, jinxes, and such.

“To enact their magic, they have to be within ten feet of their target,” Luis stated in skipping ahead a couple of paragraphs.

Zin was still reading the part about how some people connected to teraphim actually liked to travel with them for luck, often wearing the creatures as clay jewelry that looked like beetle lapel pins, lizard brooches, and so forth.

The friends were both sitting closely together at a table bench to pore over the book. Suddenly feeling like she was a little too close to Luis, Zin scooped over a bit, then just craned her neck to keep reading. She didn’t know why she should feel uncomfortable; after all, she often rode on Westerwing’s back. But for some reason, the elbow and shoulder contact felt much different than just touching feathers, like more personal somehow. While not usually shy, Zin all of a sudden felt

so, almost as though they had been holding hands like boyfriend and girlfriend; though of course they hadn't been, and weren't.

"They can enact curses of all kinds to bring bad luck and harm to people," Luis stated from more reading. "They cause falls down stairs, shipwrecks, houses to get burgled, muggings, loss of money, accidents with tools, bricks to fall on people's heads...."

"And the enhanced ones are so tough on the outside that they can't even be destroyed by hammers or projectiles like spears and arrows," Zin added, as she too read along. "So probably bullets, cannon balls, or even today's magical weapons won't harm them."

Suddenly feeling too warm from sitting so close, she stood up, pretending to need to stretch, as her mind pondered the issue of the outer toughness of the teraphim. "Then they would need to be destroyed somehow from the inside out," she said, after a short think.

"So you're planning to tackle this problem?" Luis queried, in being a little surprised since he was pretty sure countering the teraphim would not be one of the Twelve Miracles, which would turn out to be a correct assumption.

"Well, I think that might be why we crossed paths with the leafhopper," Zin answered, in not at all being surprised that God was giving her a task to work on while waiting for His direction with regard to the next miracle. Closing the book and making her way to the ladder to return the volume to its shelf, she added, "So I think I'll head down to the lab to work for a bit."

"Then I'll be in the gardens," Luis stated, rising. "I think Kiana and Lista were planning to tackle some pruning. I'll help them, since you're going to be busy."

Luis would have offered to help Zin, except for knowing that he couldn't be of use to her, since it was very difficult for a sorcerer to counter the magic of another sorcerer, unless it was something simple like changing someone that had been turned into a frog or rat back into a human being. The enhanced teraphim were a lot more complicated. In fact, enhancers were some of the most complex of the sorcerers' magic. Luis was planning to stay for dinner, but he didn't want to be in Zin's way while she was working, so he thought the gardens the best place for him for a time.

As she was putting the book away, Zin had it in the back of her mind that the teraphim issue might be immensely important to resolve; and so it would make sense for God to give her this task before leading her to perform the next of the Twelve Miracles.

Climbing down from the ladder and gazing about her at what amounted to a veritable sea of books, the thought suddenly popped into her head that, while there was no denying that libraries and books were wonderful, the answers to the most important questions of the world were not found in any book except the *Holy Bible*.

As a shortcut to the basement, Zin decided to take the spiral slide, accessed by a trap door in the library floor. However, upon raising the door, she discovered the slide to be incredibly dusty, having not been cleaned in probably three or four years. So she decided to use a magnetism spell. Although she wasn't supposed to do magical cleaning, because her mom thought it rather lazy, the libraries in the house were the exception, being so large, with the subbasement one being super huge.

The slide is connected to the library, Zin's mind told her by way of getting around the rule. Plus, I need to get a move on.

Removing a small metal stick—about as long as a toothpick, but a little thicker and more squared in shape—from a vest pocket, Zin swiftly performed her Dust-Bunny Gathering Charm, by swirling the stick over the top of the slide in the opposite direction to the spiral, which soon drew all of the dust, cobwebs, and such out of the slide tunnel toward the stick. While at first amounting to a whirling wad of dust and whatnot nearly the size of a beach ball, Zin quickly had it compacted down to about the size of a cantaloupe for easy carrying. Next stowing her magnetism stick, she stepped into the tunnel, lowering the trap door to close it as she sat down on the slide, then letting go to smoothly swirl down to a small landing, where she opened a panel in the basement wall before stepping out and depositing the dust ball into the lint bin next to the dryer.

Kisi happened to be in the basement and gave a wave hello to Zin who was heading for the door to the subbasement. Taking an interest in the dust ball, Kisi ended up taking it out to the gardens to give to a group of magical caterpillars known as idomoly that were in appearance very like common woolly bear caterpillars, also somewhat resembling

bears in shape, though not so much in coloring from more being a wide variety of pastels, both in overall color and in their interesting markings. The idomoly were very much welcome in gardens, as they were able to predict the weather, often giving warnings of upcoming storms, and sometimes droughts, by scratching out pictorial messages in patches of earth, or in sandboxes, as was the case at Doyle Mansion. Generally three to five inches long each, the idomoly stayed as caterpillars for several years before cocooning to transform into moths that still retained many of the lovely pastel colors and markings of the caterpillars.

With regard to the dust ball, the idomoly often used things like lint and cobwebs to construct little parachutes to travel to other gardens. As a favored activity, the caterpillars enjoyed nibbling on hydrangea petals, doing so always very symmetrically (rounding the edges of the petals) so that people wouldn't notice the nibbles, which they might not have anyway because of the small impact. In fact, a couple of nibbles a week during the blooming season were generally enough to satisfy an idomoly, who went without hydrangea petals the rest of the year, which was fine because this meant being able to enjoy the treat of the blooming season even better.

In addition to giving weather warnings, the idomoly possessed a lesser-known skill, lesser known because the caterpillars weren't very often observed shadowing gremlins in order to undo some of their mischief. In truth, this was part of the reason they liked to parachute around, to get more quickly to certain garden sheds, garages, and other places in order to fix things broken by gremlins. They evidently had little stomach pouches (like kangaroos and possums) in which they carried a set of magical tools, though the idomoly were hardly ever seen repairing things because they were incredibly fast.

Zin got busy rather quickly in her lab, also making a trip upstairs to procure a jar of popcorn kernels to work with to make what she would end up calling her Shatter Whammy. Luis did end up getting involved an hour or so into the project, in running an errand as Westerwing to Sam's pottery studio on Lion Mountain to obtain dust scrapings from several different types of clay pottery. Since her Uncle Sam rarely made anything terracotta, Zin scraped some reddish dust from a couple of flower pots on the back porch to add to the spell. While the whammy

would work on any of the enhanced teraphim no matter what type of clay dust was used, Zin thought it best to add a variety, to make sure to be as potent as possible. Since the teraphim could work their ill magic from within ten feet of people, Zin put a fifteen-foot range on the popcorn kernels, which would pop when coming to within that distance of any teraphim, swiftly sending the spell to the idol to shatter the creature from the inside out, the process happening within just a few seconds for most of the teraphim; though Zin did acknowledge that some of the larger and tougher ones might take longer to break apart.

So this is just like how a piece of popcorn works, from the inside out, Zin thought as she finished the first little batch of twenty-four kernels.

A test was warranted, of course, with anything new like this, which Zin wanted to perform on this day, since it was but late afternoon when she finished the whammy. Kiana had been getting ready to leave for home. In the hopes that the teraphim was still in the area, she offered to make a running search through the neighborhood to see if she could spot anything like the leafhopper or the little clay man that had dashed away over the garden wall. Westerwing, too, could do quite a lot of low-flying scanning based on his speed. Both searchers would signal by walnut if they spotted the teraphim, so that Zin could come with a Shatter Whammy kernel. Magsen was home by this time and would be standing by to take Zin quickly to any destination.

Kiana was the one who ended up spotting the little clay man, who had been nosing around the two-story gazebo on the Galloway Estate across the street from Doyle Mansion. With the estate being home to numerous magical topiaries, upon sensing the evil of the teraphim, a buffalo and a koala bear had both come to life to try to deal with the problem. However, being very fast when dodging charges by the leafy creatures, the little man was basically just laughing as he scampered about the gazebo. Well, when Magsen flew in with Zin, he didn't laugh much longer; in fact, his grin shattered as quickly as the rest of him barely three seconds after the popcorn kernel in Zin's hand popped when she approached the teraphim to just within fifteen feet.

Zin was thrilled that the Shatter Whammy had proven successful.

Jenny Galloway, the current owner of the estate, had just come out of the house to see what was going on. Thus, Zin and Luis briefly explained to her about the teraphim.

“I’ll be traveling some next week, so I can help spread the word for people to be on the lookout for them,” Jenny said. She often traveled to work on topiaries, all over the world in fact, so it would be no problem for her to also carry a supply of the Shatter Whammy kernels with her to hand out to various communities.

Zin had already decided to ask the genies at the twin plantations to multiply the kernels, which they would end up doing, to the extent that literally millions would be made in only a couple of hours after Magsen delivered six of the originals to a little genie office located in Netherwind’s magical treehouse. Popcorn had been a good choice of medium because it was plentiful, grown not only at the twin plantations, but at other places nearby such as Wharton Farm; though, of course, the genies didn’t need to start with a lot of anything in order to do their magical multiplying. While this was not the result of use of the Bloodstone, Zin almost felt as though a miracle had occurred, as was often the case when the genies (who were known as the Great Multipliers) got involved.

Jenny very quickly decided to help take charge of things, engaging bigfoots and gnomes (whom she often worked closely with anyway) to help with the distribution of bags of the kernels, which ended up dropped off over the next couple of weeks to thousands of self-sustaining communities all over the world, the gnomes employing the speedy gliders they often used for transportation, and the bigfoots using great footspeed to move things along their extensive relay networks. By contacting Heather and certain members of the Underground Army, Jenny was also able to arrange for a large supply of the Shatter Whammy kernels to be available to the Supercities and work camps, to be distributed through various covert channels.

It was a very good thing for these efforts to have begun, as it had been noticed in recent weeks that accidents and other types of misfortune had increased in many cities and settlements, as well as good fortune for certain folks, though the bad things were certainly overshadowing any good that was happening. Although few people had actually noticed the idols, because they were experts at both hiding and

blending in, the teraphim were definitely out there, and in fairly substantial numbers, causing all kinds of problems such as falls from ladders, theft of property, even in some cases sicknesses like mumps and pneumonia. In simply carrying the kernels in pockets, individuals could well protect themselves; and by replacing any popped kernels, continue the protection for as long as needed.

Meanwhile, back at Doyle Mansion, Kiana was just getting ready to leave for home when a man named Layden Merrick from Lion Mountain showed up on horseback, coming through the front gardens and to the front door, instead of going the back route used by most other visitors to the mansion.

Layden was gifted with the ability to sense demonic creatures. On his way to the twin plantations, he had stopped in on this day from sensing a concentration of megahobs in the area. Able to pinpoint the exact location, he was seeking help in dealing with them. "It's a larger pack than I would want to try to tackle on my own," he said.

Of course the folks at the mansion would help, as it was in everyone's best interest to eliminate as many megahobs, and like creatures, as possible from the world.

The name of the horse was Marigold, by the way, and she was enjoying having her nose petted by Pipac who had climbed to stand on the front porch rail to greet both horse and rider.

As Em was pulling on shoes and grabbing her favorite rope weapon (blue in color) from a coatrack, while Zin at the same time was removing a red rope from her boot and Luis was unclipping a flute from his belt, Kiana stated, "I can just call a unicorn to take care of them, if you want."

The offer was gladly accepted, since megahobs were particularly vicious and often difficult to kill, from being incredibly strong and fast, not to mention having razor-sharp teeth, fangs, and long talons. Also, Otto was napping, and no one particularly wanted to disturb him so that he could help. Besides that, the gryphons weren't around because Magsen had gone to drop off the Shatter Whammy kernels to the genies, and Halli had decided to tag along to visit a few friends at Netherwind and Laurelstone.

When Layden offered his arm to Kiana so that she could swing up onto the horse with him, she said, “I’ll just run along behind you two; don’t worry, I can keep up.”

Only briefly surprised by the statement (since he didn’t know Kiana), Layden simply smiled, after which, he directed Marigold across the front lawns to exit the gate on Paloma Drive, which was no longer properly paved, but was still highly traversable. And so, down the street the horse and rider loped, with Kiana, after closing the front gate behind her, easily catching up and keeping up the whole three-quarters of a mile to a Rubble Garden where the megahobs had been gathering, for whatever reason, probably to plan mischief, Layden had surmised.

The large garden—made by area gnomes and bigfoots from bits of old houses, cars, fences, garages, and the like—held lovely hedges and flower beds, along with an extensive vegetable plot. It was a good thing Layden had asked for help on this day because fourteen megahobs were hidden about the garden, camouflaged to look like various shrubs, rocks, benches, and such.

Quickly noting the presence of the humans and horse, four of the megahobs sprang into action, charging the intruders with lightning speed, and losing their camouflage as they did so since hobs of any sort couldn’t hold their disguises when in motion.

“You do know to shield your eyes?” Kiana said, by way of warning Layden who swiftly swung Marigold around so that her eyes could also be averted, while he covered his own with one hand, as his new friend called a unicorn while also shielding her eyes.

The golden creature appeared almost instantly to light up for a mere two seconds, which proved enough to dissipate all fourteen of the megahobs, their forms simply melting away like bits of dust might on autumn breezes, with only slimy traces of them left behind on the ground that would easily wash away with the next good rain. After briefly touching his shimmering nose to Kiana’s shoulder, and giving Marigold a short nod, the unicorn simply disappeared.

Kiana jogged back to Doyle Mansion, with Layden atop Marigold beside her at a trot. As they entered the estate, from the rear this time, Westerwing landed beside Marigold. He had been high above, watching, in case he might be needed to help deal with the megahobs.

Although Layden was invited to stay the night, since a guest room could easily be prepared, he declined because he and Marigold generally preferred to camp out. However, they did accept an invitation to stay for dinner, with Marigold enjoying the treat of a bucket of grain that one of the treehouse gnomes procured for her from Wharton Farm.

In knowing that her mom was making spaghetti and meatballs, one of her favorites, Kiana passed on the invite to stay for dinner with her friends. So that she wouldn't have to call a rookh, Westerwing ended up taking her home, afterwards returning to the mansion where he had planned to stay as a guest for another night.

Kiana was happy to be home after such an extraordinarily busy day, as was often the case when she visited her friends in the South. After enjoying the yummy spaghetti dinner, and helping to clean up in the kitchen afterwards, she went to bed early, falling asleep quickly after reading a couple of psalms and saying her nightly prayers.

Chapter Four

When Pigs Fly

Over breakfast the next morning, Zin and Luis got to talking with Otto about miracles, which were still happening in the world of today, even aside from the ones connected to the Bloodstone, like people somehow surviving avalanches, and settlements being provided for even without help from things like share bins. In his recent travels, Otto had visited a particular mothership community in Georgia in which several sixty-year-old crabapple trees that hadn't bloomed or borne fruit for the past fifteen or so years had suddenly started blooming again, and producing so much fruit that many branches of the trees were literally bending (nearly breaking) from the weight and had to be propped up.

"That seemed pretty miraculous to me," Otto stated, as he bid Luis farewell with the triangle hand symbol, and his niece with a kiss on the forehead, before heading upstairs to pack for a trip he would be leaving on in roughly an hour.

Since Zin hadn't yet gotten any further direction with regard to the next miracle, Luis left around the same time as Otto. He had some things to do at home, but planned to be available at quick notice if Zin should call to him by walnut.

After cleaning up from breakfast, and having a quick peek into her foreshard, which showed her nothing at this time, Zin headed down to her lab. Feeling good about the success of the share bins and the Shatter Whammy kernels, she was planning to work on another project, one that she had made a couple of stabs at in recent weeks but had been unable to make any progress on.

This was another problem having to do with the sorcerers and their followers. A couple of months previous, Zin had developed a counter for what was known as a hypnoid, an insidious chemical creation that allowed the sorcerers to take mind control over people, thus forcing many to again work as slaves in various Supes and camps. The counter, in pill form and in widespread use, had worked to break people free

from this control. However, the same gifted fifteen-year-old biochemist that developed the original hypnoid had then created an advanced version called a Memory Hypnoid, designed to target memories to the extent that people could be made to forget family, friends, certain aspects of education, godly pursuits, hobbies, and so forth, while still retaining enough knowledge to function on a certain level to be useful to the sorcerers, who could then reprogram the subjects to serve in all sorts of ways—as spies, assassins, factory workers, whatever.

While the original counter hadn't been too difficult to develop, the one for the Memory Hypnoid was proving to be a huge challenge. In fact, Zin was starting to wonder if perhaps this might be a task slightly beyond her skills, particularly because there was something incredibly foreboding about the whole thing, not just the concept of people losing their memories, which was scary enough, but that something bad related to this might be about to hit somewhere close to home. While she hadn't ever been one to have these types of premonitions, something was definitely unsettling her about the Memory Hypnoid.

Zin had made a detector device to basically sniff out victims of the original hypnoid so that they could be treated with the counter pill. But the detector wouldn't work with the Memory Hypnoid, which was infinitely more complex than the original.

But a detector won't matter if I can't find a way to counter the new hypnoid, Zin reminded herself when trying to get focused on the task at hand. *So...boy genius Winston Hardcastle,* her mind mulled, for this was the name of the biochemist who was working with the sorcerers.

Winston was actually the younger brother of seventeen-year-old Ethan Stanley, a friend of Zin's; though Winston had been taken from his family as a baby to be raised by adoptive parents who were part of the elite class of Supercity Ten.

Oddly enough, like Eizel, Winston was newly saved, according to Ethan and his mother, Holly Stanley; though we might not have known he was saved, since he was still working with the sorcerers. Being a true city boy, and being resentful of what had happened to the Supercities as a result of the uprisings, Winston couldn't quite yet see why it was wrong to help the sorcerers try to gain more workers to run things. It was Winston's opinion that this might restore some normalcy

to the Supes, which were in pretty bad shape in having to operate with such a reduced workforce.

Winston had developed both types of hypnoid before he was saved, so there was a strong hope that he wouldn't do more of the same. In truth, Heather, who was keeping an eye on his activities, hadn't gotten wind of him working on anything else for the sorcerers in recent weeks. So he wasn't up to anything bad at this time; though he also didn't seem to be doing much of anything good.

Looking over her notes relating to the Memory Hypnoid, Zin suddenly got a rather sick feeling in her stomach. The original hypnoid actually worked more on the senses than on the brain; but this new one had to do directly with the brain, specifically memories, which were very intricate, not to mention incredibly mysterious. The sick feeling was from Zin having an inkling that this was something she might not be able to do anything about. Maybe this would be the time that the sorcerers would get the better of their longtime adversaries, the magicians. Winston was a friend of Tanner's, which particularly irked Zin because her rivalry with Tanner had become intensely personal over the past couple of years.

Like many people, Zin had hoped things would calm down after the uprisings with regard to the malice of the sorcerers and their cronies. Instead, it seemed to have fueled many of them, who had awakened from complacency to work harder than ever to come up with even more sinister creations.

With the issue of the Memory Hypnoid confounding her, Zin contemplated visiting the Realm of Sextessence. But in addition to preferring not use something she deemed a crutch, she had a deep feeling (like the Holy Spirit telling her) that the answer to this particular puzzle couldn't be found there.

Sitting down on a couch, Zin prayed. *Heavenly Father, I think this is sort of like writer's block. I'm stuck and I need help. Please tell me what to do.*

What almost instantly popped into her brain was that she had forgotten to ask for God's direction to start with, which she was meant to do with pretty much everything in her life, rather than relying on her own thinking or skills. *Of course, God carries me. I'm not meant to carry Him.*

In a flash (literally a flash of light), there appeared in the subbasement what would turn out to be an answer to the prayer, though not an answer to the issue of the Memory Hypnoid, which Zin evidently wasn't meant to continue work on at this time.

"Aunt Vini!" Zin exclaimed.

"Sorry, didn't mean to startle you," her aunt replied.

The sudden appearance actually hadn't startled Zin too much, since she had in recent months grown used to her aunt coming and going just like a unicorn.

Handing Zin a small stone sphere, gold in color, Vini added, "I was told in a dream to bring this to you." (Dreams were the way Vini had been getting some of her directions from God since her youth.) With this, she simply gave Zin a wink before disappearing in a soft flash of light.

"The Sage Key," Zin stated, amazed, in swiftly realizing that this was the answer to getting information about the next of the Twelve Miracles, since the sphere was designed to allow users to see future events. *Of course it won't be the foreshard showing me every time*, her mind added, in thinking herself a complete dunce when remembering that one message already had come from Kiana. Plus, Louetta had given them Albert's locale. And talking to her mother and Pizzo had led to seeking out Luca and Pone. *So I'll be getting information from various sources, including the Sage Key.*

The sense of foreboding was now gone, which prompted Zin's brain to tell her, *Time to put any thoughts of doubt or failure behind me, and push forward.* With this, her mind flew to a quote from Philippians 3:13. "...but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead..." In fact, she now felt completely energized (a notorious side effect of exposure to a unicorn), almost as if she could take on the whole world, including the issue of the Memory Hypnoid; except she knew she wouldn't be doing that today, being meant instead to pursue the next miracle.

Although Zin had actually helped to create the entire set of seven magical spheres, to which the Sage Key belonged, she wasn't an expert in their use. *But the Sage Key is pretty easy to use*, she thought. In truth, it was simply a matter of holding the sphere, closing the eyes, clearing clutter from the brain by focusing on something simple (like a

cloud or a leaf), and letting the eye of the mind look forward to whatever God might want to show the user of the key.

And it *was* easy for Zin, who had her answer within two minutes of performing the aforementioned steps. (She had pictured a small moth sitting on a rock to clear brain clutter.) On her walnut to Luis right away, Zin briefly described the vision she had seen in the eye of her mind. “It’s a box we need to find, made of bone. And I’m pretty sure I know how to track it down.”

Lots of things were made of bone, including a comb sitting on her mother’s dressing table. Heading to the master bedroom of the mansion, Zin borrowed the comb, before making her way outside in search of Pizzo, who was a master of tracking down magical creatures in the area like hairy vetches and bigfoots. In this case, Zin was looking for a grimmpt, which had superb tracking abilities, like a bloodhound but even better. Pizzo ended up leading Zin and Westerwing, who had just arrived, to a grimmpt snuffling around in a zucchini patch on Wharton Farm, the residents of which had planted a late garden, so some leftover zucchini was available to the grimmpt.

The little flying piggy, bluish in color with shiny copper hooves, was happy to see the visitors, especially Zin, who gave him a handful of grapes she had hastily grabbed from the greenhouse at home.

When the grimmpt had finished his treat, Zin showed him the comb, which she had seen in the eye of her mind while using the Sage Key. No sooner had the piggy finished sniffing the comb than Pizzo hopped onto the shoulder of Zin who then hopped aboard Westerwing; and just in the nick of time because the grimmpt had lifted his tiny wings to take off, which he did like a streak of lightning, changing color as he flew from blue, to a kind of purplish pink, then to gold with a greenish tinge, his hooves flashing in the sunlight as he rose higher and higher in flight.

How do you know the comb is related to the box? Luis asked Zin by thought, in wondering this because the grimmpt wouldn’t be able to track something that wasn’t.

God showed it to me in the vision, Zin answered. *Both the comb and box were made from the bones of the same ancient creature, a mammoth, I think. But I don’t exactly know who made them, or when.*

Well, apparently, a few other things had been made from the bones of the same creature, as evidenced by the grimmpt first leading Luis,

Zin, and Pizzo to an abandoned cabin in a woodsy area of Canada. In the kitchen of the cabin, they found a buffet that had bone drawer handles. Moving on, they next ended up at a trading post in rural Russia where a knife vendor tried to sell them a set of three bone knives. Finally, the third time was the charm, as they found the bone box in a tea garden in a self-sustaining community in Japan, simply sitting on a small table in a pavilion. Being shortly after midnight, no one else was in the garden, which well suited the visitors who didn't particularly want to have to explain to anyone why they were there.

With Zin indicating she had found what she was looking for, the grimmpt—after receiving pats of thanks from Pizzo and Luis, and a scratch behind the ears from Zin—took off, again in a streak, on his way to seek out more zucchini, this time from a farm in Mexico.

The three-quarter moon over the tea garden provided a fair amount of light to see by. Plus, Luis used his staff to produce a small glow globe—basically a ball of light about the size of a baseball that would last fifteen minutes. The bone box was cube in shape, and looked to be about a foot square. With the glow globe hovering near her shoulder, Zin lifted the hinged lid of the box, which was empty, as expected based on the vision she had seen.

“After we put a pine needle inside,” Zin said, “a little tree is going to come out.”

“So this is a somewhat small miracle,” Luis remarked, in basically comparing it in his mind to the gorge of Jasper Diamonds.

“Depends on what the tree is for,” Zin said.

“I didn't mean in importance,” Luis responded, “but more just in size.” As Pizzo straightened himself up (to be about a half-inch taller), while giving the sorcerer a sharp look, Luis hastened to add, “Not that kind of size. I mean, it's just one tree, not like thousands upon thousands of diamonds or leviathan scales.”

Not terribly convinced, with pursed lips and narrowed eyes, Pizzo simply stared at Luis, until Zin provided a distraction by saying, “So this is another transforming miracle; and I was thinking of that old magicians' trick of putting a turtle in a box and changing it into a guinea pig, then back again. But, of course, we won't change the tree back into the pine needle, because it's supposed to stay as a tree.”

Piszo finally stopped giving Luis a look as Zin produced a longleaf pine needle she had snatched as she left the house from a craft bin that held her mother's basket-making supplies. Retrieving a pinch of transformation dust from a vest pocket, Zin fully believed as she coated the nine-inch pine needle with the dust that the Bloodstone would make the transformation that was about to occur permanent. As soon as she placed the needle into the box and lowered the lid, Luis used his staff to perform a transfiguration spell, one designed to work mainly on plant life (and one he had recently used to change six rose thorns into a half-dozen pink roses as a birthday gift for Zin). As he did this, the box took on a yellowy-green glow, which faded after a couple of seconds.

Lifting the lid, Zin drew out a seedling about three feet tall that turned out to be a maple tree whose leaves were just starting to turn red. "Oh...I would have thought...pine," she said, having not had a clear picture of exactly what type of tree had come out of the box in her vision. "It has leaves, instead of needles," she added wonderingly, since her brain was still basically in a state of surprise.

"Pine needles are pretty much the same thing as leaves," Luis stated, with Piszo nodding. "And since anything is possible with God, it's not too much of a stretch for a pine needle to turn into a maple tree."

"You're right," Zin said. "It's just I was expecting something else. I know, I shouldn't make assumptions, especially with regard to miracles." (To this, Piszo nodded again.)

"So what's next?" Luis asked.

"We're just supposed to leave the tree here, and the box," Zin said.

As Westerwing was carrying them off about a minute later, in the fading light of the glow globe, Zin and Piszo caught a last glimpse of the maple, which had, incredibly, turned entirely flame red in color in just that short amount of time. Zin would later learn from her foreshard that this particular tree was entirely unique among maples, one of a kind in fact, in being a cherry maple, whose leaves were not only extremely edible (tasting like cherries), but also had medicinal qualities capable of curing many illnesses, this being an incredible blessing to several area communities. Planted in the tea garden, the tree grew to over thirty feet tall, and was evergreen in nature with the leaves staying brilliant red pretty much year round.

The adventuring trio was home in time for lunch, before which, Zin returned the comb to her mother's dressing table. In doing so, she remembered her mother once telling her that the comb had been a gift from a puck troll in Finland that Em had made a jumpsuit and coat for some twenty years previous.

So here it is now in Doyle Mansion, handy for use to help track down the bone box, Zin thought, smiling as her mind added, *the Clock of the Universe ticking along...in the Hand of Providence.* Of course God was controlling the clock, along with everything else in the universe. While His children were allowed to help wind the clock, the Lord was always in complete charge of everything that was happening.

After lunch, Zin and Luis headed downstairs to the subbasement library because Zin had just thought of something. "It's another story in *Jasper Diamonds and Other Legends*," she said, as they made their way to the bookshelf to retrieve the book.

The legend of "The Seven Blessing Boxes" was about seven boxes made by craftsmen angels and designed to bestow various types of blessings on individuals coming into contact with the boxes. "Physical blessings, spiritual, health bringing, protection...the boxes could do all of these things," Zin stated. "They were each made of a different material, and one of them was made of bone."

Scanning the story while sitting side by side at a table, they easily found a list designating what the boxes were each made from. "Wood, mother of pearl, metal, cloth, bone, leaves, and stone," Luis said

As they continued to read, Zin followed up with, "The metal box was a combination of unique metals, unearthly both in appearance and in hardness; and the stone box was made of malachite and really dark turquoise. The leaves of the leaf box were golden in color and of an unusual shape, really long and fernlike; and the wood box was made of poplar."

"But if the box in the tea garden was the bone blessing box, why was the Bloodstone needed?" Luis questioned. "I mean, the seven boxes were designed to basically perform miracles, so a blessing box probably could have produced a tree without any help."

"You're right, and the blessings weren't the whole of it because the boxes in the story were also shapeshifting," Zin said. "The metal box could turn into swords or other weapons for someone to use to defend

against evil. The bone box came to life as some sort of bony creature to hunt down and kill packs of demons. Oh, and the leaf box liked to turn into a flying pig that carried important messages,” she added in surprise in connecting this to the grimmpt having just helped them find the bone box. “What a coincidence.”

“Not really,” Luis countered. “From reading the story not so long ago, you probably just had flying pigs in the back of your mind, so you naturally thought of a grimmpt to help find the box.”

Zin still thought the connection to the grimmpt was significant; if not coincidence, then just plain amazing, and evidence as to how God works through our brains sometimes, like having us read something in a book that will pertain to an event in the not-so-distant future. And like how bible verses sometimes just jump out at us that fit with whatever might be going on in our lives at a given time. If Zin really thought about it, she probably could have come up with a hundred examples of this sort of thing that might best be termed, “God’s perfect timing.”

But putting aside the flying pig, she felt there was some reason her mind had led her to “The Seven Blessing Boxes” on this day. “Seven is an important biblical number, denoting completeness, fullness, finality...” she said, thinking aloud. “The week is seven days. God made everything in six days, and then He rested, satisfied, on the seventh.”

His brain not particularly on numbers, but more considering recent events, Luis thought to say, “The blessing boxes are a kind of natural counter to things like the malice of the teraphim.”

“God always gives His children help when they need it,” Zin declared. This had proven true throughout the ages. The share bins were a good example.

With regard to the possibility that they had just encountered a blessing box, Zin remarked, “Since I kind of fixated on ‘The Bloodstone Miracles’ story, I never thought to do any research into whether or not the blessing boxes might be historically real.”

“The Jasper Diamond was certainly real, and you have the Bloodstone,” Luis stated, “so I would be tempted to think that all of the legends in the book have at least some truth to them.”

Continuing to scan the story, they soon discovered that the bone box in the pavilion in Japan was not a blessing box, because all seven had

some sort of noticeable feather design. “Worked into the boxes in some prominent way like as carvings, hinges, handles...” Zin stated. “The box that produced the maple tree didn’t have anything like that.”

“Agreed,” Luis answered, as he would have definitely noticed a feather design, even if it were small. *But it probably wouldn’t be small, because then it wouldn’t be prominent*, Luis reasoned, before catching himself when recalling how he had accidentally caused an affront to Pizo. *Small can still be prominent*, his mind added, *but I still don’t think the bone box had feathers*.

“Plus, I didn’t get the feeling that the box could turn into a creature to hunt down packs of demons,” Zin offered.

Luis agreed with this as well. In truth, either a sorcerer or a magician would have been able to sense that sort of power; and having two highly-magical persons together meant even less chance of missing something like that.

Luis planned to stay for the afternoon, to do some research in the libraries, and for dinner.

With nothing else miracle-wise yet indicated by the Sage Key or her foreshard, and because she didn’t think the timing was right to work more on the issue of the Memory Hypnoid, Zin decided to help her mom make a couple of casserole dishes for the freezer, plus spinach-and-chicken ravioli for dinner, along with fennel bread.

At the same time Luis was researching and Zin was helping her mom cook, a woman living in a row house in Supercity Ten was just admiring an extra charm that had somehow been added to her charm bracelet in recent days. Examining the shiny clay ladybug, the woman assumed her husband had gotten it for her as a surprise. However, the real surprise ended up coming when she left her house, passing a man on the street who happened to be carrying a supply of Shatter Whammy kernels in a jacket pocket, one of which caused the tiny charm to basically explode in a little puff of clay bits, several of which stung the woman’s wrist leaving small red welts. Later when emptying his pockets, the man, a member of the Underground Army, wasn’t surprised to discover two popped kernels, particularly because he had taken the walk around town for the express purpose of shattering any possible teraphim he might come within range of. The second had been posing as an earthworm in a window box full of pansies and lobelias.

Also in Supercity Ten, Birch happened to be visiting Eizel in her high-rise apartment. They were having coffee and talking when Birch happened to cross the living room to have a look on a bookcase for a couple of history books Eizel had said he could borrow.

Hearing a kind of pulsating noise on the shelf below the books in question, Eizel and Birch were both surprised to see a small earthenware figurine of a pig with wings suddenly crack into about a thousand pieces, becoming nothing more than a pile of dusty debris in a matter of about five seconds.

“That’s not mine; I’ve never seen that before!” Eizel exclaimed of the pig. “But it was the exact shape of my iron bank over here,” she added, retrieving from the same shelf the little metal bank that was painted a cream color very similar to that of the earthenware pig.

Realizing what had happened, Birch said, “So it was impersonating something you own, to blend in and not be noticed.”

“Wait, what was?” Eizel asked, since she hadn’t yet heard anything about the teraphim.

As he started to explain, Birch fished in a pants pocket for the popped Shatter Whammy kernel, also drawing out a handful of unpopped ones to give to Eizel so that she could begin carrying them. Word was spreading pretty fast about the teraphim, and Birch had actually done some research after receiving his supply of kernels.

“In order to take revenge on a person’s enemies, they can batter, steal things, cause accidents like a fall from a roof,” Birch went on to describe. “But sometimes they just act like spies to steal patent secrets, or personal secrets so that someone can be blackmailed. They can do all sorts of things to ruin businesses, or personal lives, like tempting a sobered-up alcoholic to drink, or putting things within easy reach of someone with any kind of weakness. When they offer their services, in the form of favors and good fortune, they imprint on a family for generations upon generations. Sadly, this is never good, because the teraphim are first servants of evil, mainly working for Satan, or sometimes other fallen angels, sorcerers, and certain high-level demons. Serving Satan first is why their malice sometimes doesn’t have to do with revenge, but is simply directed at anyone godly.”

“There are ranks of demons?” Eizel suddenly thought to ask.

“Yes, I think they have a military hierarchy like the angels do, and the fallen angels,” Birch responded. (Eizel of course knew that mimics and print doubles were the most advanced forms of demons; but she hadn’t known that they were so highly organized.)

Based on something she had recently learned in her underground bible study class, and in considering the favors and good fortune the teraphim were capable of bringing about, Eizel remarked, “The prosperity of the wicked doesn’t last forever.”

“True,” Birch replied. “God may take His time, but eventually He acts to restore justice and take down the wicked.”

“People who are prosperous often have a false sense of security,” Eizel mused, as this had also been mentioned in the bible study, particularly in connection to the United States, which had gone into bondage along with the rest of the world precisely because it had become so prosperous. When the people felt like they didn’t need God (from Whom all of the blessings had come), they became complacent and apathetic, swiftly falling to liberalism, terrorism, and the ideals of the sorcerers, all of which were led by Satan, who can definitely influence people to become lazy, limited thinkers, self-righteous, cruel, and filled with hate. All of these things had certainly caused the U.S. to self-destruct. With liberals and sorcerers in charge of the Big Government, the nation couldn’t help but fall.

“The only real security is found in God,” Birch correctly stated.

“So was the pig teraphim here to do me harm, or was it attached to my family in the past?” Eizel wondered a short while later, as she was using a whisk broom and dust pan to clean up the mess on the shelf, as well as some on the floor below.

Birch didn’t have an answer for his friend; and while Eizel would never know, because her family had no records going back a thousand years, we can be let in on the secret. This was a teraphim that had imprinted on her ancestral family, and the little clay figure had already done her one favor on the previous day.

An ESS member had been coming to question Eizel, basically investigating a rumor that she was no longer sympathetic to the cause of the sorcerers, and actually had been seen with a bible in her possession. While the teraphim, who had been in her apartment for over a week, was confused to see her reading a bible, the creature was still loyal to

her, particularly in being somewhat simple minded, and not yet having received contrary instructions from any higher-ups such as a fallen angel, high-ranking sorcerer, or Senior Demon. And so, the little earthenware pig with wings caused the investigator to trip on a stone and break his ankle before entering the building. As the man was limping away to seek medical treatment, the teraphim also enacted a curse to make him forget why he had come, this spreading to his colleagues as soon as he rejoined them later in the day. Thus, Eizel was safe from investigation, at least for now. And she was learning to be more careful about having her bible exposed. In fact, she had stopped carrying the one she kept in her apartment because Birch had recently given her a genie-made bible, one foldable in design and disguised to look exactly like a pretty lapel pin etched with a flowery emblem of tulips and lilies.

With regard to bad things that a teraphim might do even when loyal to a person, the popcorn kernel had acted just in the nick of time because the little pig (right before being shattered) had been considering what sort of bad luck he might dole out to Birch, like maybe cursing his jacket to strangle him later in the day. So it was a good thing Birch had remembered to bring some of the Shatter Whammy kernels with him; this, of course, being the Hand of Providence, ever at work in the lives of God's children.

Leaving a short while later atop his protector, a female thunderbird named Naya, Birch calmed a demon-produced storm on his way home to West Virginia.

As soon as her friend left, Eizel basically dove into her bible. It had been somewhat of a trying day, not counting Birch's visit because that had been very pleasant; but she hadn't slept well the night before, and the morning had turned out stressful, mainly because of the issue of guilt. Eizel had been feeling quite a lot of guilt lately over mistakes of the past, mainly the acts of malice she had committed against others. She was actually horrified over certain things she had done, and was now trying to remember specific instances in order to ask forgiveness for each. But this was turning out to be a taxing process, with waves of guilt often hitting her suddenly, forcing her to stop for a while. She had recently remembered to ask for God's forgiveness for attacking Zin.

And if I meet her again, Eizel had thought, I'll ask for her forgiveness too; and maybe hope someday to find a way to make it up to her.

At least Zin was still alive, so this might be possible, while there would be no way for Eizel to make anything up to the people that her wickedness had actually killed. A woman in her very apartment building had committed suicide over thoughts Eizel had planted into her brain. *But maybe I can someday help the woman's family, somehow, hopefully.*

There was always hope, even in the throes of despair. And God was constantly reminding Eizel of this, like in having Birch come to visit. This was such a blessing, and not just on this day, but his entire friendship was an incredible blessing, particularly because he was not at all judgmental of her, despite knowing about many of the horrible things she had done in the past.

In truth, having Birch to talk to was helping Eizel remember that God had fully forgiven her. She was, of course, also assured of this from reading the bible. And certain quotes that she liked to read over and over again were helping, such as 1 John 1:9. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Hebrews 8:12 was another of her favorites. "For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more." With regard to certain sleepless and otherwise troubling nights, Eizel was taking comfort in a quote from Psalm 30:5. "Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning."

If not the morning, then the afternoon, Eizel thought. This had certainly been true on this day, as she did now feel joyful, especially in looking toward the future. She had, in recent days, been considering that she had much more life ahead of her than behind. *Probably, unless I meet with some sort of accident, or get killed by someone like Tanner,* her mind reasoned. *So I can do some good with the rest of my life.* She had already been doing some good works, and hoped to do far more in the future. *Time is a funny thing,* she thought. *It's not pressing right now, but it might be very shortly.*

At this time, Eizel didn't have to work. Being from an elite family, she had plenty of credits to live on, at least for the next couple of years, even with being generous and sharing, which she was definitely doing, mainly in helping to support several elderly people in her bible study

group. She not only knew this was right in her heart, she was following one of God's commands in the bible, found in Hebrews 13:16. "Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God." And she fully believed this should apply to both her gift and her resources. By the time her money ran out, she felt she'd probably be living somewhere outside the Supes, maybe on a self-sustaining ranch or in a mothership community. Eizel actually knew of several elite families that had recently gone that route, in being tired of city life. She fully intended to work, as everyone should. In the meantime, she would continue her bible studies, while using her gift for good as often as possible. Also, Birch had encouraged her to take a few college classes. While the universities in the Supercities were simply propaganda driven, to serve the purposes of the sorcerers, there were plenty of worthwhile programs available in the self-sustaining communities.

As far as what she might want to do for work in the future, she was thinking of something related to horticulture. When visiting some of the outside communities in recent days, Eizel had found herself most interested in the plants—vegetable gardens, large crops, shade trees, shrubs, flowers—basically, she was drawn to it all. And speaking of plants, Eizel suddenly remembered to check on the seven pots on her balcony, holding geraniums and mini mums, all of which were blooming. They had done amazingly well in the past few weeks, and Eizel had it in her mind that this might be because she was directing good thoughts at them. *Keep growing, little ones, and blooming. You're so pretty. Come on now, sprout some new leaves.* It wasn't too much of a stretch to think her gift could work on plant life; and if so, maybe she could someday help make things grow in places normally inhospitable to plants.

Meanwhile, back at Doyle Mansion, while they were cooking, Em and Zin actually got to talking about Eizel, who was evidently proving herself to be changed. According to Birch and others, she had recently visited a hospital in a pocket in Mississippi to use her gift to help soothe the pain of several people who had just had surgery. Plus, while at a farming community in South Carolina, she was seen hoeing in a garden and helping to harvest broccoli and radishes.

“We are all a work in progress,” Zin mused, in thinking that every person was meant to change during his or her lifetime, to become more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ.

“Eizel might very well be moving along faster than many of us,” her mother offered.

“Where people are, is not where they’ll end up,” Zin said, in remembering the theme of a recent bible study. “And just like it’s never too late while we’re alive to be saved, it’s never too late to change our path, to continue to learn and grow and become more Christlike.”

Em was thinking along the same lines. “And we need room to grow, breathing space.”

“Just like how plants need room to grow,” Zin said, eyeing a begonia on a nearby windowsill that looked like it needed to be both repotted and moved to a roomier location.

“Exactly,” her mother responded. “And this means space free from judgment from others. We are all constantly learning and growing and transforming. So we should accept one another, help one another, love one another, rather than judging.”

“Plus, it’s impossible to know one’s whole circumstances, like we can never truly walk a mile in another’s shoes,” Zin shared.

“And sometimes it takes a long time to change,” Em stated. “Very few things happen instantly.”

“Time is a funny thing,” surmised Zin, who might have been very surprised at having thoughts similar to those of Eizel.

But perhaps Eizel had been projecting some of her thoughts to people on her mind lately, like Zin. Though the physical distance between them was great, it wasn’t too much of a stretch to think that a thought from a gifted person in Ohio could travel all the way to someone in Alabama.

With the mention of time, Zin glanced at the kitchen wall clock. However, instead of noticing that it was quarter to four, what struck her was the shape of the clock, being that of a circle. Her mind suddenly connecting this to the flower pot she had somewhat fixated on in the greenhouse when working with the share bins, Zin thought, *There are lots of circles in the world. Why even the earth itself is a circle, and the moon and lots of other heavenly bodies. Orbits are circles. And all of the seven magical keys are spherical.*

As a cherry tomato thrown by Pizzo from across the room bounced off of her arm before landing and rolling on the counter, Zin smiled in recognizing yet another sphere. *And a tasty one indeed*, her mind pronounced as she popped it into her mouth. Throwing a second tomato which was caught by Zin in midair, Pizzo smiled as well, mainly because he hadn't thrown anything at Zin for a while (as a sign of affection), and so it had felt good to do so.

After finishing in the kitchen, since she didn't want to disturb Luis who was reading in the upstairs library, Zin decided to read the bible in her room for the rest of the afternoon. Having Eizel on her mind, she was specifically looking for passages having to do with forgiving others when Matthew 7:12 caught her eye. "So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets."

I would want someone to forgive me, Zin reasoned. *I've done plenty of wrong in my life*. She was specifically remembering shortly after her mother adopted her at age six getting into a lot of mischief. There were also times growing up when she remembered being very selfish and manipulative. (At those times, Pizzo used to throw things at her not out of affection, but instead to get her attention and scold.)

Zin often thought how blessed she was to have been adopted, through a program called Bookends that specialized in finding homes for both the young and the elderly who didn't have anyone to look after them. *And yet look at how I acted*, she suddenly thought, *all ungrateful and even mean sometimes*. Zin also remembered her mother really struggling not to get super angry over a lot of her mischief. *So I might have caused her to sin from my own bad behavior*, she thought. *Thank goodness she never really lost her temper, like in rage. But if she had, it would have been my fault*. And this made Zin wonder how many times we ourselves might be responsible for other people doing things they would later regret and have to ask forgiveness for.

Once when talking about the issue of anger with her mother, Em had confessed to Zin that she had had problems with anger her whole life. "And the only way I managed to hold my temper was from prayer and reading the bible," she went on to say. "I could never do it on my own. Only the power of God can rescue us from some of our sins, like anger, ugly thoughts, being jealous, having a critical spirit...even overeating, drinking, things like that. We have to first have a

relationship with Jesus Christ, and then allow the Holy Spirit to work in us and through us. Otherwise, we can do nothing good in this world; and we especially can't control something as powerful as anger without divine help."

Zin next came across Luke 6:37. "Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven...."

Luke 6:41 was also pertinent. "Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?"

Flipping to the Epistles next, Zin found 2 Corinthians 2:7. "...so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow." In well imagining Eizel being very sorry for certain things she had done, Zin thought, *We just heap more pain onto sorrow when we refuse to forgive; I certainly don't want to do that to anyone, no matter what they've done.*

Zin was also drawn to James 5:9. "Do not grumble, brethren, against one another, that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the doors." *God for sure is the only Judge, the only One who has a right to judge. And He died for me, as payment for my sins, a horrible and painful death, so I have no right to hold anything against anyone else.*

Flipping back to the Gospels, Zin found what she thought might be the most important quote relevant to her ponderings on this day, John 3:17, which would turn out to be one of her favorite bible verses of all time. "For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him." *So while Jesus will be our Judge in the end, he didn't come to judge us, but to save us, her mind told her. And after we're saved, when we become changed, we will get rewards based on how we've changed.*

Zin definitely knew that the Ultimate Judgment of God's children had to do with rewards, because Christians were meant to do good in the world, to bear fruit. *Because Salvation isn't just about being saved and eventually going to heaven, Zin reminded herself. We're assured of that after being saved, but it's not enough in this world.* This line of thinking tied into a somewhat long passage she had just read, about how faith apart from works is actually dead. Again turning to the Epistles,

Zin reread all of James 2:14-26, before heading downstairs to help set the table for dinner.

At the same time the evening meal was taking place at Doyle Mansion, it was just after lunchtime the next day in a mothership community in New Zealand. Inside of a sod house, a puck troll was just bringing to life a small bronze statue of a lion, about eight inches in height, to pounce upon a teraphim that was about ten inches tall. Evidently, the magic of the puck didn't just animate the cat, but also somehow kept the teraphim from shapeshifting in size; thus, the lion had no trouble keeping the clay man pinned to the ground while the owner of the sod house was calling for help, which arrived about twenty minutes later in the form of a thunderbird delivering a pouch of Shatter Whammy kernels to the mothership community. After the teraphim was shattered, the lion kept pawing in disgust at the pile of dust for a time, until the puck troll magically settled the cat, then afterwards dusting him up to a nice shine, the bronze statue all the while purring inside, both from the massage of the dusting and from feeling very useful, helpful, and wanted.

Meanwhile, back at Doyle Mansion, Luis left for home just after dinner. Seeing her friend off in the back gardens, just after Westerwing disappeared from view, Zin smiled in spotting a cloud shaped exactly like a flying pig.

Chapter Five

Feathers and Yew Trees

Using the Sage Key the next morning, Zin could see a peacock feather in the eye of her mind. While there were lots of peacock feathers in the world, because her Aunt Vini was fresh on her mind, Zin connected the vision to the magical peacock feather in the possession of her aunt. In being able to give visions of future events, the feather was actually very like the Sage Key and Zin's foreshard.

After breakfast, Zin made a quick walnut call to Luis who agreed to pick her up in roughly an hour. She also called her aunt to make sure it was okay to come for a visit. Since Vini had no particular plans for the morning, this was fine with her.

Flying to the twin plantations about an hour later, Zin and Luis spotted a small flock of dragons in a woodsy area below, taking off from a clearing. Since they were all different colors, as the dragons took to flight and streaked away east, they looked much like an unusual rainbow glittering in the sun, one perhaps caught by a strong gust of wind to be dragged along a short distance before the colorful glitters simply faded, then disappeared.

The dragons are sleeping less these days, Luis remarked by thought to Zin.

I think that means we're closer to the Endtimes, Zin answered.

Unless they just know that they need to be out more to help combat the growing numbers of flash dragons, Luis countered.

Westerwing, with his excellent rookh eyesight, had just spotted something below, this prompting him to land in the clearing the dragons had just departed from.

The item was a bright blue dragon feather, a treasure indeed since dragon feathers were shapeshifting and could be used as keys in just about any lock.

"No, you keep it," Zin said, as Luis tried to give it to her. "I already have my magic key." (The key had been produced long ago by a

magical bag called a bagical.) Plus, being a magician, Zin was rarely troubled by locks.

Luis was pleased to be able to keep the feather, which could also be used as a knife, from its toughness as well as its shapeshifting ability.

In considering dragon feathers, Zin specifically thought of how flash dragons (created by the sorcerers) didn't have any. *Only real dragons have feathers because feathers are wholly in God's domain, so the ungodly can't create them*, her mind told her as they again resumed flight to the twin plantations.

They landed behind Netherwind Manor, a short distance from the small cottage Vini had lived in for decades now. Nearby, Jenny and a bigfoot were working on making a topiary out of a bushy yew tree.

"Oh, it's like a big apple!" Zin exclaimed with delight as she slipped from Luis' back.

A short distance from the yew stood a gnome, his face nearly as red as an apple as he threw his hands up into the air. Evidently, those doing the shaping were not doing very well at taking his advice. He thought the tree should be shaped more like a Red Delicious, but Jenny and the bigfoot evidently didn't care that it was turning out more like a Fuji apple. As Zin and Luis were sneaking somewhat delicately around the scene, the wife of the gnome arrived to help smooth things over, which she managed to do in short order, mainly by getting Jenny to agree to shave a little off the sides of the apple to make it more the preferred shape of the gnome. (But really, how could anyone successfully argue with gnomes over a topiary, the making of which they were truly masters.)

Vini was just taking a tray of biscuits from the oven. "With honey butter," she told her two young guests as she set the fare in front of them at the kitchen table before retrieving the peacock feather from a safe in her bedroom.

"There's really no trick to using it," Vini stated as she placed the feather on the table. "Just look into the eye, and if God wants you to see something, He'll show you."

As Zin was wiping a little honey butter from her mouth and hands, her aunt added, "But it's odd; in just the past year or so, I've discovered that the feather can see into the past too, not just the future." In fact, Vini had traveled to the past on two occasions in recent months when

God wanted her to do something related to a vision seen in the eye of the feather. “I’m not sure why I should have been surprised by the feather demonstrating a new trick,” Vini went on to say. “I mean, it is an Instrument of Providence, which means anything is possible.”

Of course, like the foreshard and the Sage Key, Zin suddenly realized. They are all Instruments of Providence. And the Clock of the Universe too; can’t forget that one.

Carefully taking the peacock feather into her now-clean hands, Zin gazed purposefully into the eye, where she did see a vision, one lasting about two minutes. And because she was now tuned in to the possibility of seeing something in the past, the vision, indeed a scene of history, was slightly less confusing to her mind than it would have been otherwise. While Zin might not have guessed that one of the Bloodstone Miracles would actually take place in the past, this was exactly what was going to happen. Of course time travel would be involved. But before that, she needed the answers to a few questions, because she was fairly well perplexed by what she had seen.

Seeing a look of confusion on her niece’s face, Vini ventured to ask, “Did you see something you can share?”

Nodding, Zin answered, “It was definitely Jenny’s house, sometime in the past. The landscaping looked different, less topiaries. The yew cross was tall, but it hadn’t spread to encircle the entire estate.”

Vini was smiling because Zin was describing a scene of her teen years, when Jenny’s grandfather ran the estate. It was he who made many of the earliest topes (a term often used when referring to magical topiaries), including the lovely yew tree cross that now had its arms wrapped around the entire Galloway property.

“I saw a guy with a chainsaw,” Zin went on. “It was dark, like nighttime; and there was a streetlight, but it wasn’t very bright.”

“I wouldn’t think it would be safe to prune topiaries in the dark,” Luis ventured to say. “Even the bigfoots and gnomes generally don’t do that.”

Vini had lost her smile and was listening carefully, because she now thought she knew the exact incident Zin was describing. “What else happened?” she asked.

“The chainsaw wouldn’t start,” Zin answered. “He couldn’t get it started. And the guy looked familiar. He was young, like a teenager,

college age maybe. I couldn't quite place him, but he definitely looked familiar."

"Like Frank Wharton maybe?" Vini suggested.

"Yes!" Zin suddenly realized. "It's Uncle Frank! His hair was so much darker; I couldn't tell it was him. But his face, the nose and chin were unmistakable."

"So you're being directed to travel to the past to help with something that needed to happen," Vini said, still not smiling because she considered this to be immensely important. Frank Wharton, who had basically started Wharton Farm, making it the success it was to this day, had married Vini's childhood best friend, Charlie.

"The chainsaw has to start," Vini stated, in an incredibly serious tone, "otherwise, Frank won't vandalize the yew. If he doesn't, he won't come under the mentorship of Mr. Galloway. He'll never work on or own Wharton Farm. And he'll certainly never marry Charlie. And all of these things needed to happen."

"Agreed," Zin replied, in knowing something of the story of how Frank, basically a teenage hooligan, as well as a devout atheist, had vandalized the yew cross, which led to him working for Mr. Galloway, who led Frank to Christ, this being the means Charlie had of meeting her future husband.

Zin could definitely see the importance of what needed to happen. When Frank became a Christian, he was able to save his entire family, including his mother, a renowned atheist activist. Plus, Charlie and Frank had children and grandchildren. And Wharton Farm had literally fed millions of hungry people, particularly through Charlie's soup kitchen, which had, over its five decades of operation, seldom served soup, instead choosing to dish up meals of a much heartier nature.

Though Luis could also see the significance, his mind was privately thinking, *So the miracle will be simply to make a chainsaw start. That seems pretty small. Oh well, who am I to judge providential things?* With this, what popped into his brain was how an act of malice had turned into such a wonderful thing—for Charlie, Frank, his family, for hungry people all over the place. *And who knows how many other people might be blessed in the future. So it's not small at all. Just like a puck troll isn't really small, when you look at his or her impact on the world.*

In considering the darkness of the vision she had just seen, Zin suddenly thought what a wonderful thing it would be to have the light of a unicorn with Luis and herself on their time-travel trip.

Vini happened to be thinking the same thing. “So would you two like some company? Instead of using the Time Key to travel back to help Frank, I could just take you.”

Luis also thought this a wonderful idea.

Finishing their biscuits and clearing their plates from the table, they were ready to go in five or so minutes.

Stepping outside into the back garden of the cottage, the three simply linked hands; and they were off...on a lovely and color-filled journey into the past. They felt no movement (other than a slight tickle in the brain), not even a bare wisp of a breeze. Except for the fact that their legs weren't moving as they floated along (carried by a powerful but gentle invisible force), they might have been strolling down a garden path lined with slowly-swirling streaks and scrolls of soft multicolored lights dancing all around them. Midway along the journey, the trio came to what seemed to be some sort of crossing, where thick masses of glowing leafy vines lay in front of them, perpendicular to their path. While it was no trouble for Vini to raise them up over the vines, she paused briefly to answer the unspoken question of her two companions. “It's the genies' Magical Grapevine,” she stated, her voice sounding much like flowing water. “They use it to communicate with their future selves, and vice versa.”

Glancing either way along the scrolling tendrils, the time travelers saw blossoms resembling those of wisteria plants, along with clusters of grapes in many colors. *Rainbow grapes*, Zin thought delightedly as they moved on to leave the grapevine intersection behind.

The whole of the trip into the past seemed to Luis and Zin to take about three minutes. As the swirling lights about them suddenly faded, they arrived to a nighttime setting on the sidewalk passing in front of the Galloway Estate, about forty feet from the yew, where they quickly employed shroud sapphires in order not to be seen.

“Should we climb a tree to sit and wait?” Zin wondered, glancing around at several large oaks that might provide good vantage spots for watching while waiting.

Vini was chuckling as she answered. “I’m a bit old to be climbing trees. The gazebo would be a lot more comfortable, I think.”

Because her aunt was still so youthful, Zin often forgot that she was in her sixties. This was true of her mother as well, who was but a year or so younger than her Aunt Vini.

“We have about a half hour,” Vini said, climbing the stairs to the second floor of the gazebo, which was furnished with comfortable chairs.

The yew cross was over twenty feet tall at this time, pretty well matching the gazebo in height. In the quiet of the night, the tree looked lovely, and serene, in being seemingly unaware of what was about to happen; and for brief a moment, Zin felt intensely sad about the vandalism, before thoughts of the bright and amazing future of the yew flooded her mind. In Zin’s time, the tree was immense, lush, and stately, not to mention being home to masses of birds, garden spiders, squirrels, and such. Plus, quite a few magical creatures would end up calling the yew cross home.

While they were waiting, Zin briefly described the project of the Bloodstone Miracles to her aunt, who was curious to see the stone, which Zin produced from the puzzle box.

Holding the Bloodstone and turning it over in her hand, Vini had a very strange look on her face, so much so that Zin was prompted to ask, “What is it?”

Losing the odd expression and smiling as she handed the stone back to her niece, Vini stated, “Nothing...it’s interesting, and a wonderful project. The world needs as many miracles as possible.”

Carefully placing the stone back into the box, Zin continued to wonder about her aunt’s initial reaction, which had seemed to be something like confusion, then swiftly turning into slight amusement with something of a nonchalant air to it, almost as though she might have been discounting the power of the Bloodstone. *Surely she wouldn’t disbelieve that the stone is capable of performing miracles*, Zin thought. For as much magic as her Aunt Vini had seen in her lifetime, this would have been a little hard to believe.

Zin had no time to ponder further because Luis had just pointed out Frank, trudging down the street carrying the chainsaw. As expected, at

just before midnight, Frank arrived on foot, having walked from where he parked his car in a secluded alleyway one block over.

Also as expected, the chainsaw wouldn't start. Thus, Zin and Luis needed to act quickly, so that Frank wouldn't get tired of pulling the cord, or be so discouraged as to simply head back to his car without completing his task. Luis had once fixed a generator by magic, and so had decided on the same Fix-It Spell that had worked in that instance. While Zin had never used magic to fix anything mechanical before, she did know a spell that could start things like boat motors and lawn mowers. Plus, she was full of confidence that at least one of their two spells would work. If only one was needed, the second might act as a booster to the first, perhaps in carrying the magic to just the right spot to start the chainsaw, which did indeed start, with a roar, on Frank's very next yank of the pull-cord, a mere three seconds after the sorcerer and magician released their spells. Thus, the time-travelers were able to watch the scene play out exactly as it had in the past.

With several well-placed swipes of the chainsaw, Frank was able to cut off two-thirds of the yew cross, before a topiary shaped like an anteater tackled him, after which, a gorilla topiary sat on him. In the low light from the distant street lamp, Frank couldn't tell what had tackled him, or what was sitting on him, other than *two somethings, incredibly leafy*. At least, that was what his mind kept telling him later, when he was still confused over what had happened.

Mr. Galloway, in slippers and wearing a bathrobe over his pajamas, had just emerged from the house with a flashlight and a baseball bat, this prompting the topes to run and hide themselves behind a tall hedge. (In this day and age, people weren't used to seeing topiaries come to life, and so it was prudent to run and hide.)

As stunned as Frank was, he didn't try to flee; instead, he just waited with Mr. Galloway until the police arrived, from Mrs. Galloway having called them while her husband was putting on his robe and slippers, and grabbing the flashlight and bat.

Zin had just fished a pair of rose-colored glasses from her belt pack. In addition to seeing through camouflages and invisibility, the glasses helped people see better in low light. Being a newer model, Zin's glasses also had a spy-spec magnifying feature, which she flipped on

and which allowed her to clearly see the anteater and gorilla getting settled back into their normal spots in the sprawling garden.

Turning her gaze back to the damaged yew, Zin noticed two idiomoly crawling about on one of the lower branches. In knowing from the neighborhood of the future that these magical caterpillars liked to hang out in yew trees, this didn't particularly surprise her.

The police were just arriving when the three in the gazebo linked hands and departed in a soft flash of light that went unnoticed due to the flashing lights of the police cars.

As the trio floated through time, they didn't come across the Magical Grapevine. "It moves around quite a bit," Vini shared, in a voice again sounding like flowing water. While the time travelers might have returned home right away, Vini had it in her mind to give her young companions something of a treat; and so she stopped at a point in time where the yew cross had regrown somewhat, but not nearly to the extent of encircling the Galloway Estate, which was the result of a growth spurt that happened in an incredibly short amount of time, and that Vini thought Zin and Luis might like to witness. (And by the way, although they hadn't made it all the way home, the partway trip still seemed to the travelers to take about three minutes.)

Again looking on from the gazebo, as the sun was just setting, the three watchers noticed a rhino tope munching on a pile of peppermint pansy petals provided for him by a girl genie floating about the garden carrying a small satchel and scribbling in a little notebook.

In whispers, Vini told her companions, "A genie horticulturist—as good as any gnome. But don't tell the gnomes I said that," she hastened to add.

Smiling, Zin and Luis nodded their promises not to tell.

Although the rhino was the only active topiary at the moment, the time travelers did specifically notice and admire a regal giraffe, a leaping porpoise, an enormous butterfly, and the same gorilla who had sat on Frank, but who was now considerably larger.

The sun was just slipping away completely to sleep when the gazebo onlookers spotted a boy arriving through a time-travel destination window that appeared very near the base of the gazebo. Frees Muldoon who lived at the twin plantations was Zin's friend and classmate. Though the light from the street lamp and the half moon was

somewhat dim, Zin surmised that Frees looked to be about fourteen, which was the same age as he was at home.

Frees also happened to be a friend of the genie horticulturist, whose name was Glamini, and who had been tending the yew tree cross on the Galloway Estate. Though, of course, since he wasn't born yet in this time, Frees was a friend of the future Glamini, whose younger self had used the Magical Grapevine to contact her future counterpart with regard to Frees, who had the gift of being able to make plants grow very quickly, and thus was needed to help spurt the yew. Though Glamini was most interested in helping to confine the rhino tope (who had a wandering tendency) with a yew hedge, the effect of the spurt, of course, would end up being wonderful for many more creatures than just the rhino.

The task ended up taking Frees less than five minutes to accomplish, with those in the gazebo looking on in speechless astonishment the whole time as the yew rapidly grew to over a hundred feet tall to take the stance of leaning protectively over the house and gardens while also wrapping its arms (in the form of a thick hedge) around the entire property.

Frees stayed a few minutes longer, to spurt several rose bushes; not to super-large, but just to make them healthier and with about double the blooms they held previously. He also made visits to a vegetable plot, several flower beds, and the honeysuckle vines covering the backyard pergola on the Galloway Estate, before bidding farewell to Glamini with the triangle hand symbol and stepping through a destination window to return to home.

Leaving shortly after Frees, the gazebo watchers were basically still speechless the entire trip home to the garden behind Vini's cottage.

As usual, time travel took no time at all in the present to complete; and they arrived back at nearly the same instant they left. In fact, the leftover biscuits were still warm on the kitchen table, where the three took a seat to catch their collective breath.

Zin was the first to find her voice. "It might have been interesting to have stayed to see the expressions on the faces of the people in the neighborhood the next morning."

“You might ask your mom about it,” Vini suggested. “I think she was one of the first to discover the New Yew—that’s what she called it at the time—at sunup when she was just starting out on a jog.”

As Vini was wrapping up the leftover biscuits, and Luis was visiting the bathroom, on an impulse, Zin fished the Sage Key from her pack. While holding it and closing her eyes to focus on the image of a lit candle, she was given a vision, one that ended up being actually a little more confusing than the one involving her Uncle Frank.

“We usually can’t travel to the future, can we?” Zin asked her aunt who was just coming back to the table as Luis was also returning. While Zin knew of time travelers coming back in time from the future, as far as she knew, no one from her own time had ever traveled to the future.

“Correct, the Time Key has never sent anyone to the future that we know of,” Vini responded. “But if God wants you to go to the future, or course He can send you.” Vini was actually smiling as she added, “I wondered why we crossed paths with the genies’ grapevine; now I think I know. We can’t use it to talk to our future selves, because it’s only designed for genie communications; but, on God’s direction, we could use it as a conduit to travel into the future. So, is that what you think we need to do?”

Zin was nodding as she described the vision she had seen in the eye of her mind. “I saw myself in the future working on some project in my lab. I was there in the lab too, as my current self, shrouded I imagine, looking on at whatever the older me was doing; and I was taking a picture of a blueprint on bamboo paper that she had made of the project.”

“It sounds like God is making something of the future available to you now,” Luis remarked. “But it doesn’t sound like this is one of the Twelve Miracles.”

“I agree,” Zin remarked.

“I believe I can locate an entrance to the Magical Grapevine,” Vini stated. “I see them sometimes in my travels.”

While Luis offered to take them, since he was plenty strong enough to carry both Zin and Vini on his back while flying, Vini smiled when saying, “Thank you, but no. It’ll be much quicker if I just take us.”

With this, she simply grasped a hand each of Luis and Zin, who instantly found themselves, along with Vini, in a forested area of Korea.

Unknown to Zin and Luis, they had actually traveled by unicorn speed to Canada, Tasmania, Portugal, and Argentina before Vini found what she was looking for, which very much resembled a large wreath hanging in midair, one about six feet in diameter and made from similar glowing leaves, vines, blossoms, and fruit as the grapevine they had encountered when traveling back to the vandalism event. However, until Zin and Luis donned rose-colored glasses from their packs, they couldn't see the wreath because it was invisible. Vini had been able to see it because, having unicorn powers, her eyesight was tremendously advanced.

The rose-colored glasses also allowed Luis to spot a hobgoblin nearby, which he killed using his new dragon-feather knife, afterwards wiping it on nearby vegetation to remove the gunky dark-gray residue left on the knife when the nasty creature dissipated.

"The entrance might not stay here for long, so we'll need to hurry," Vini urged, taking their hands again to lead them through the circle of the wreath, which did indeed vanish from the Korean forest mere moments after the three entered.

Passing into the mouth of the wreath, Zin briefly got the idea that the circle of the opening actually looked more like a triangle; though, as she glanced back, she could definitely see that it was circular, and thus decided that her eyes had been playing tricks on her. Inside, it occurred to Zin that the grapevine was an Instrument of Providence. It then suddenly also came to her how special and miraculous it was that God was allowing her to travel into the future; though this was just one in a long line of amazing experiences that had marked Zin's life up to this point. In fact, it seemed to her that her life so far had been just one big miracle in progress.

Following the scrolling tendrils of the grapevine, while floating along much as they had on their previous trips through time, on her aunt's direction, Zin used the Sage Key to gain information in the eye of her mind as to when they were supposed to exit, which they did in short order (through a wreath opening similar to the entrance one), finding themselves in a Utah desert. They didn't remain in Utah long; instead, as Vini again grabbed her companions' hands, they ended up outside the

gate leading to the back gardens of Doyle Mansion, where they wisely employed their shroud sapphires before entering.

As Zin discreetly made her way to the house to slip inside and head down to the subbasement library, Luis and Vini waited outside, being as still and quiet as possible because Kisi was in the garden, sitting on a mossy stone and reading a book. Turning a page in the book and looking up, the little troll suddenly glanced suspiciously at the exact spot where the time travelers were standing; but she was unable to see them.

Zin always carried a camera in her pack, so she was ready to go when she reached the subbasement where, as expected, her future self, who looked to be about ten or fifteen years older by this time, was working on some sort of project, the blueprint of which was laid out on a table. The visiting Zin felt a need to hurry as she swiftly took a snap of the bamboo paper. Although her older self was occupied, the younger Zin didn't want to risk the possibility of arousing suspicion. *If I felt an unknown presence, I might be tempted to use Reveal Powder to try to expose whoever it might be*, she thought. *Hmm...why didn't I think of that when I was working on the share bins and felt something in the lab? Oh well.*

In having only just glanced at the blueprint, the younger Zin had no idea what it might be for. *It must be something important, or else I wouldn't have been sent here*, she decided as she was sneaking back up the stairs and out of the house to rejoin Luis and Vini, who had been trying not to look too hard at the changes they were noticing to either Doyle Mansion or its gardens, so as not to risk changing anything in the present with regards to this future timeline. Of course, things were already changing, as God had evidently decided that the younger Zin needed to bring something from the future back to the present. However, with regard to other things, the time travelers would definitely know upon returning home not to mention anything about the hanging gardens they had noticed all along one wall of the estate, this being something Em and the gnomes would decide upon and create in about five years' time. So too was there a new set of unique wind chimes on the back porch that a puck metalsmith wouldn't end up making for nearly ten years. Plus, a new and wider set of back concrete steps had been poured. So, all in all, there were quite a lot of things that

the visitors to the future decided were probably best kept to themselves, or put out of their minds.

Vini found another entrance to the Magical Grapevine in Jamaica (though, unknown to Zin and Luis, she had first traveled to Uzbekistan, Finland, and South Africa before finding it).

Inside the grapevine, when the Sage Key prompted Zin, they exited in Romania in their own time. However, instead of traveling directly home, Vini decided to take Luis and Zin on a little sightseeing trip. With the yew tree fresh in her mind (and just trees in general), Vini thought the pair might like to see a few of her favorite oak trees in Europe, since the travelers were in the area already.

Vini had always loved trees of all kinds, but she probably most favored oaks, partly because they formed such interesting shapes without anyone pruning on them. Plus, they were amazingly tough; and in just looking at them—the twists, splits, gnarls, cavities, burls, and so forth—one might imagine the perils the trees had been through in their lives such as lightning strikes, wind storms, antler rubbings, insect infestations....

They visited several famous oak trees in Europe, including Bowthorpe Oak in England, before returning home to the U.S. where they stopped to see Angel Oak in South Carolina. Sitting on a long bench near the tree, the visitors had a snack of cashews and dried apricots from Luis' pack while watching several squirrels play.

As they were snacking and watching, with the circle of the grapevine wreath on her mind, Zin mentioned that she had recently been thinking about such things as shapes and numbers, mainly in connection to bible symbolism and meaning.

After a moment or two of thought, Vini was prompted to say, "The Galloway gazebo is octagonal in shape, which corresponds to the feng shui bagua map in Chinese philosophy. Each staircase in Doyle Mansion has a number of stairs divisible by three, which is considered to be a lucky number, even aside from representing the Trinity. The triangle is an auspicious shape in certain philosophies; again, even aside from the Trinity aspect. Some people study the stars and read their horoscopes each day, and live by what they say. Lucky charms have been popular throughout the ages. Wind chimes, bells, fountains, curved paths instead of straight, colors—all of these things can have

strong meanings, and even superstitions, attached to them. But as far as making a study of them, we need to be very careful not to let anything draw us away from what has real meaning, that is, the Truth.”

“In other words,” Luis interjected, “this is the only shape that we should really focus on.” With this, he used a stick to draw a cross in the soft earth beside the bench.

Smiling as she answered, Vini stated, “Yes, but did you know that the original cross might not have been shaped like that? In fact, some theologians believe the cross might simply have been a straight pole. The cross has come to be the main symbol of Christianity, which is fine. And it definitely has power—it can burn the eyes and skin of demons, and convict people in their hearts of whatever sins they might be living in. But the fact that the original cross might have been very different I think reinforces that we probably shouldn’t put too much emphasis on anything like shapes, numbers, and such.”

By this time, both Luis and Zin were practically hanging on Vini’s every word, and especially when she went on to say, “Except...we do need to pay attention to messages from God—what He wants to tell us, what He wants us to know. And He speaks to people in different ways, like how I used to get messages in the number of clock chimes, and in cloud shapes. So it’s okay to pay attention to symbols and shapes and whatnot, as long as you don’t idolize or get too fixated on certain philosophical ideals like astrology, existentialism, numerology, birth elements, etc.”

“Numbers are important in music,” Luis remarked, in suddenly remembering this.

“In tree language too, which is highly musical,” Vini answered. “And while most music isn’t bad, and we know that trees aren’t bad, Satan is. And because He was incredibly musical, and some music throughout history has been devilish, we have to be wary.”

As Zin and Luis were nodding in agreement, Vini went on to say, “In truth, putting too much belief in any human-born philosophy actually limits our thinking, hindering what God might want to do in our lives. And if we’re focused too much on colors, numbers, whatever—even in the bible—we might well miss what God really wants us to learn from His Word.”

“The lessons, important doctrines, the blueprint for how we ought to live,” Luis input, “and even secrets He might want to reveal to us.”

“When I was young,” Vini added, “I definitely put too much emphasis on things like feng shui, which I guess I hoped might help me find answers to secrets, or some sort of perfect balance, when really only God can do that. The real secret to solving mysteries and finding balance is in reading the *Holy Bible*, which is not only a book full of mysteries, but also of answers. But we have to look for them; they’re not just going to transfer themselves to our brains without the reading part. Even listening to pastors nonstop won’t give us answers that God will show us only when we read the bible.”

From South Carolina, Vini dropped Luis off at Lion Mountain and Zin off at Doyle Mansion, before arriving home a mere fraction of a second later to begin making lunch for her husband, Ben, the head pastor at the twin plantations who had just arrived home from a morning’s work at his office in the chapel at Laurelstone.

After lunch at Doyle Mansion, Zin headed down to her lab where she used her camera’s projection-and-copy feature to transfer the image of the blueprint onto a sheet of bamboo paper. Whatever the design was for, it was incredibly complex; and at this point, Zin couldn’t make heads or tails of it, especially because she had a slight headache. *Possibly from being inside the Magical Grapevine*, she reasoned. (In fact, she was correct. Because the grapevine wasn’t originally designed for humans to traverse, the slight headache was a side effect.)

Not getting the idea that the blueprint was immediately related to the Twelve Miracles, Zin felt she could wait a bit to study it further. And so, rolling it up, she stored the bamboo scroll in the subbasement safe, where she actually kept many of her secrets.

Not everything happens in a straight line, Zin reminded herself, as she headed up to her bedroom. *So even though I have the blueprint, it might not be important for a while.*

Hanging her belt pack on her desk chair, Zin happened to glance out the window, which was open a couple of inches to allow fresh air into the room, and which had a good view of the Galloway property. The yew encircling the estate made Zin again think of circles. While taking her aunt’s warning to heart, she still needed to listen carefully to what God was telling her in putting certain shapes in her path; and in her

lines of thinking because, of course, God could easily direct a person's thoughts. And Zin could definitely tell the difference between thoughts and ideas coming from God, and those planted by demons or Satan (or other fallen angels), because God's were always godly. *Never contradicting His Word and never leading us into sin*, Zin's mind reinforced, as she also referred to notes she had taken at a recent lecture called, "Listening to the Right Voices, and Making the Right Choices."

"If a person is ever confused, he or she should read the bible, and pray. Then the answer will come, if not resoundingly like a clanging bell, then in that still small voice in our mind that gently but firmly reminds us not to sin, because we are His children, and are meant to live better lives than being steeped in sin. While it's true that no one is perfect, we can resist sin. The Lord gives us the ability to resist; and we need to exercise this ability, like we would any muscle."

But back to circles, triangles, numbers, bible symbols... Zin's mind pondered, as she again thought of the grapevine wreath. *A triangle can become a circle fairly easily, and vice versa.* Circles and cycles next came to mind as being kind of interchangeable. *Like cycles in nature*, she thought as a gust of wind suddenly burst through the cracked window. Picturing the new wind chime on the back porch of the future Doyle Mansion, Zin again thought about metals being important in the bible. *Not just things like gold representing divinity or purity, but something to do with wisdom.*

But lots of things have to do with wisdom, her mind countered, *like how the seven-faceted stone mentioned in Zechariah connects to the seven pillars of wisdom mentioned in Proverbs. But the stone represents even more than that, of course, since it's the Cornerstone. And the number seven corresponds to completeness, in the Cornerstone being laid, and in Jesus' final words on the cross. "It is finished."*

Having her bible handy, Zin suddenly thought to look up Colossians 2:8. "See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ." *In perfect keeping with Aunt Vini's warning*, she decided. Thus, when the metal box in the story of "The Seven Blessing Boxes" came to mind, she decided that

she didn't need to rush to the either of Doyle Mansion's libraries to look up what metals might represent in the bible, or any other type of symbolism. *Now that's real wisdom*, Zin determined. *The bible tells the story of God's plan of Salvation for man*, she reminded herself, as to what was most important about the bible. *Scripture as a whole saves mankind, not just little tidbits from here and there.*

At the same time Zin was contemplating the bible, a good-sized yew topiary shaped like a rabbit was coming to life in a garden in a mothership community in New Hampshire. Using his large back legs and feet, the rabbit easily knocked down a ten-foot teraphim that had started the day off posing as a belt buckle inside a cabin before heading outside to look like a croquet ball that was eventually noticed by a puck troll as being not quite right, this prompting the puck troll to awaken the rabbit to deal with the teraphim that was shapeshifting and growing in size to try to make a hasty escape. While growing even larger and attempting to rise, the clay figure once again found himself flat on the ground from a second strike by the rabbit's powerful back legs and feet. And this continued...six, seven...ten...fourteen times, until a man with a Shatter Whammy kernel arrived on the scene to obliterate the teraphim, after which, the puck settled the rabbit back into his normal spot.

Meanwhile, back at Doyle Mansion, Zin had been reading passages in the bible having to do with trees—in Isaiah, Psalms, Romans, and Nehemiah—while thinking about the lovely trees they had seen earlier in the day. When another gust of wind broke into the room, she rose to close the window. Gazing out at the enormous yew, Zin suddenly recalled another story in *Jasper Diamonds and Other Legend*; and she almost couldn't believe that she hadn't thought about "The Story Circle" until now, since it had to do with both circles and yews.

While a literal circle of yew trees took center stage in the tale, the story was about much more than just a protected place where people were meeting to exchange stories from books that had been outlawed and destroyed over the years by the sorcerers and their followers. What stuck in Zin's mind most were two main concepts of the storytellers: one expounding that stories almost always come full circle (in genuineness and completeness) some centuries later no matter how greatly they are distorted or changed by generational retelling; and the

other asserting that the end of one story is always the beginning of another, never-ending. While both ideas were interesting, Zin somehow knew that the philosophies were less important than the fact that both were circular in theme.

Circles again...so what does it mean...she pondered.

Both are related to time, she decided, stories throughout the ages. It's like my thoughts lately are trying to solve a mystery, but what mystery?

Maybe the Mystery of Time, a thought came in answer.

But nobody has solved the Mystery of Time, in all of time, her mind countered. Zin actually couldn't imagine that God wanted people to know everything about time. Though...He might...you never know. So I shouldn't be closed-minded about this.

In fact, He had just allowed her to go forwards in time, a thing completely unheard of up to this point. *Note to self for later: Remember to thank God in prayer for the amazing experience because I definitely don't want to take something like this for granted.*

Actually, she decided not to wait until later, instead dropping to her knees right away beside her bed to pray earnestly, in both thanks and praise, for the events of the day so far; and not just the miraculous ones, but also for things like breakfast, toothpaste, and having a warm jacket.

After praying, Zin got to thinking more about what God might be telling her with regard to circles, and maybe time.

If shapes are important, maybe the shape of time is important; at least in how God makes things happen, because I don't think He very often works in straight lines.

So is time a circle, and is that part of what God is telling me?

Gazing out the window a short time later, Zin noticed a cloud shaped exactly like a feather. As a mockingbird feather on her desk caught her eye, one she had picked up in the garden a week or so ago, her thoughts were led back to the blessing boxes. All having a feather motif, she could almost imagine them flying about the heavens, perhaps alongside many of the lovely birds of the earth, or even the angels. *But what am I supposed to make of all of this?* she wondered.

With no answer coming to mind, Zin's thoughts next shifted to the Twelve Miracles. *So, six are complete; we're halfway there. Things are really zipping along.* In fact, she felt really good about her

progress, particularly as regards to the yew. However, in the same manner as to how the yew before being attacked seemed blissfully unaware as to what was about to happen, so too was Zin completely oblivious to an event in her near future that would prove rather a severe setback. In hindsight, she should have taken her overly-good feelings and thoughts as a kind of warning, because often when things seem to be going too well, we may very well be about to stumble, if not from pride, which hinders many of us, then just from the ongoing trials that we each must face as we make our way, learning and growing, along the pathway of life.

Chapter Six

A Visit to Yellowstone

The next morning, Zin got to thinking about the Twelve Miracles, and it occurred to her that all twelve might eventually be a lot to keep up with just in her mind. So she decided to make a brief list of them in her journal, like labels or titles, though she did skip lines between the individual miracles in case she might want to add notes later. With six completed thus far, her list included the following: Jasper Diamonds, Leviathan Scales, Walking on Water, Share Bins, Bone Box and Maple Tree, Chainsaw and Yew.

It also crossed Zin's mind how amazing it was that she never needed to take the Bloodstone out of the box in order for the miracles to come about. This shouldn't have been surprising, since nothing can hinder the blood of Jesus Christ, which makes saving people from Eternal Death possible. *It's the only thing that saves people*, her mind reinforced. *And God's Perfect Plan will be fulfilled, no matter what; so certainly a simple box can't pose any sort of stumbling block.*

After making the list of the first six, Zin decided to go ahead and number the miracles, continuing on in the journal to twelve, the labels/titles to be filled in later as the miracles happened. As she wrote the last number, she again got to pondering about the importance of numbers in the bible, including the number twelve. *It represents faith, and the church, and divinity, and a kind of perfection—twelve tribes of Israel, twelve apostles, twelve fruits on the Tree of Life, twelve kinds of gemstones adorning the foundation of New Jerusalem.... Twelve also represents perfection in organization, cities, government—basically the way things should be. So that's probably why there are Twelve Miracles connected to the Bloodstone.*

Faith was what mainly stuck in Zin's mind with regard to the number twelve because she firmly believed that, even though the Bloodstone was incredibly powerful, a person would need to have faith in order for the miracles to truly happen. Faith also, of course, was

what enabled people to be saved; and this led Zin to refer to notes from a binder that she had been taking with her to bible studies for the past year or so. Flipping pages, she found the specific notes she was looking for.

“How to be saved: This is based on faith. Acts 16:31 states, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved....” This sounds simple and is fairly simple, but we should go into more detail and actually declare that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and He came to die for our sins and reconcile us to the Father (to bridge the gap that began with Adam and Eve) as a substitute sacrifice, the Perfect Lamb. Also, the thief on the cross next to Jesus simply asked for Jesus to remember him when He came into His Kingdom; and Jesus said He would see him that very night in paradise. So that seems simple too, as far as being saved. However, the thief also acknowledged his own sin and guilt, while declaring Jesus to be innocent. So it seems reasonable to assume that confession of sin and a declaration of belief in Jesus, as being the Son of God and the Messiah, should be part of a person being saved. In other words, these things should naturally follow the initial ‘believing’ part of being saved.”

So this was certainly a lot to think about as connected to the Twelve Miracles. *We definitely have to have faith for things to happen*, Zin’s brain told her, just as she was noticing four little triangles in ink she had evidently at some time doodled in the margin beside the notes on faith and being saved. *The number four seems to represent action in the bible, she thought, four each of horsemen, chariots, winds, cherubs—all of them acting on God’s commands.* When considering Ezekiel’s vision of the four cherubs, the turning wheels came to mind. *The wheels represent God’s actions, His hand moving throughout the universe to make things happen—the Hand of Providence.*

The triangles then made Zin think of the Trinity (represented by the number three) being multiplied by action (the number four) to equal the perfect number twelve. *That’s interesting...how it’s all interconnected...and how the bible seems to be like a big jigsaw puzzle, with all of the pieces fitting together perfectly.* This also then connected back to the twelf. *And probably in more ways than just his numerology*

expertise, Zin decided, particularly in thinking of a twelf as a twelfth child and being given special powers because of this.

Noting the four triangles again, Zin thought, *There are Four Gospels because they were written for different groups of peoples, speaking to different peoples. So everyone can find one that speaks to his or her mind and heart.*

Her mind turning back to the miracles, Zin made a quick check of her foreshard and the Sage Key, but got nothing at this time. However, she did suddenly feel an urge to work on a history paper for school. Though ahead in her studies, she definitely wanted to stay so. Working on the paper got her thinking about history repeating itself, as it had done many times throughout the ages. *Very like circles in time...that's interesting.*

An hour and a half later, Zin was ready for a break from schoolwork. When considering taking a peek at the blueprint in the safe, or working on the issue of the Memory Hypnoid, neither option felt right at this time. A glance out her bedroom window at the sunny day suddenly made an outing sound like a better idea. Thus, Zin decided to track down Magsen, whom she had been wanting to spend some time with, having not done much of this lately in being out on her own so often on her airbike, and in spending so much time with Luis.

Magsen was in the upstairs library. In wanting to stretch her legs and wings (as well as spend some time with Zin), she eagerly jumped at the idea of an outing, also suggesting Yellowstone as the destination. While it wasn't an official National Park anymore, because none of the parks had been staffed or tended to after the Supercities came into being, Yellowstone was still absolutely lovely to visit as far as the geysers, wildlife, waterfalls, and such.

Since October tended to be cold in Wyoming, Zin chose a coat instead of her jacket, also gathering a few things from the kitchen pantry and fridge to stuff into her pack for lunch for her and Magsen, who was waiting in the garden and who took off as soon as Zin hopped aboard, the pair making it to Yellowstone in less than ten minutes to fly over the massive lake, and then inland a bit, to a spot from which they could view several regularly-spewing geysers at once.

Since the day was rather chilly, and the breezes somewhat sharp, Zin fished her insulated bedroll from her pack to sit on, the mat being

genie made, lightweight, and capable of keeping a person comfortable even in extremely cold conditions. While Magsen didn't need extra insulation, because her fur and feathers were keeping her plenty warm, she didn't mind snuggling in close to Zin to help protect her somewhat from the bite of the wind. Of course, it wasn't nearly as cold as it would be in Wyoming in a few short weeks; and although it had been snowing in recent days, there hadn't been enough snow yet to form a blanket-like covering. Thus, quite a few bare patches of ground were still showing (especially in sunny areas) amongst the stretches of snow.

After dining on apples, peanut butter sandwiches, and coconut macaroons, while having a nice chat, Zin and Magsen decided to play steam pictures, which was a game a lot like that of cloud pictures, but instead of looking for recognizable shapes in the clouds, they would be looking for them in the steam of the nearby geysers.

Taking turns, the pair pointed out to one another what each was able to see in a geyser producing taller pictures. "A sitting poodle," Magsen exclaimed.

"A bouquet of daisies," Zin said next.

"A vase...no, that spurt just looks like steam," Magsen decided.

"A chair...no wait it's changing...a tallish cherry tree in full blossom," stated Zin.

"I'd call it a cotton tree," Magsen countered. (Of course they weren't always going to agree on what they were seeing because folks rarely did.)

"A knight chess piece," Zin declared just as the geyser stopped erupting.

Next, as they turned their attentions to a geyser that had just started spewing (one producing less-tall pictures), Zin said, "A bridal veil."

"A gourd...no a ghost," Magsen ventured.

"A window frame," Zin stated in amazement at the near-perfect rectangle.

"A fuzzy caterpillar," Magsen said.

"And it's turning into a butterfly," Zin answered in delight.

The game abruptly stopped when Magsen sensed something nearby that Zin also sensed when her protector nudged her shoulder while telepathically conveying, *We have a visitor.*

Not sensing anything evil, but more just a kind of energy or presence, Zin decided to be friendly. However, instead of speaking aloud (because she saw the wisdom in being at least somewhat cautious), she sent out a thought message. *Hello there! Would you like an apple?*

No thank you, came a thought back, just as a cloudbird, who had been impersonating a pile of snow about twenty feet from Zin and Magsen, began to shapeshift, to take the form of a cloud-like creature about a hundred feet in length resembling a long snake, with perhaps also some dinosaur and seal-like features. *Hi, I'm Golli.*

Since cloudbirds didn't speak aloud like humans and gryphons, both Zin and Magsen thought it polite to continue to communicate telepathically, which they did as they introduced themselves. Zin had never seen a cloudbird in person, but she had seen a picture Alex had taken of one that lived in Scotland. Magsen had seen cloudbirds before, but only from a distance.

Acknowledging their names with a smile and a nod, Golli was floating about three feet above the ground and didn't seem to need or want to touch down. *No wings*, Zin thought (just to herself), before her mind added, *of course a cloudbird wouldn't need wings, because clouds don't need wings.*

Golli had been visiting Lake Yellowstone before noticing Zin and Magsen having their little picnic.

Swimming? Zin asked.

No, I'm a boy, Golli replied. *I mean, I could swim if I wanted to. But it's mostly girl cloudbirds that like to swim. Boys don't very often go swimming. But I do like snow, a lot.* With this, Golli used his large flipper-like front feet to throw a great heap of powdery snow into the air that came falling gently down upon them like cottony sprinkles.

To the laughter and clapping of Zin and Magsen, Golli threw a second heap of snow so high that the sun filtering through the falling flakes formed a lovely snowbow (basically a rainbow made from snow instead of rain).

So even if you don't like to swim, Zin remarked, *you do produce rainbows like girl cloudbirds do, or snowbows, I guess, in this case.*

Of course, Golli replied earnestly, all cloudbirds like to produce bows, of any sort—rainbows, moonbows, snowbows, waterfallbows—we like them all.

Evidently, Golli liked to play steam pictures too; and he delighted in pointing out a couple to Zin and Magsen: *A string of pearls; a funnel, no, a great sea twister...breaking up a bit, so it's a spiral staircase now.*

With rainbows on her mind, Zin suddenly thought to ask Golli, *By any chance, do you know anything about the Secret of Rainbows?*

You mean aside from rainbows being both symbolic and scientific? Golli asked.

Yes, and specifically as connected to human beings, Zin answered.

Only that some people have already learned the secret, Golli replied. *I don't know it myself, personally.*

Golli couldn't stay long because he wanted to visit Lake Huron on this day as well. Bidding his new friends farewell with a *toodeloo*, Golli rose into the air, producing as he departed a vibrant rainbow that lingered for several minutes and that Zin, after thinking to fish in her pack for her camera, managed to take a snap of before it disappeared. She then also took a couple of pictures of Magsen, and a few of the spewing geysers, to have as keepsakes of the day's outing.

Next continuing their game of steam pictures, as the wind was blowing the steam from one geyser completely sideways, Zin and Magsen ended up spying a spoon, two more fuzzy caterpillars, a squirrel, a loaf of bread, an otter, and a train. "A steam train, obviously," Magsen remarked.

"Oh for sure," Zin answered.

They decided to visit the mud pots before leaving Yellowstone. Then, instead of heading directly home, the pair took a detour to visit a string of lovely lighthouses along the Atlantic Coast.

With rainbows still on the brain, Zin thought about how the bows represent promises in the bible, not just relating to Noah, but also as a promise of the covenant—that God saves anyone who believes in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, some people believed the bow carried by the rider of the white horse in the Revelation to be a rainbow, with the horsemen setting out to conquer Eternal Death through the spread of Christianity.

Thoughts of rainbows were dismissed when the flying pair suddenly spotted a shooting star, a fairly unusual sight in the daytime, and it suddenly came into Zin's mind that scientists had long ago discovered the universe to be expanding, by leaps and bounds actually. *So many stars...billions upon billions probably.*

More like trillions, Magsen replied.

Smiling, Zin hadn't even realized she had been projecting her thoughts.

After viewing seventeen lighthouses in total, the last of which was in Virginia, they shortly turned to make their way back to Alabama. And although the trip home took a mere four minutes of flight, the last minute turned out to be one of the worst (and longest) in the lives of both Zin and Magsen.

It started over Georgia, when Zin startled her protector by loudly exclaiming, "Whoa, what's going on!" This was quickly followed by Zin giving an imperative shout. "STOP! What are you doing and where are we even!?"

At first, Magsen imagined her charge to be speaking to someone else, but soon sadly realized that she was the target of her mistress' words when Zin added in a squeaky and panicky voice, "Set down on the ground this minute, you beast! Let me off! RIGHT NOW!"

"We're almost there; then I'll let you down!" Magsen replied, in pretty much an equally squeaky and panicky voice, from suddenly realizing that something terrible had evidently happened to Zin, or at least to Zin's mind, which would turn out to be correct.

Fifteen seconds later, Magsen practically crash landed in the back gardens of Doyle Mansion, as Zin, even before the landing, was already jumping off, dropping from about eight feet up into a tulip bed, where she grabbed a rock as she scrambled to her feet.

"Who are you...and what's...what's going on? Where am I?" Zin asked dropping the stone she had intended to fight with since the gryphon turning to face her obviously wasn't threatening her in any way. Plus, the creature had a stricken look of disbelief and confusion on her face, one that pretty much mirrored Zin's own disbelief and confusion, particularly because, at this point, she couldn't even remember her own name. Nor did she recognize any of her surroundings, not even Heike and Pizzo who had just reached the scene

on a run from the back porch, from where they had been able to tell right away that something was wrong the moment Zin jumped and Magsen landed.

Not feeling threatened at the moment, Zin was calmer than she had been in the air. But, of course, she was incredibly disoriented, this being the effect of the Memory Hypnoid she had just been struck with, the chemical having taken full hold of her somewhere over South Carolina, leaving her with missing memories.

Zin's calmness actually didn't last—turning to cringing, crouching down, and fear—as the gryphon in front of her suddenly gave a screeching cry. “EM HALLI HELP, HURRY, HURRY!”

Chapter Seven

Missing and Stolen

Both Em and Halli made it to the scene in less than eight seconds, Em on a run from the kitchen (just in her socks) and Halli in flight from the upstairs library balcony (still carrying a book she had been reading).

Magsen had started pacing and Zin was rising from crouching, still with a look of confusion on her face in not recognizing the woman or this other gryphon any more than she had the first one, or the two pucks; though she definitely knew what pucks and gryphons were, somehow.

“She’s lost her memories,” Magsen told Em, Halli, Heike, and Pizzo, as it began to creep into all of their brains as to what had probably happened to Zin. She had likely been infected by a Memory Hypnoid.

“Okay,” said Zin (who was back to being a little calmer). “I know what memories are, but I don’t know any of you.”

“I’m your mother,” Em said, in a somewhat shaky voice which steadied as she went on. “And this is your protector, Magsen; and this is her sister, Halli, who’s my protector.”

“What are you protecting me from?” Zin asked.

“Everything,” Magsen said, though she knew it wasn’t a very good answer, especially because it had just hit her like a ton of bricks that she hadn’t done very well on this day as a protector, with Zin in her current state.

“And this is Heike and Pizzo,” Em added. (The trolls were waving at Zin somewhat tentatively.) “They’ve known you since you were a little girl; well, they’ve practically had a hand in raising you, pretty much.” (Heike and Pizzo were nodding, as they very much felt like an extra set of parents to Zin, or at least an aunt and uncle.)

As Zin was absorbing all of this, Em said, “You’re safe; come inside and we’ll talk more.”

Somehow, the tone of the woman’s voice convinced Zin that the first statement was true, and that the second was a good suggestion.

On the way to the house, they passed a huge sandbox from which three additional puck trolls and two sand sculptures, one an octopus and the other a mermaid, smiled and waved at Zin somewhat timidly and sympathetically, because the sandbox occupants had been listening in and thus already knew what the trouble was. Returning the waves in a similarly mild fashion, Zin also noticed a huge bronze statue of a gryphon in the center of a large flower bed adjacent to the sandbox.

Noting Zin's interest, while indicating her sister, Halli said, "That's our Uncle Zapor; and there's a portrait of him in the parlor." (Zapor was actually cousin to Halli and Magsen, but was called an uncle from being considerably older than they.)

"Oh a fancy house...has a parlor," Zin suddenly thought to say. (So she still knew a little something about houses, it seemed.)

"Heike is a sculptress and made the statue," Em stated.

"Really, wow!" Zin exclaimed. "Such a big statue for such a little person to make; well, I'm impressed."

Still tagging along, neither Heike nor Pizzo, given the situation, felt the need to address the affront of the size remark; though they did kind of discreetly roll their eyes at one another and slightly shake their heads.

Inside, Zin was given a glass of water before being led from the kitchen, through the butler's pantry, and into the dining room connecting to the main hall where she looked around at pictures and knickknacks with interest, but no recognition.

Eventually, she was led to the parlor where the occupants of several portraits on the wall waved to her, including the one of Zapor, along with three human beings.

"Mrs. Doyle, and my parents, Dave and Violet," Em explained. "By the way, your name is Zinnia Summerhaven, Zin for short; and my name is Em, Em Tremaine that is, but you usually just call me Mom."

"So we don't have the same last name," Zin ventured.

"You were adopted," Em responded. "And I don't have the same last name as Dave and Violet because they adopted me and my two brothers, your Uncle Kip and Uncle Otto."

Zin evidently knew what it meant to be adopted, and she knew what uncles were. As she took a seat in an easy chair, Em and the pucks immediately began showing her certain items in the hopes the things might be familiar and jog some memories, like a couple of favorite

books, a vase, a family photo album, two candlesticks, a basket Zin had made, and a throw she evidently liked to snuggle up in on the divan when reading. Halli and Magsen, in deciding not to add to the flurry and confusion—especially because their wings might pose a danger to various figurines, delicate furniture, and wall pictures—soon retreated to the upstairs library.

Fifteen minutes later, still nothing being shown to Zin was all that familiar; though she did acknowledge that the house and its contents didn't feel completely strange to her, but more just that she couldn't remember them. However, since she didn't recognize anything, she could have been sitting in anyone's comfortable parlor surrounded by friends who were intent on showing her certain things of interest. Em, Heike, and Pizzo when fetching the items were now being spurred on by suggestions from the wall portraits. "Get that ragdoll she used to play with. Show her the painting of the three sailing ships. The pewter horse figurine. And she always liked the porcelain spaniel. That ugly orange jacket from three years ago. Get the baton she used to play with. That blue bowl with the yellow flowers from the china cabinet. The stuffed elephant. And the beanbag chair."

Despite not remembering, Zin did actually believe what she was being told—that she had lost her memories and that she was in her home surrounded by loved ones and objects that should be familiar. "I agree that's an ugly jacket," she said. "Oh, what a sweet spaniel. I do like the painting of the ships, but I don't remember seeing it before, sorry. No, I don't recognize the beanbag chair."

All the while that the parlor show-and-tell was taking place, Em was hoping that this terrible event was not due to a Memory Hypnoid, and that Zin had just somehow been knocked in the head and was only temporarily disoriented. Except, Magsen surely would have known, and would have said, if Zin had been knocked in the head. While Heike and Pizzo continued bringing things to Zin that hopefully might trigger some memories, Em made a trip upstairs to have a word with Magsen.

"I can't imagine how this happened, how she got infected," Magsen was quick to explain. "We were touring lighthouses on the way home from Yellowstone, and suddenly, just before we got home, she blanked out on me and got all panicky. Then we landed and, well, you know the story from there."

Em was nodding, and taking a deep breath as she patted Magsen on her forearm while saying, “Okay...so we’ll just have to figure out where to go from here. Don’t worry,” she added, actually giving herself advice as well as Magsen, who was indeed in a state of tremendous worry.

Halli was incredibly sympathetic to her sister, as she could only imagine how she might feel if Em had been the one infected by this malice. Far from being interested in the book she was half-heartedly flipping through at the table (as her sister wasn’t either the book sitting in front of her), Halli was trying to think of what could be done to help; but so far, no ideas had presented themselves.

Meanwhile, in the parlor, Zin was feeling a little overwhelmed and nervous, especially with the things she was evidently supposed to recognize starting to accumulate in piles because Kisi, Pipac, and Lista had come inside and were now helping to chase down objects being recommended by the occupants of the portraits. “Her old green headband. Get her bunny slippers, and the blue flip flops. Remember she used to like to play in the sand with the red bucket and spade. And the melamine gelatin molds. The animal cookie cutters. The gold throw pillow in the living room, and the blue-flowered one too. Get her skates out of the attic...and that little sewing machine.”

Em, returning to the parlor, could immediately tell that this chaos wasn’t particularly helping; thus, she soon led her daughter upstairs to Zin’s bedroom. Along the way, Zin admired a tapestry and a marble statue, but sadly had to tell her mother that these weren’t familiar to her; nor was the hallway containing her bedroom, which she initially turned the wrong way on from the stair landing.

Pausing to admire a woodcarving picture on the wall beside her bedroom door, Zin stated, “This is Don Quixote and Sancho Panza!”

“So you are able to recognize some characters from literary works,” Em said, smiling. In fact, Zin’s education was largely intact, along with the knowledge of many books she had read simply for fun over the years.

In sitting down with Zin on her bed and conversing in a question-and-answer manner, Em was able to tell that Zin retained most of her basic education. She also knew she was a magician; but just off the top of her head, she couldn’t describe specifics to her mother, such as any

particular magical tricks she might have performed either recently or in the more-distant past. “I don’t know, maybe some things with mirrors, or rabbits?” Zin suggested, since she couldn’t recall.

What she also couldn’t remember were family members, friends, anything related to Doyle Mansion, social experiences, actually going to school, or any of her magician training under the mentorship of Marlon Hornbuckle and Jeremy Palladino, most often known to Zin as Marlon and Mr. P.

So that her daughter could begin familiarizing herself with the things in her bedroom, Em left for a time, returning twenty minutes later with one of Zin’s favorite sweaters freshly laundered from the basement. Em had also brought a few early crayon and colored-pencil drawings done by Zin, and two handmade Christmas cards she had given her mother over the years—one that magically produced butter mints and the other capable of singing certain Christmas carols. “Oh these are interesting,” Zin said before adding, “sorry, I don’t remember them.” In truth, she was incredibly sorry for this, especially in seeing the worry on her mother’s face, mostly, it seemed, as related to the Christmas cards; and the bible from the desk by the window Em had just thought to place beside Zin on the bed.

The worry was real, and was actually almost a terror in Em’s heart and soul at this moment, because it seemed her daughter had no memory of Jesus Christ, the bible, God, Christmas, the cross, or even any well-known bible events like Noah’s flood or Daniel in the lions’ den. *So she doesn’t remember reading bible storybooks*, Em’s mind told her, *or, more importantly, anything in the bible itself*. This was incredibly scary, because it meant that Zin, at this point, had no concept of what it meant to be a Christian.

“Well, I’ll leave you to yourself until dinner,” Em said, rising to leave, her hands sweaty and shaking somewhat as she turned the doorknob.

After her mother left, Zin gazed out the window for a time, marveling at the gnome treehouse in one of the larger backyard oaks, and the enormous yew hedge on the property across the street. Next rifling through what were supposed to be her belongings—in dresser drawers, closet bins, and a couple of boxes stashed under the bed—she started to feel nervous again, panicky, and even suspicious, as it crossed

her mind that maybe she had been kidnapped, and that this was all some sort of elaborate hoax.

However, intelligence and common sense soon talked her out of this idea because, if it were true, what an *incredibly* elaborate set-up it was, particularly the photographs of her growing up, in which the little girl over the years even looked like herself. Plus, the acting jobs of the magical creatures, the woman calling herself her mother, and the portraits in the parlor were all too good. Also, the surroundings in the mansion, while not familiar, definitely felt comforting; in fact, holding the freshly-laundered sweater was calming her down.

No, this has to be real, Zin decided, also finding comfort when petting two stuffed animals on her bed—a white bunny and a faded lilac bear.

Four journals on a bookshelf caught her attention next. *These might prove interesting reading*. However, suddenly feeling tired, Zin instead decided to lie down and take a nap with the bunny and bear, the sleep overcoming her at almost the same moment her head met the pillow.

In her own bedroom, Em was praying, to ask for God's guidance. After praying for a time, she set to reading the bible, in which she kept coming across comforting passages basically telling her not to worry such as Philippians 4:6. "Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." 1 Peter 5:7 also popped up. "Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you." So too did Proverbs 3:6 catch her eye, as a reminder that God will always guide us. "In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths."

While Zin was napping, and Em praying and reading, we might take a few moments to find out exactly what happened to Zin, which took place in the air over Virginia and which happened to be an encounter with Tanner and a Magician Hunter that both Zin and Magsen were unaware of because the miscreants were well shrouded, on stealth airbikes in fact, that Tanner had recently stolen using sorcerer trickery from a technology lab in an earthship community in Arizona.

The Magician Hunter had been able to track Zin using a detector designed to home in on various magical items often carried by magicians, whose creations held signatures similar to the imprints common to sorcerer magic. Thus, Zin's magic-infused seeds, Reveal

Powder, mirrors, foreshard, etc. were trackable by various sophisticated devices the Magician Hunters, working with sorcerers, had been able to develop over the years.

The Memory Hypnoid, in mist form, was inside a tiny ampule designed to break very near the face, triggered by human body temperature so that it wouldn't break near other creatures, over which the chemical would have no effect, being designed only to work on humans. Sneaking in close to Magsen and Zin in flight, Tanner had been able to deliver the ampule by use of a device called a propel-tube that was very like a blowpipe. Thus, in this unguarded moment of sightseeing fun aboard her protector, Zin inhaled the mist from the broken ampule, which took effect in less than a minute.

The Magician Hunter was along not only to track Zin, but also to help capture her so that she could immediately be taken into custody to be reprogrammed by the sorcerers for their own purposes, in this case, to harness her magical abilities and make her work against the very people she had once known as family and friends. And the plan might have succeeded had it not been for a very strange occurrence. The Magician Hunter had just loosed his magical ink weapon (basically a tattoo shaped like a like martial-arts throwing star) from his neck with the intent of killing Magsen with it, and Tanner was readying his staff to perform a sleep spell on Zin, when both miscreants were suddenly hit by a targeted wind gust that dragged the airbikes and their riders over fifty miles in less than five seconds before the wind either let loose of them, or they simply slipped out of the stream.

Zin and Magsen barely felt a breath of the powerful wind because it was so concentrated, and somehow completely directed at the sorcerer and Magician Hunter. Magical wind eddies (sometimes called sky eddies) were a fairly recently-discovered phenomena. More powerful than traditional eddies, they were capable of forming various shapes and moving in different directions—in straight lines, swirls, long curves, spirals, even straight up and down. So too were these mysterious winds able to change directions suddenly to form shapes like U-turns and zigzags.

The wind eddies were originally created by the angels, who often used them to help people in such ways as having one scoop underneath a person to protect from a fall. Warm air could be directed into an

extremely cold area to save someone from exposure. So too did the angels occasionally use these magical eddies to carry off the likes of megahobs, demons, and nyregs to save people from attacks. Of course, not knowing of the angels' involvement, most humans aware of the eddies were simply likening them to the Hand of God moving about to make things happen, a pretty accurate assessment since God is in charge of the angels' activities. The "Hand of God" concept was a good way to explain the unpredictability of these phenomena.

Despite the unpredictability, a gifted fifteen-year-old girl living at the twin plantations, Chevy Longwood, a combat and weapons expert, was in the process of making a study of these eddies using a spyglass designed by a magician to spot and see the patterns of the literally thousands of eddies traveling around the world at this time. A tracker was also in development which would eventually allow people to make full use of these powerful winds. Not only would catching and riding eddies make travel by airbikes, airboards, and such much faster, projection warfare (a.k.a. distance fighting) would eventually be made possible, where a person using light, color, and music weapons could fight from a remote location, with the force of the eddies carrying the weapons' energy great distances to deliver precision strikes to an enemy. While no complex mechanicals were set to work in the future, there would be advanced fighting techniques nonetheless, particularly since not much could hinder magical weapons (which had little to no moving parts) or things like the magical eddies.

How odd that Zin had recently thought about the wheels in Ezekiel's vision because Chevy, scanning the skies with the spyglass, had just been thinking of these special winds being very like the wheels. But, as we've mentioned before, it's not too unusual for people's brains to be on the same wavelength. However, a wind eddy is not to be confused with an eddy related to thought because thought eddies, having been used by wordsmiths for centuries, were definitely different.

In returning briefly to Tanner and the Magician Hunter, having been blown off course, they weren't able to locate Zin again before she was safely home at Doyle Mansion, which no sorcerer or hunter dare try to attack, because there would be virtually no chance of survival against the forces protecting it, to include pucks, humans proficient with magical weapons, gnomes, neighborhood bigfoots, sand sculptures

come to life, topes, area wind horses, and such; not to mention quick help from places like Wharton Farm and the twin plantations that were similarly protected. So while Tanner was fairly sure he had infected Zin, there was no easy way to get at her at this point. Nor could he control her from a distance as he might with the original hypnoid because the memory one wasn't designed for that type of use.

In case we might be wondering, although Heather was a member of the Guild of Hunters, she basically only knew what was going on within her own sect of Stone Hunters. Without outright spying on the other guild divisions, which was difficult, she never knew what the Dragon Hunters, Magician Hunters, etc. were up to. So she couldn't have known that Zin was being targeted, and thus had no way to warn her.

However, the maker of the Memory Hypnoid definitely knew, because Tanner had just visited the Hardcastles' apartment to acquire a supply of ampules from Winston, while at the same time informing the biochemist that one of the targets would be his longtime nemesis, Zin Summerhaven. Winston didn't particularly care who the sorcerers used the Memory Hypnoid on, as long as the credits for his work were deposited in the bank. In addition to being selfish in this way, he was still bitter over what had happened to the Supercities during and after the uprisings, and unto the present day, where things were still in such a mess, with nearly everything remaining centralized in the cities, and with the outer blocks likely to be left permanently without services and in rubble. Other things had changed too, like no more organized sports for entertainment; and the elites were having great difficulty getting good servants. Plus, the lines between the elites and commoners continued to blur. So much had changed about the cities, and it seemed even more changes were on the way, as there was growing talk of shutting down two of the Supes, the remaining populations in them to be spread out amongst the other twelve.

Although newly saved, having been raised as a city boy, Winston was in something of a state of confusion, and was at present actually more sympathetic to the cause of the sorcerers than he was to anything going on outside of the Supes. While he did understand what it meant to be a Christian, he hadn't learned much yet about either Christ or the bible; and at this point, being busy with both work and school, he wasn't making much of an effort to do so. Thus, he would end up

making much slower progress than Eizel in the area of learning and growing as a Christian, largely because of his maturity level. Of course, it often takes many of us longer to grow up than others; and if we truly want to make progress, we must endeavor to make something of an effort, this being an area Winston was seriously lacking in at present.

Shortly after Tanner's visit (which was about three hours before Zin was infected), Winston discovered his current journal to be missing from the bookshelf in his bedroom, where he always kept it handy for reference and to take with him when leaving to go to work at the sorcerer's den (a lab) near his home. Winston had actually started to call his journals almanacs in recent weeks, because he more used them for scientific notes and reference, rather than to record personal jottings. Being positive that he hadn't misplaced the book (because he was an incredible creature of habit), Winston was sure someone had stolen it. He was also fairly positive that it hadn't been Tanner, who had been in his sight the whole time while inside the apartment. *So who did steal it then?* Winston puzzled.

While he doubted anyone else could make much out of his notes, Winston was troubled because not having them would pose a huge setback to his next project, one he had made much progress on just in the past few weeks. *If I don't find my almanac, I'll have to start over from scratch*, Winston's mind whined, as he felt more than a little defeated, as well as tired.

So maybe it's time for a break, his brain soon told him, which sounded like a good idea, particularly because he had plenty of credits in the bank these days. *Time to do something fun*, he decided. What to do was another puzzle, but was one he would soon figure out.

Meanwhile, back at Doyle Mansion, after her nap, Zin headed downstairs to the kitchen where her mother was busy cooking, something pretty amazing evidently, based on the wonderful smells coming from the oven.

Declining Zin's offer to help, Em instead suggested that Zin head downstairs to the subbasement, to see if anything in either the library or her lab might jog her memory.

"How about a tour of the rest of the house first?" Zin asked, to which Magsen and Pipac, who were also in the kitchen, offered to be her tour guides.

“Oh, she can go on the slide in the upstairs library!” Magsen excitedly suggested.

This sounded like fun to Zin, with Lista also deciding to tag along from having just come inside from playing in the sandbox.

While Magsen couldn't fit into the slide tunnel, Zin and the pucks could. After going down the slide twice, which didn't jog memories, but was terrifically fun, they went floor by floor in the house—peeking into every room, closet, nook, and cupboard—before heading down to the subbasement.

In the kitchen, Em was making some of Zin's favorites for dinner. Blessedly, she had found a lasagna in the freezer, which was baking nicely, alongside an apple pie Em had swiftly assembled using piecrust also from the freezer. Next, she was planning to make homemade croutons and Russian dressing for the baby spinach salad that would be topped with walnuts, shredded carrots, and radishes. *And maybe I'll make some coconut crunchies for alongside the pie*, Em pondered, thinking about having them ready to pop into the oven after the pie, lasagna, and croutons came out.

All the while she was cooking and baking, Em was thinking about the situation with her daughter, and occasionally shaking her head, mostly over the fact that so little was yet known about the Memory Hypnoid, and its effects. While she wouldn't have wished this malice on anyone else, Em certainly would have felt more settled if other cases had already presented themselves, for study, and perhaps some sort of treatment found. But since this hadn't happened, they would just have to do the best they could.

Em had already figured out that the sorcerers couldn't control a Memory Hypnoid subject from a distance, as they could with a victim of the original hypnoid. If they could, they surely would have done so by now, and Zin probably would have fled. However, being slightly worried about this possibility, Em had set up watches amongst the gnomes, sand sculptures, topiaries, pucks, gryphons, and two bigfoots so that eyes would be constantly on the estate to watch for the possibility of Zin leaving by herself so that she could be stopped.

In knowing deep inside that God has everything under control, Em soon stopped fretting, even about the “unknowns” of the Memory Hypnoid, especially when it occurred to her what a blessing it was to

have Zin in close quarters where various things could be done to try to help her. Thank goodness she hadn't been lost out in the wilds somewhere in this condition, which might have happened if she had been on her airbike instead of on Magsen. Em also suddenly felt a deep confidence that all would eventually be resolved, this coinciding with the timer for the pie going off.

The discussion over dinner, and afterwards while having pie and coconut crunchies, was mainly about Zin not recognizing anything in particular on either the tour of the house or in her lab; though she definitely thought the lab was interesting, and was even excited about the possibility of working in it. And while she knew what a lot of the tools and devices were for, she couldn't remember having worked on anything specific recently, like the counter to the original hypnoid, the Shatter Whammy, the share bins, and definitely not anything related to the Memory Hypnoid. Nor could she remember anything slightly more distant in the past, like her Breath of Birthday Cake Spell or her Tea Steeping Jinx from about two years back. While in the lab, in order to "try her wings," if you will, she performed a few tricks involving playing cards and mirrors, before also making an aloe vera plant dance across a table, all under the watchful eyes and applause of Pipac, Magsen, and Lista who were delighted that Zin hadn't entirely lost her skills. In fact, some of what she was doing was actually rather complex, though she couldn't particularly remember instances when she had performed these tricks before.

Em had refrained from contacting anyone outside of the immediate family up to now, largely in the hopes that her daughter's condition would suddenly reverse itself somehow. However, in recognizing that this was unlikely, while the pucks and gryphons were cleaning up after dinner and while Zin was taking a shower, Em got on her walnut to talk to a few people. While she had gone to God first, which is always the best idea, she now felt led to ask for help, or at least input, from others. It was too late tonight for anyone to come, but she was expecting a few visitors bright and early the next morning, along with Otto, whom she had asked to come home early from his travels, if possible.

Going to bed around ten, Zin had a little trouble sleeping, which she reasoned was not just in light of what had happened, but the long nap earlier probably hadn't helped. Since she didn't feel tired, and couldn't

seem to get relaxed enough to fall asleep, she ended up reading some in her most recent journal and in her school notebook. She also read the history paper she had just finished writing. Shortly before midnight, she ended up having another bout of feeling panicky, before something inside her calmed her, after which, she was able to relax well enough to fall asleep to the sound in the hall of the gryphons breathing, the sisters both being asleep on the landing by the stairs. *With protectors so near, I have nothing to panic about,* Zin's mind told her just as she was dropping off to sleep.

At breakfast the next morning, Em was ready with a few flashcards, commonly used by wordsmiths to help people with all sorts of issues including, on occasion, problems with memory. The cards contained significant words (sometimes phrases) describing various aspects of Zin's life written in certain ways and in specific colors designed to jog her memories. For instance, with regard to Zin's two best friends, Quin and Linn, their names were written in their favorite colors, alongside the word "friend," and with the "Q" in Quin's name shaped and colored to represent her blond and somewhat wavy hair, while the "L" in Linn's name was done to resemble the fact that he was confined to an airchair.

However, while Zin did notice the oddities, she had no particular idea as to what they meant. Nor did she remember anything when shown a card upon which the words "how long learning to cartwheel" were written in actual cartwheeling fashion across the card in colors of bright green to represent doing cartwheels in the summery grass, with the "o's" and "a's" in the statement resembling wildflowers like buttercups and clover blossoms that might be in anyone's yard in the summertime. Thus, Zin had no idea that it had taken her nearly a full summer of practice in the back yard at age nine to learn to do a decent cartwheel; though she did think the flashcard was pretty nifty, and even asked if she could keep it to use as a bookmark, which of course was fine.

Zin didn't recognize Quin in person when she arrived shortly after breakfast with her Grandma Vini, whom Zin also didn't know; though she was able to tell somehow that these two people were trustworthy, so she didn't doubt anything they were telling her, such as that they had known her most of her life and were pretty much part of her family. While Vini the whole time of talking to Zin wore an expression of

concern on her face, Quin was actually doing a good job of hiding the fact that she was horrified over Zin's memory loss. So she basically kept a friendly and smiling countenance while chatting in the kitchen with her friend, in a fairly benign manner, as though they might have only just met recently and were maybe planning to have lunch together or go trading-post shopping sometime.

Linn actually wouldn't be coming for a visit, not just yet, as Em didn't want to overwhelm Zin with too many visitors at once. However, she had contacted Luis, who arrived shortly after Em and Vini retreated to the parlor to leave Quin and Zin to chat.

"Are you a cousin?" Zin asked Luis as he entered the back door.

"No, just a friend," Luis answered, nodding hello to Quin who actually needed to leave to make it to her English class on time.

"See you later," Quin said, patting Zin on the shoulder before slipping out the back door to head to school on her airbike.

Though Zin hadn't recognized Luis, she had instantly felt some sort of connection to him, which was why she had thought they might be related.

While Zin and Luis were visiting in the kitchen, Em and Vini were talking in the parlor. What had most concerned Em above everything else was Zin's lack of knowledge about Christianity. However, Vini was quick to reassure her longtime friend. "She is still a child of God. Once saved, a person cannot be lost. Amnesiacs over the years that have died without regaining their memories are still part of God's family. They are still saved by Jesus. So if something happens before she remembers, she's still His. 'The Lord knows those who are his,'" Vini added, quoting from 2 Timothy 2:19.

When Vini left a short while later, Em ended up in the kitchen with Luis, who was gazing out a window at Zin and Lista playing catch with a tennis ball in the gardens, with the tiny troll throwing the ball so hard sometimes that it actually hurt Zin's hands a little to catch it.

"If she had been captured by the sorcerers," Em offered, "this is the exact state they would have wanted her in to be easily trained up to serve their disgusting purposes."

Luis absolutely agreed with Em, also stating, "It's such a blessing that she ended up at home when this happened."

"By the hand of angels, maybe," Em reckoned.

While nodding, Luis simply said, “Providence.”

Vini had briefly returned, in a soft flash of light in the hall, bringing a painting with her to put in Zin’s bedroom, to perhaps soothe her anxiety and help her sleep (because the same painting had helped Vini sleep during bouts of insomnia throughout the years). A gift from Louetta when they were both teens and in the early years of their friendship, the title of the painting was *Hope Joy Peace*; and to just about anyone looking at it, the work did very much inspire hope, joy, and peace in very deep ways. Vini didn’t stay long, just long enough to trot upstairs with the painting to lean it against the wall beside the door to Zin’s bedroom closet.

A therapist from Laurelstone had just arrived. Ms. Bohanan had actually been busy in recent weeks counseling victims of the original hypnoid. Thus far, she had no experience with anyone infected by the Memory Hypnoid; in fact, this was the first case she had heard of.

After talking with Zin for nearly an hour, Ms. Bohanan sought out Em to tell her, “I could set up some counseling sessions, but they might not do much good. For now I suggest that you just keep doing what you are doing, trying to trigger memories using familiarities. And just give it time, because the brain does often have the remarkable ability of healing itself.” Since most instances of memory loss over the years had been treated with talk therapy, there really wasn’t any sort of pill or shot that could help; so Ms. Bohanan, at this point, wasn’t planning to refer Zin to a medical doctor.

“But also let her get out some,” Ms. Bohanan went on to suggest. “I’m sure you can keep her safe. Plus, she already believes in you and in the narrative of her past that you’ve been telling her. So even if the sorcerers got hold of her, I don’t think she’d believe anything they might tell her. And their ordinary mind tricks don’t usually work on magicians; I’m sure you’ve noticed she’s not lacking in her skills in that regard.”

“Mother mind tricks often don’t work on magicians either,” Em said smiling, in remembering the difficulty over the years of trying to convince her very shrewd, strong-willed, and magically-inclined daughter of certain things. In fact, if Em hadn’t been a gifted wordsmith, and used certain deliberate techniques, she might never have broken Zin early on of various bad habits, like using magic to cheat on

spelling tests that she hadn't studied for, or sneaking out at night to practice certain spells that could be enhanced by moonlight. "Thank you," Em added, bidding Ms. Bohanan farewell at the back door with the triangle hand symbol, before heading up to the attic to look through trunks and boxes for select treasured items from Zin's childhood such as a music box and a frilly chartreuse parasol.

Meanwhile, Zin and Luis had retreated to the upstairs library, to look for a few favorite books Zin had read over the years—such as *Oliver Twist*, *The Mysterious Bender Bones*, *Heidi*, and *Please don't eat the daisies*—from a list Em had made. While they searched, Luis mentioned that he and Zin had lately been working on a project together.

"Does it have anything to do with the miracles I found listed in the journal in my bedroom—share bins, a bone box, and others?" Zin asked.

"Yes," Luis said in surprise, since he hadn't known that she was keeping any notes relating to the Twelve Miracles.

While Zin didn't know about bible miracles, she did evidently know what miracles were. "Like amazing things that don't have an explanation in science, or that we can't reason out as being everyday occurrences from how we understand things in the world to work," she said.

Next heading to Zin's bedroom with the fifteen books they had selected from the library shelves, Luis thought to retrieve the Chinese puzzle box from a pocket in Zin's jacket in order to show her the Bloodstone they were using to perform the Twelve Miracles. As he handed it to her, he actually thought that the touch of the stone might somehow miraculously restore her memories. *After all, Jesus restored sight to the blind and speech to the dumb. So why not missing memories from a stone that has touched His blood?*

Also, because sorcerers could sometimes influence the minds of others, Luis discreetly performed a concentration spell on Zin while she was holding the Bloodstone. When nothing noticeable happened, he decided this was probably because she already had good concentration skills that actually didn't seem all that hindered by the Memory Hypnoid.

Plus, that's not how the stone worked before, Luis ended up reasoning. *We both had to perform a spell*. While this was an interesting idea, he quickly decided it was not a good one because it probably wouldn't be safe for a magician to put a spell on his or her own brain. Plus, this was enough experimenting for the time being, as he wouldn't have wanted to mess up her brain even further with any sort of haphazard trial-and-error magic.

"Pretty stone," Zin remarked, as Luis placed it back into the puzzle box, which he then slipped back into Zin's jacket pocket.

It was at this point that he noticed something strange about Zin's belt pack, hanging on the chair beside her jacket. Luis could sense sorcerer magic on the pack, a magic not his own because he would have recognized his own imprint. And for some reason, he didn't think this was entirely related to the delivery of the Memory Hypnoid ampule. He was right. In taking the opportunity to look in Zin's pack while her nose was buried in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Luis noticed that her foreshard was missing. This was one item she did keep readily available, tucked into an elastic loop just inside the pack opening. In looking for the crystal deeper in the pack and not finding it, he quickly surmised that the foreshard had been stolen. And not only that, he got the strong vibe that this was Tanner's doing. In fact, both the Memory Hypnoid assault and the stolen foreshard were Tanner's doing. Luis was certain of this because he was incredibly familiar with Tanner's imprint from owning a staff that had once belonged to this vicious adversary of both himself and Zin.

Excusing himself from Zin's room while she was reading, Luis decided to do something about the stolen foreshard immediately, taking off as Westerwing from the back gardens barely two seconds after exiting the house.

Upon landing on the roof of Tanner's Supe-9 high-rise apartment building and shrouding himself, Luis quickly sought out his rival who was working in his private den that took up roughly a third of his residence. Tanner had no idea that Luis was standing directly behind him. Nor did he notice the foreshard dematerializing from a short ways down the work table in front of him (to end up in one of Luis' jacket pockets).

Just before shooting the Memory Hypnoid ampule through the propel-tube, Tanner had pinched the foreshard from Zin's pack using the same trick Luis had just used to recover it—a magnetism spell designed to lock on to the crystal's magnetic signature before transporting it to another destination.

Continuing to stare at Tanner's back, Luis was struggling somewhat not to just kill him right then and there. But something in his mind was holding him back, a little thought actually, telling him that there had to be some reason Tanner wasn't already dead. From all of his malice over the years, it was quite a wonder no one had killed him by now, especially because this vicious boy had had any number of encounters with persons much more powerful than he. *Maybe God has some sort of purpose for him*, Luis ended up reasoning.

Strangely enough, the thoughts leading to Luis' restraint were not entirely his own, because Eizel happened to be standing directly behind Luis; shrouded, of course, for Luis not to have noticed her. She had actually been spying on Tanner. And she might not have noticed Luis, except for sensing some of his thoughts, this prompting her to don rose-colored glasses, which had then allowed her to see the visiting sorcerer. Eizel was basically planting thoughts for Luis not to kill Tanner, to help him calm down so that he wouldn't commit murder. In reading more of his thoughts, she learned what had happened to Zin, which she felt truly sorry about. She could also understand why Luis might want to kill Tanner.

But that's not what's meant to happen here, Eizel reasoned, as she was smart enough to know exactly why God had led her to spy on Tanner on this day: not to gain any great secrets from her former friend, but to stop Luis from doing something he would have greatly regretted, particularly because she somehow knew that God did definitely have a plan for Tanner's future.

Returning to Doyle Mansion, Luis found Zin reading in a different book.

"My mom evidently wrote this," she said, pretty excitedly, showing the book to her friend.

"I know, I've read it," Luis answered smiling, while discreetly placing Zin's foreshard into her pack.

Em had added one of her own books to the list, *Graham Rumpole*, for a very specific reason. Although she was fairly assured that her daughter was still saved, this book (which God had led Em to write and which He Himself had written parts of through her) had the power to save. In fact, anyone reading to a certain sentence mid-way in the book would definitely be saved at some point during his or her lifetime. This was the main reason the book had been banned, for roughly twenty-five years now. At this time, Em was reluctant to suggest to her daughter to just start reading in the bible because she felt a good deal of the historical parts, the laws, and the writings of the prophets might be confusing, particularly the violence in the form of assassinations, stonings, beheadings, instances of judgment, Jesus' crucifixion, and so forth. Except, perhaps the Gospels might not be a bad choice, with so much hope in them, including so many miracles. Plus, since Zin had been reading the bible from her grade-school years, it was a familiar book, much more so, in fact, than any other. The Psalms and Proverbs might also be good choices.

While Zin was reading the first couple of chapters of *Graham Rumpole*, Luis did some work in the gardens before also helping Em and the pucks get lunch ready.

In the music room after lunch, Heike set out Zin's favorite childhood jigsaw puzzle, one Zin had helped to piece probably five or more times over the years and whose picture depicted a collage of exotic animals around a waterhole.

Otto arrived home while Zin, Luis, Heike, and Kisi were working on the puzzle, which Otto joined in with. Although Zin didn't know her uncle, she did find him highly amusing, particularly the funny faces he was making at her, as he had for years, along with the telling of certain jokes. However, while Zin was amused, nothing Otto did or said particularly jogged her memories.

He also took the opportunity to show her a couple of things she had made for him in recent years—a shoehorn that worked by itself, and a magical handkerchief launderer. "It's just a little envelope pouch," Otto stated, "but when I put the used handkerchief inside, it comes out clean." While Zin was fascinated by the items, she had no memory of making them. She also didn't remember Cinders, the cat come to life

from the trompe l'oeil painting of a fireplace that Louetta had done many years ago on one wall of the music room.

Em had invited Luis to stay in a guest room for a while, which they both thought a good idea, since he was even faster than Halli and Magsen in flight, and thus could help with watching out for Zin possibly leaving the estate unexpectedly so that she could be tracked down quickly if this happened. Shortly after Otto arrived, Luis left the scene of the puzzle to unpack a few things. When setting a couple of books from his pack on the desk in his room, he got to thinking of the list of Zin's favorite books, and he suddenly thought to get *Jasper Diamonds and Other Legends* to add to the stack in the hopes that it might trigger some memories.

However, when he looked for the book in the subbasement library, it wasn't there, and couldn't be found even with Halli, who was reading in the library, helping him look for it. While Luis was suspicious of what this might mean, particularly with Zin's stolen foreshard fresh on his mind, he decided not to focus too much on the missing book, and instead ended up suggesting to Zin that they again take up work on the Twelve Miracles project, which she agreed to.

Em was just entering the music room as Luis and Zin were talking about starting the next morning. "I agree you should keep on with whatever you were working on before this happened," Em stated. Even if this didn't serve to jog memories, she thought the outing a good idea, especially since Ms. Bohanan had recommended it.

Zin ended up sleeping much better that night, mainly from gazing at Louetta's painting for a few moments before climbing into bed.

Chapter Eight

Introducing the Sunbird

Magsen had been upset and largely avoiding Zin since she lost her memories. Having noticed this, Zin sought her out early the next morning in the gardens. “Sorry I called you a beast on the day this happened,” she offered, in thinking perhaps Magsen was upset over that. (Plus, Zin definitely knew that gryphons were not beasts.) “I was just confused and scared at the time.”

“That’s okay, I can understand,” Magsen replied. While she was definitely upset, it had nothing to do with being called a beast. Rather, she was still deeply troubled over feeling like she had failed as a protector. *I’m not supposed to be out having fun looking at geysers and lighthouses*, she privately scolded herself (for about the hundredth time). *I’m supposed to be looking after my charge*.

Magsen was actually depressed. She hadn’t been sleeping well, was constantly worried and distracted, along with feeling helpless; and she was even starting to think that nothing was ever going to be right again.

“Speaking of okay, it’s going to be okay,” Zin said, noting the extreme look of worry on her protector’s face. “I just somehow know it.” (The somehow was the Holy Spirit inside her, reassuring her.) Giving Magsen a reassuring hug, and a big smile, Zin returned to the house.

Otto made a bunny-shaped pancake for Zin for breakfast, along with her initials. Actually, he was making everyone’s initials, plus a few other critter shapes to include an owl, cat, turtle, giraffe, lion, spider, and snail, the pancakes being a perfect complement to the large bowls of fruit salad Em was dishing up for everyone.

Luis and Zin got started on their project after breakfast, with Luis going over some of the details with regard to the miracles so far. Zin somehow knew how to use her foreshard, but got nothing from doing so. She did, however, receive a vision from the Sage Key, which she also seemed to know how to use. And in doing so, she discovered that

the Sage Key, like her Aunt Vini's peacock feather, could see backwards in time, as well as forwards.

"The next miracle is in Scotland, slightly in the past by a month or so, I think," Zin told Luis from interpreting a rather unique vision. She had been standing on a small island looking at a castle disguised as a rock spire. Next, rising up into the air very high, as though seeing things from a bird's-eye view (or perhaps from atop a rookh), Zin had recognized what she was certain was Scotland based on the shape of the landmass, the island with the castle being somewhere off of Scotland's northern coast. Coming back down to earth and paying a visit to a small cottage, Zin discerned from a wall calendar that the time was roughly a month previous.

"So we'll need to head to Netherwind," Luis said, "to borrow the Time Key and use the portal there."

"Okay, whatever you say," Zin replied, a little baffled by the lingo.

While she did know they had time traveled during their project so far, any details as to how this might have happened actually eluded her. Not only did she not know anything about unicorn time travel or the genies' Magical Grapevine, she also didn't know anything about the Time Key, despite having grown up using it, and despite helping a sorceress create the seven spheres in the first place. But she was gradually learning, from having Luis fill her in on certain things, which he did more of while they were grabbing their jackets and other gear.

Taking off from the back yard a short while later, the pair headed for Netherwind. However, barely three seconds later, to Zin's surprise, Westerwing ended up noticing something that caused him to land. Due to his excellent rookh eyesight, he hadn't even needed rose-colored glasses to spot the shimmering grapevine wreath positioned in a small pecan grove.

"We won't need the Time Key, because I think God is leading us to use this," Luis said, when urging Zin to put on her rose-colored glasses, as he also donned his because he couldn't see the invisible wreath when in human form.

Zin caught on quickly. "So this is the grapevine you just told me about. But how do we use it?"

"Once we're inside, the Sage Key will tell you where to go," Luis answered.

And so, they stepped through, much as they had before when traversing the grapevine. Using the Sage Key, Zin next led them to an exit situated on the island of her earlier vision.

Though the spire castle was nearby, this was not the destination of the time travelers. Instead, as they stowed their glasses in their packs and employed their shroud sapphires, Zin led them to a position behind a grouping of rocks that had a good view of a nearby tidal pool, where the next miracle was set to take place.

“It’s interesting how the genie grapevine goes both backwards and forwards in time,” Luis surmised as they got settled in to wait.

“Well, if the genies use it to communicate with their future selves and vice versa, as you say, it makes sense for it to run both ways through time,” Zin offered, which made sense to Luis.

A couple of minutes later, Zin quietly added, “So this is the seventh miracle evidently, according to the list I was making of them in my journal.”

“Yes, exactly,” Luis whispered.

They were being quiet because they were expecting a visitor to the tidal pool, who arrived barely five minutes later and whom Luis recognized as being the same twelf they had seen behind the wall of water when battling Tanner and his crew with the navy before the leviathan scales were harvested. Having lost her recent memories, Zin of course didn’t recognize him.

In keeping with some of his water manipulation skills, Levegō was about to do something very special with the water in the tidal pool, which was not water in a traditional sense, but rather, tears of joy collected into the pool by some unknown force, angels perhaps, by the Levegō’s way of thinking. The twelf was unknowingly projecting his thoughts, which Luis was able to pick up on, and which Zin would learn about later from Luis. For now, the sorcerer and magician both just needed to act, Luis with his staff using a stimulate jinx and Zin with a tiny seashell upon which an animation spell had been placed. As she flicked the shell toward Levegō, the force of Luis’ jinx carried it along to gently land in the tidal pool, where it didn’t at all look out of place and where it remained unnoticed by the twelf because he was busy fishing tools from a small pack. Using several devices to determine precise measurements, Levegō proceeded to add a flame of sacrificial

fire to the tears in the tidal pool, followed by seven sprinkles of sacred earth, and three breaths of glory.

Luis was able to discern what these things were from reading Levegō's thoughts, and he shared the information telepathically with Zin, while being careful not to project anything towards the twelf (who would have known he was being observed if Luis had). This was the same sharing method Luis had used when letting Zin know what they needed to do as far as their dual spells, which, on their own, would have merely made the water dance, churn in a frothy manner, and take on certain shapes such as spirals, dolphins leaping through hoops, waterspouts, or perhaps waltzing raindrops. Now, in combination with what Levegō had just done, and from the Bloodstone being on the scene, the water was taking on a different form of life, one that left Luis and Zin completely speechless (to include their telepathic voices) as it slowly rose from the tidal pool to drift upwards and away, out over the open sea, without looking back.

Levegō, after packing up his tools, simply headed off along the shore toward the castle where he lived.

The reason the sight left Luis and Zin speechless was because Luis had never seen a sunbird before, despite having read about them in mythology books; and Zin had never even heard of a sunbird, until Luis, when finally finding his telepathic voice, managed to tell her.

Intending to follow the creature, Luis told Zin, *Hop on*. As she did so, he also encouraged her to use her rose-colored glasses, which had a sun-blocking feature. This was a good idea because the sunbird was stunningly bright; and while the eyes of a rookh wouldn't be much bothered by the glare, Zin's were already watering, even as she was shielding them with her hand.

"It's amazing, a sunbird," she said, finally finding her voice as well.

Not in over three hundred years of living as Westerwing have I ever seen one, Luis shared as they rose high into the air to tail the creature, who didn't just look bright, but also somewhat translucent. The sunbird was also obviously shapeshifting, in first looking like a gigantic eagle, then a dragon, then a condor, then some sort of unknown bird with an amazingly-long tail.

Like maybe a bird of paradise, Zin projected.

They didn't end up following for very long because the sunbird suddenly emitted a burst of light that might have given Zin a serious instant sunburn had not Westerwing, upon noticing the first of the flash and anticipating a surge, made a dash westward (in a fraction of a second) to put them both out of reach of the sear.

Deciding they had had enough excitement for one day, the magician and sorcerer agreed to head home. Scanning with her rose-colored glasses, Zin was able to spot an entrance to the grapevine in a valley in Ireland. Then the exit to their own time ended up being in Iowa, from which Luis took a leisurely pace to Doyle Mansion, landing about ten minutes later in the back gardens, where they immediately headed to the subbasement library to look up information on sunbirds.

Halli was there and helped them pull books, being eager to do so not just from always being helpful, but also because she had never seen a sunbird either.

They had to piece information together from various books because hardly anyone, it seemed, had ever seen one.

Sunbirds probably just end up looking like the sun a lot," Halli speculated, "or sunshine, I mean."

"Or they're just incredibly rare," Luis input.

"Maybe a combination of both," Zin reasoned.

"Here's something on the imprint of a sunbird," Luis offered, from the book his nose was buried in. "You can know a sunbird has been in the area when the rays of sun coming through the clouds look just like a pleated skirt."

What Luis had gotten from the thoughts of Levegõ before needing to hurriedly tell Zin about performing their spells on the tidal pool had to do with both cloudbirds and sunbirds. "Cloudbirds are made from the tears of the oppressed, and sunbirds are made from tears of joy," he told Halli and Zin.

"Sunbirds evidently have the power to scorch," Zin remarked, having just found this tidbit of information in one of the books.

"The one we saw was probably practicing when he lit up," Luis stated. "Over the water would be a safe place to do that."

"A newborn sunbird would probably need to practice." Zin said with a smile. "And it seemed he was practicing his shapeshifting too."

Halli was the one who ended up finding the most information about sunbirds, from a book called *Elusive Magical Creatures*. “In contrast to the scorching they can do, their light can cast protective shadows, if they get behind great hills or trees. This would be to help protect other creatures, and plants, from heat or sun,” she said. “They draw their energy from the sun. Oh, and they can provide emotional help.”

“You mean like how people who live in regions where the winter days are short need sunshine in order not to be depressed?” Luis asked.

“Probably that too,” Halli responded, “but this says the help is in the form of buffering emotions rising from stressful events and tragedies, so that people who experience these things can still find joy, even in an extremely troubled world.”

“Well that makes sense,” Zin responded, “since sunbirds are made from tears of joy.”

“They also can bestow blessings, of various sorts,” Halli added, as a final bit of information from the book.

Suddenly thinking of cloudbirds, Zin offered, “Cloudbirds have great water manipulation skills. They can save people from drowning, divert flood waters, even calm seas like halcyon can. And they can protect people from the sun, and maybe even from a sunbird’s scorch. I don’t know how I know all of this,” she added. “It must have been part of my education at some time.” This was not surprising, as most schools taught classes on magical creatures. Plus, Zin had had easy access to huge libraries for most of her life.”

As they were heading up to their rooms a few minutes later to stow their jackets and packs, Luis remarked, “Magsen said you met a cloudbird on your trip to Yellowstone, the same day you lost your memories.”

“I don’t remember that,” Zin answered, shaking her head.

Magsen happened to be in the hall and she said, “You took pictures that day—of geysers, of the snowbow that the cloudbird produced, and of some of the lighthouses we saw.”

Diverting into the upstairs library for a short time, Luis helped Zin fish her camera from her pack. Using the projection feature, which Zin evidently knew how to make work, they looked at the lovely pictures, of which the lighthouses ended up being Zin’s favorites. “Beautiful,” she remarked.

Luis had favored the snowbow. “Cloudbirds only just now seem to be more common; I mean more visible,” he stated.

Magsen was nodding as she said, “I’ve only just started seeing them in recent weeks, and never before that.”

While Zin had enjoyed looking at the pictures, they hadn’t jogged any memories for her. This left Magsen feeling incredibly sad. After Zin and Luis left, she gave a great sigh, before heading off to sit by herself in a secluded spot behind the detached garage on the estate. She didn’t want to be around anyone else at this time, but just to be by herself. She didn’t only feel sad, but tired, deep down inside; and this didn’t help alleviate any of her constant worry over Zin.

Luis felt like working in the gardens, and did so while Zin was wandering the house. On the desk in the parlor she noticed a few pages of her mom’s poetry.

“Your mother is a fabulous poet,” Zapor, from his portrait, told Zin. “That one is acrostic,” he added referring to a poem called “The Little Boat.”

Zin somehow knew what this meant (probably from an English class). “I see what you mean,” she remarked, working out that the first letters of each line spelled out words, in fact, a phrase. ““The little boat was steered by God and Providence.””

Nodding, Zapor added in an eager tone, “She just wrote that recently; it’s one of my favorites.” (Of course, being a longtime fan of Em’s writings, as well as her former protector before being killed by a group of hunters during the uprisings, Zapor tended to say this about most things Em had ever written.) “You know your mom won the Nobel Prize for Literature for *Graham Rumpole*,” he offered next.

Though the award didn’t exist anymore Zin knew what it was. “Really, wow!” she declared. “That’s a big prize.”

Zapor nodded as he said, “The medal she got is in one of the cases in the subbasement library; and she bought bibles for libraries and private schools with the million dollars, plus donated some of the money to various churches.”

Zin ended up taking the poem with her to read in her room. On Zapor’s urging, she also sought out a volume of her mother’s poetry from a shelf in the upstairs library.

Popping down on her bed, she read “The Little Boat” first.

The Little Boat

The little boat was tired from age and wear,
Having had little rest and not much repair;
Enduring the harshness of many a storm;
Long years sailing on windy seas were the norm,
In service it seems of both people and freight,
That often amounted to quite a lot of weight.
The cargo was as varied as our wishes—
Long poles, barrels of apples, fancy dishes,
Eggplants in crates, stacks of bricks, tall bookcases,
Boxes holding fine dolls with smiling faces.
On the shore of a lake, rocky on one side,
And near five-and-a-half kilometers wide,
The little boat watched the early-morning clock,
While bumping gently against the wooden dock;
And noting the many people on the pier
Saying tearful goodbyes to loved ones most dear.
Sitting patiently waiting to start the day,
The little boat thought, *We'll soon be underway.*
Everyone shortly managed to take a seat,
Except three boxes placed by a woman's feet.
Rudder quickly employed so to navigate;
Engine chugging along at a steady rate;
Direction on this day was north by northwest;
By the captain's calculation, this was best.
Yonder on the far shore, a fog did linger,
Gently snaking through trees like a curved finger.
On a high cliff, a Cross sat amongst the rocks,
Distinctively gleaming like golden hair locks.
All these years, the boat never noticed the Cross.
Now wondering why, he was at a great loss.
*Did I just not think to look for something more,
Perhaps a brighter future, an open door?*
Rather than simply ending up thrown away,
Over a cracked hull or stalled motor one day,
Very determined, the boat's thoughts took a leap.
I am worth so much more than just the scrap heap.
Deciding on this, the boat felt included.
*Everyone can be saved, none are excluded.
Not even if I end up sunk in the sea
Can I ever be lost. Plus, the save is free,
Even for a worn-out little boat like me.*

Zin next chose a poem from the book.

Regarding Happenstance and Godforsaken

I dreamed I saw two men walking together one day,
On a wide city street under clouds of white and gray.
Crowds of people followed, their paces both fast and slow,
All carefree as to where the two might decide to go.
From a deserted side street, I briefly joined the throng,
Though I quickly realized that I didn't quite belong.
From someone beside me, I decided to inquire,
As to whom all the people were so prone to admire.
The answer came quickly in a voice unshaken,
"They are often called Happenstance and Godforsaken."
When the pair in the lead did abruptly disappear,
The startled gasps of the crowd resounded far and near.
With the deserted street I came from still within sight,
An about-face I did, under clouds of gray and white.
Of musing the strange vanishing, my mind desisted,
Because I knew the two never really existed.
My mind instead vowed to give Heaven more than a glance,
Knowing full well that truly nothing is Happenstance.
And from this odd dream, I did suddenly awaken,
Also knowing nothing is ever Godforsaken.

There was certainly a lot Zin didn't know about her mom at this point. The fact that her mother was a poet actually surprised her; though she didn't know why she should have been surprised, especially because the writing voice was reminiscent of that of *Graham Rumpole*, which Zin was anxious to take up again.

As she was reading the next chapter, her mother brought in some laundry to her, at which point, Zin took the opportunity to say. "I just read 'The Little Boat' poem. Zapor says it's one of his favorites."

"He says that about everything I write," Em said smiling. "I woke up stiff one morning, feeling the creaks of age I guess, and that's what came to me when I was writing. So I guess I'm 'the little boat.'"

"You don't seem that old," Zin stated, having noted her mother's early-morning jogs around the neighborhood, as well as her spryness around the house and gardens.

"No, I guess not," Em replied. "I just feel that way sometimes, arthritis mostly."

After lunch, while Luis and Otto were engaging in some training with ropes and flutes in the back yard, Zin took the opportunity to join in.

“So she hasn’t lost her skill with weapons,” Otto remarked to Luis while observing his niece’s dancelike leaps with a swirling blue rope while fighting against a practice target made to resemble a slashing and lunging demon. “That’s interesting, and good news.”

Luis had felt the same way earlier when watching Zin’s graceful flute-wielding movements against a dummy target designed to act like an attacking megahob.

After practice, Zin simply sat in the gardens for a time, watching birds flitting about, clouds changing their shapes, falling leaves blowing around, and shadows dancing on the lawns from winds moving the trees. Upon noticing at one point that the afternoon sunshine coming through the clouds looked very much like a pleated skirt, Zin thought Magsen might like to see the sight. However, she wasn’t able to find her protector when looking for her because Magsen was still hiding behind the garage. And while Zin could have called to her telepathically, she was reluctant to disturb Magsen, who seemed to want to be alone lately. *It probably would have been too late anyway*, Zin ended up deciding, in noting the clouds had shifted to make the sun look more like a crown than a skirt.

Inside, Zin and Luis spent some time in the parlor, where the portrait of Zapor ended up telling her some stories of her childhood, with Heike and Pizzo there as well, and engaging in little mime shows to add some of their own details to the stories. While Zin as yet didn’t recall anything, she was having great fun listening to Zapor, and watching the pucks’ performances.

Although Luis was likewise amused, his thoughts were more on the Bloodstone. *If it’s really a stone that can enact miracles, why isn’t it restoring her memories?* he wondered.

Because that not the way the stone works, his mind reminded him. It evidently needs the actions of a sorcerer and magician working together to make the miracles possible.

That’s probably why God makes sure some sorcerers are converted, he further reasoned a short while later, *so that there will be enough*

sorcerers willing to work with magicians to make certain magical things happen in the world.

Luis also decided that maybe the timing just wasn't right yet, for whatever it was that was eventually going to cure Zin of her memory loss. For some reason, he couldn't help thinking that there was some important reason as to why this had happened to her.

At one point while storytelling, Zapor ended up in a fit of laughter when describing an incident that happened to Zin when she was eight. Evidently, while practicing bubble charms, she ended up with bubble gum splattered over about half of her body. Zapor was actually laughing so hard that his eyes were watering and his stomach was hurting a little; and he was definitely unable to keep speaking.

"Okay, well we'll carry on later," Zin said, taking this as an opportunity to head to the kitchen to join her mother who was starting dinner.

Heike and Pizzo also decided to leave because they were ready for their afternoon snack, on this day consisting of bananas and a bowl of trail mix. Luis left the parlor as well, deciding he was ready to do some reading in his room.

Passing Magsen in the hall, Zin gave her an encouraging smile, which Magsen did her best to return.

Magsen was actually on her way to talk to the portrait of her uncle, to share some of her worries over Zin with him; though she had to wait a couple of minutes for Zapor to collect himself well enough to stop laughing and be able to listen.

Zapor could definitely understand his niece feeling badly over the incident; but at this point, he couldn't think of anything to say that might help, other than telling her, "You didn't really fail; sometimes these things just happen, and there's nothing we can do about them."

It was mainly her uncle listening that ended up helping Magsen, who felt better in just being able to voice her frustrations, along with her fear that Zin might never be normal again.

"Right now, we can only just pray about that," Zapor advised.

Magsen was nodding. "I know. Until some remedy is found, or God tells us to do something, we will just have to be patient and pray."

"Maybe go visit your parents for a bit," Zapor suggested on a whim. "Zin's pretty well protected for now, and I think you could use a break."

Magsen actually found this to be a good idea, especially because she hadn't seen her parents for a while. Her mother, Folto, being Kip's longtime protector, was living in Antica these days. And her father, Candar, was living in Brazil from having been recently assigned as protector to a fifteen-year-old boy living there. While her parents definitely would have preferred being closer to one another, they had to take their protection duties seriously.

Heading to the kitchen, Magsen told Zin she wanted to go see her parents for a couple of days, this being a plan both Em and Zin heartily agreed with since they both felt that Magsen could use a change of scenery, as well as the support of her parents.

"I'll see you soon," Zin said a short time later while giving Magsen a goodbye hug on the back porch, after which, she stood watching as her protector swiftly disappeared into the blue sky like a soft golden wink.

Making cookies as Zin headed upstairs to read for a bit, Em recalled an outing earlier in the day when she had asked Halli to take her to see Vini at Netherwind.

"No, the Mind Key can't be used to restore Zin's memories," Vini had stated.

Em had pretty well already figured this, but she didn't think it hurt to make sure. "I guess I just hoped it might work," she said, "since it's so powerful."

"True, and it's one of the most versatile of the seven spheres," Vini responded, "capable of protecting someone's mind from intrusion, and of various types of mind manipulation. It can make people forget certain things, influence by planting ideas into the brain, even add whole scenarios to people's lives, along with making them believe these things are absolutely real. But it can't fix Zin's problem because the hypnoid is chemical in nature, and the Mind Key is magical. So it can't override something like this."

As Em gave a great sigh while nodding in resignation, Vini added, "Besides, I already tried it, at the same time I brought the painting over. I didn't want to tell you because I wasn't sure how you'd feel about someone experimenting on your daughter, but I basically couldn't help myself."

"I'm glad you tried it," Em answered smiling.

“Me too,” Vini replied, “because I think that’s how I figured out that something magical probably can’t battle something chemical that is this powerful, created by such a powerfully-gifted person. And I don’t believe the sphere could have worked to repel the Memory Hypnoid, in the same way the mini Mind Key that Quin always carries didn’t keep her from getting infected by the original hypnoid.”

“Oh that’s right,” Em said. “But it was a magical counter that broke people out of control of the original hypnoid,” she suddenly thought mention.

“Yes, but the original was designed to work more on the senses than on the brain,” Vini answered. “And the brain is very different.”

“Okay,” Em stated, finally understanding.

“I know, it’s complicated,” Vini said. “I think at this point we just have to be patient and trust in God to work things out, because I’m sure He’s going to.”

Em was also sure of this, though it was a little hard not to be impatient when it came to something this serious concerning her daughter.

Half-heartedly stirring the bowl of cookie dough, Em was pulled out of her musings by the sound of Luis setting the table for dinner in the dining room.

After dinner, Zin had the good idea of putting on a little magic show for everyone in the parlor.

Gathering things from her lab and her bedroom, it took about forty-five minutes to set up the show, which she hoped might help with regaining some of her memories.

With Em recording the show so that Magsen could see it when she returned home, Zin first hypnotized both Halli and Pipac (to stand up and sit down when certain words were spoken), before stopping her Uncle Otto’s wristwatch and also making it float above a table, while she made eggs disappear from certain spots and reappear in others. Then she performed various tricks with scarves, hats, bubbles, a short ladder, candles, and rings. After un-hypnotizing Halli and Pipac (so that they wouldn’t have to keep standing and sitting on command), she slowly tore a sheet of newspaper into long strips, then folding up the torn strips into a tight square before unfolding the newspaper sheet that was somehow magically whole again, all while Mrs. Doyle from her

portrait sang the U.S. National Anthem from being hypnotized to do so. Next, gloves put on by Em and Luis switched colors with each other, and walnuts on a table disappeared under peas (as opposed to the old trick of the pea under the walnut). And, of course, in keeping with magician tradition, a few locks and mirrors got in on the action of Zin's performance.

To everyone's delight and ongoing applause (both for Zin and for the volunteers from the audience), the show lasted about an hour, ending with Zin performing her final trick of making the cookies Em had baked earlier, which happened to be gingerbread moons and lemon stars, fly about the house for everyone to chase down, after which, they all gathered in the kitchen to have milk with the cookies. Although Zin hadn't regained any lost memories, everyone had had a great evening of fun.

Luis helped Zin return things used in the show to her bedroom and lab, after which, they said goodnight, intending to work on another miracle the next morning.

After washing her face, brushing her teeth, and putting on her pajamas, Zin read a couple of psalms from the bible, specifically Psalms 45 and 91. While the poems were not rhyming, like her mother's, they were very lovely and uplifting. Recalling earlier in the day her mother saying that her favorite book was the *Holy Bible*, Zin could actually see why. Just in this short time of holding it in her hands and reading what amounted to only a few paragraphs, she could definitely feel the power of the book—the comfort, the wisdom, the protection, and even a deep sort of promise held somehow within the pages.

After gazing thoughtfully at the *Hope Joy Peace* painting for a short time, Zin turned off her reading lamp and ventured into sleep a few minutes later.

Chapter Nine

Resurrection and Restoration

Having breakfast the next morning with Luis, Zin was on the verge of checking her foreshard and the Sage Key when Luis got a walnut call from a friend of his, a man named Arlo Tangemann, who lived in a mothership community just outside the borders of Lion Mountain. The body of his grandmother had evidently just been found, and was beyond the point of dragon tears being able to bring her back.

“She accidentally drank poison,” Luis told Zin as he disconnected with Arlo. “He’s asking if I can come.”

“Of course, you’re needed,” she replied, “to help your friend.”

“Well, he seems to think a sorcerer might be able to help,” Luis answered, “but I’m not really sure that I can. I mean, necromancers can communicate with the dead, but sorcerers generally can’t bring people back to life. And I’m not even a necromancer by specialty, so I wouldn’t even be able to talk to his dead grandmother.”

“I imagine he probably just wants support from a friend,” Zin answered.

“You’re right,” he answered. “So I’ll be back as soon as I can.”

“Wait a minute,” Zin suddenly realized. “I think we’re kind of missing something obvious here. I mean, raising the dead. That’s like a miracle, right?”

“Of course,” Luis answered, barely able to believe he hadn’t caught on before now.

“Just because the message didn’t come from the foreshard, Sage Key, or the peacock feather you told me about, doesn’t mean it can’t be related to the Bloodstone,” Zin added. “Plus, you said a friend in Ohio gave us the information for one of the Twelve Miracles.”

“Kiana, through her auto-writing, yes.”

“So that means I’m going with you,” Zin stated, as they hurried to clear their breakfast dishes and race upstairs to grab their gear.

I can't believe I didn't think of the miracle aspect right off the bat, Luis told Zin as they took off from the back gardens. *Especially since many dead were brought back to life in the bible.* As they flew, Luis took the opportunity to share the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, before also relating that Jesus Himself was resurrected.

The community police and doctor were at Arlo's grandmother's small cabin, and were confident that there was no foul play.

"She evidently mixed up bottles similar in shape and size," Arlo told Luis and Zin when they arrived outside the cabin, "a cough medicine and a cleaning product. I feel terrible," he added. "I haven't checked on her in about six weeks. I guess I've just been busy; but if I had, she might have been brought back by dragon tears. They think she's been dead about four weeks, and nobody noticed because she's reclusive and keeps to herself most of the time."

"It's not your fault," Luis told his friend, as he and Zin entered the cabin with Arlo.

The smell from the dead body was pretty bad, this prompting Zin to perform a Mint Infusion Charm that worked beautifully to both air out the cabin and make it smell strongly of mint. The body was in the bedroom, which neither Zin nor Luis needed to enter because they could perform their spells just as well from the doorway.

Since they had never raised the dead before, and basically didn't know how to with their normal skills, Zin decided on an invigorate spell designed to enhance energy and vigor, mainly to combat tiredness; and Luis chose an arouse spell he had used on a few occasions to revive dying plants and flowers.

Barely five seconds after the swirling pink and green light sparkles from the two spells entered the bedroom to settle on the body lying on the bed, than Arlo's grandmother sat up, apparently whole and healthy again, without even the slightest trace of having been dead and decaying only moments before.

Zin was just shoeing a mouse out of the room as Arlo brushed past her and Luis to gather his grandmother in his arms and hug her. "You mixed up your cough medicine with a bottle of copper gloss," he exclaimed.

"I had a pretty bad cold, and a cough," she replied, "so I guess I didn't know what I was doing."

From this point on, Arlo would be visiting his grandmother a lot more often. Plus, he was planning to get some of her neighbors involved in checking on her.

Luis ended up shoeing the mouse out the front door as he and Zin were leaving the cabin. *Colorful little fellow*, he thought in noting the gray, red, gold, and white tones mixed with the pale brown of the mouse.

As they were getting ready to leave, Luis suddenly felt a small movement in his pocket. A Shatter Whammy kernel had just popped. In looking around, he and Zin discovered a teraphim no larger than an average piece of hard candy sitting in the leaves beside the front steps to the cabin. The creature had been impersonating a mole cricket; and while definitely shattered, he still held the shape of the insect, until, that is, Zin poked at it with the toe of her boot, which then reduced the cricket to nothing more than a tiny pile of dust.

“I wonder if the teraphim had something to do with those two bottles getting mixed up,” Luis remarked.

“Maybe,” a nearby policewoman answered, “sounds like teraphim mischief to me.”

The doctor was still on the scene and remarked, “We had another one shatter just the other day, impersonating a fancy hatpin, actually in church. The lady wearing the hat was surely surprised, along with the rest of us.”

As Luis and Zin were taking off, she questioned, “So I made the whammy that’s helping to fix this problem?”

“Yes, and people are very appreciative of it,” Luis answered.

“I just wish I could remember,” Zin said.

Instead of going directly home, Luis suggested they pay a visit to Kiana at her mothership community in Ohio.

With Zin being game, they arrived in less than a minute.

“So you really don’t remember me?” Kiana asked with a big smile after being introduced to Zin. “I would have thought I’d be about as memorable as they come.”

“And I’m sure you are,” Zin answered, returning the infectious smile. “It’s just this Memory Hypnoid thing.”

As Kiana’s nodding actually turned into a shake of her head, she remarked in perplexity, “There has to be some reason this happened.”

Zin was definitely inclined to agree, as this had already been on her mind.

Kiana had the good idea of demonstrating her footspeed to Zin, to see if that might trigger any memories.

However, while Zin was properly amazed at what basically appeared to be a streak of gray rather than a person, running back and forth across a field, she didn't remember Kiana.

"That's okay," Kiana said, not even out of breath from running the stretch of the field fifteen times.

"We might not be able to see you at all if you get any faster," Luis said with laughter.

"I have been getting faster in recent weeks," Kiana stated. "Thankfully, I have a blue sapphire to protect me from windburn."

"Some blue sapphires can heal," Zin said, without knowing exactly how she knew this, also suddenly looking at the sapphire ring that she always wore.

"Correct," Luis responded, "but the stone in your ring is a protection sapphire, not a healing one. It protects from things like weapons' strikes and gremlin claws, and mind intrusion like from demon-planted thoughts."

"But evidently not from a Memory Hypnoid," Zin said.

"Evidently not," answered Luis.

"Maybe from being trumped by a more powerful gift," Kiana reasoned, correctly as it were. "A gifted person produced the sapphire, but a more-powerful gifted person produced the hypnoid."

"That's probably right," Luis said after a moment of contemplation.

After having glasses of iced tea with their hostess, who actually needed to be getting to her geometry class, Zin and Luis bid Kiana farewell with the triangle hand symbol, afterwards deciding to do a flyover of nearby Supercity Ten.

"It's huge!" Zin marveled, as the city was larger than what she might have imagined.

Spans pretty much all of, and everything in between, what used to be Columbus and Cincinnati, Luis projected.

"And the outer regions are all in rubble because of the uprisings that my mom and Halli told me about," Zin said.

Yes, Luis answered, as he dodged an encounter with two nyregs patrolling over the city. Zin knew what nyregs were, even though she hadn't remembered ever seeing Supe-10 before.

As they were finishing their flyover, on the very southern outskirts of the city, Westerwing's keen eyesight spotted something odd below that prompted him to land to investigate.

The oddity was a burned book sitting atop a chunk of concrete beside what remained of a collapsed building.

"Probably the Torch Squads at work," Luis speculated. "They're still burning banned books whenever they find them. Maybe the genies can restore it."

"If you pick it up, I think it will crumble," Zin warned.

Luis agreed; so instead of trying to take it with them, he decided to try a reversal spell on the book, which worked to restore what turned out to be a journal.

"Well that was easy," he said, folding and stowing his staff inside his jacket, before placing the book into his shoulder pack. (In feeling as though they had been out long enough for one day, both Zin and Luis preferred to head home, instead of taking the time to examine the journal more on the spot.)

They reached Doyle Mansion less than five minutes later, and were greeted by a message Albert had sent by dawn pigeon. Evidently, a leviathan scale had been stolen by a sorcerer who had lately been spying on the navy. However, when the sorcerer was carrying away the stolen scale, he ended up losing his seating atop the flash dragon he was riding. Tipped into the sea with scale landing on top of him, the sorcerer ended up drowning from the weight of the leviathan scale pressing down upon him. Albert had simply wanted to let Zin and Luis know of this strange little incident; strange to him at least since, as far as he knew, no one had ever died a death by leviathan scale before.

"Because the scales are light when dry, but in contrast are incredibly heavy in the water," Zin remembered from Luis earlier relating details to her about the second miracle.

"And speaking of contrasts," Luis said, "this is a death in contrast to the resurrection miracle we just witnessed."

"It's like a little balancing act," Zin surmised, to which Luis agreed, especially since human beings can never fully comprehend God's plans,

the wheels ever turning, the Clock of the Universe ever ticking, the Hand of Providence ever working. (However, we can often be fairly certain that the things God intends for use by His children, like the leviathan scales, are not meant to be used for evil; so it's no wonder the sorcerer drowned.)

With regard to not comprehending, Luis was absolutely baffled a short while later in the guest bedroom upon discovering the journal he and Zin had just found to be missing from his pack. And not only that, the strong vibe he was getting from the pack, as far as recent magic, was a sorcerer imprint that turned out to be his own! In fact, he was certain of it, which meant this wasn't malice from someone like Tanner, or any other gifted miscreant, but he himself had done it. His mind spinning over this mystery, as well as the rest of the events of the day, Luis ended up having to force himself to stop thinking for a time, because it was just too much for his brain to fully comprehend all at once. However, he was about to discover the excitement of the day not to be anywhere near over, because something was about to happen that would once again set his brain gears into motion, along with everyone else's at the mansion.

Eizel had just arrived in the back gardens by airbike, accompanied by Birch on Naya. Vini, in a soft flash, appeared on the lawn only moments after the other two visitors landed.

Birch and Eizel had been visiting the twin plantations so that Eizel could help ease the pain of two cancer patients at a hospital in a pocket on the grounds of Netherwind, after which, they met up with Vini at her cottage, where Eizel had suggested a possible visit to nearby Doyle Mansion.

Vini had decided to accompany the pair, in not being quite sure how Eizel would be received. And, indeed, the former miscreant was greeted by the mansion's residents with a lukewarm reception, which was understandable given her history. However, Vini had decided that the visit was more important than anyone feeling uncomfortable because Eizel had actually had a good idea relating to Zin's condition.

"Well, I wanted to see how she was doing," Eizel said to Em in the kitchen. "But I also thought that seeing me might jog some of her memories. From what I understand, you've been sharing good things with her about her past. And I'm sure that's all fine; but I thought

maybe something bad as far as memories, namely me, might jar her out of the Memory Hypnoid.”

Em actually thought this was good idea.

In addition to hoping her visit would help Zin, Eizel had another reason for coming, in thinking that this might be a good time to apologize to Zin over things that had happened in the past. *Then when she gets her memories back*, Eizel thought, *hopefully she'll remember that I am sorry, and things might go more smoothly between us in the future*. Since they had mutual friends and were bound to cross paths at some point, Eizel felt it was important to try to foster the least amount of friction possible.

As she was being led up the stairs to visit Zin, who was in her bedroom, Eizel made an apology of sorts to Em over the incident when she had tried to kill Zin, which might have happened if Em hadn't intervened. “I deserved lots worse than what you did on that day,” she said. “Thank you for not doing worse.”

Em had merely used a flashcard at that time, but one powerful enough to cause Eizel significant pain (in the form of intense diaper rash) and send her running. Though giving a small nod of acknowledgment to this former adversary, Em was still wary of Eizel; and rightly so, in knowing that it sometimes takes a long time for people to truly change.

Zin was reading a book on bible interpretation while reclining on her bed. With resurrection on the brain, she was specifically looking up instances where people had come back to life in the bible. However, she didn't get far before the knock came at the door.

Birch hung back in the hall with Luis while Em, Eizel, and Vini entered the room. Zin actually greeted Eizel more warmly than anyone else at the mansion had, with a smile and a bright “Hello.” However, the smile disappeared in a flash when her head flew back to hit hard against her pillow as she exclaimed, “Oh, oh, ow!”

“Oops, sorry!” Eizel said.

“What did you do?” Em cried, rushing to her daughter's side.

“Nothing bad, I promise,” Eizel hurried to say.

Zin could actually confirm this, and did as soon as she could manage to, which was about eight seconds later, when she was able to

tell her mother, “I remember now, everything. It’s all back. Oh, but it hurts; my head hurts.”

“She’ll be okay,” Vini assured everyone. (She was sure of this from the still small voice in the back of her brain telling her so.)

“I just planted a strong thought for her to remember,” Eizel stated, as a better answer to Em’s question as to what she had done. “I guess it was a little too strong; again, sorry.”

“It might not have gotten through, if you hadn’t forced it,” Vini reasoned. “So it was a good thing; you did good here.”

“Yes,” Em agreed, adding, “thank you,” and even giving Eizel a big hug of thanks before once again returning to her daughter’s side.

The headache was from all of Zin’s memories flooding back pretty much all at once.

“A couple of aspirin and some rest are probably the best things for a headache,” Em reasoned, drawing the curtains to darken the room while Luis sprinted downstairs to get the aspirin.

“Oh, hi Birch,” Zin said, suddenly noticing him in the hall as Luis returned with the aspirin. (This served as proof that she had truly gotten her memories back; otherwise, she wouldn’t have known who he was.) “Did I just yell that?” Zin added wincing since the words, spoken in a fairly normal tone, had just sliced into her brain like a knife.

“Okay, everybody out,” Em said in as hushed a tone as possible, since Zin needed both quiet and rest.

As the group from the bedroom (minus Zin) gathered downstairs in the kitchen with the puck family and Halli, everyone was fairly stunned that the answer to the Memory Hypnoid problem was as easy as a gifted person simply employing her gift.

“You know what this means,” Birch said. “Eizel can cure other people infected by this malice.”

In addition to being stunned by the sudden curing of her daughter, Em was also slightly surprised that Eizel’s gift had gotten through the protection of the sapphire ring, which had proved plenty strong enough over the years to keep even powerful demons from planting thoughts. In truth, the ring might have prevented Eizel from influencing Zin’s mind in times past, but her powers in recent weeks had been growing.

“It’s interesting to note that the Memory Hypnoid didn’t fully erase the lost memories,” Eizel said, “because I thought that’s what it was

supposed to do. But the memories were evidently just blocked somehow, or pushed out of the way.”

“So even clever sorcerers and gifted biochemists can’t erase memories entirely,” Luis input, pondering.

Vini was nodding as she offered with a smile, “The brain is designed by God; and it’s more complex than any earthly scientists, doctors, sorcerers, and such can figure out, or fully manipulate.”

Magsen had just arrived home and was overjoyed to discover Zin to be healed and whole, albeit with a splitting headache, which Em would end up helping to fix for good a little later using a couple of wordsmith tricks to get Zin’s brain to relax and more fully rest itself.

The unicorn presence of Vini ended up adding an interesting dimension to the gathering, as everyone in the room had the sudden revelation as to one reason why this had happened to Zin. “So that we could know for sure that the gift of one person can overcome the gift of another, if it’s powerful enough,” Em voiced.

Vini’s presence also helped lift Magsen’s spirits, which were already much lightened from visiting her parents; but this served to get her pretty much back to her normal, happy self. In fact, she was practically dancing and singing inside.

The group all had a noontime meal together (Em taking a lunch tray up to Zin), with Vini, Eizel, and Birch leaving shortly after that.

Naya had actually been skeptical of Eizel up to this point, and had been keeping a close and careful eye on her. Now, after this, it would be easier for the thunderbird to more fully trust Birch’s new friend. In truth, this event would help gain the trust of many towards Eizel, which might have been another reason why God allowed this to happen to Zin. He always has a plan, even for the bad things that happen to us; and He always promises to work all things for our good (as per Romans 8:28), if we just let Him.

Zin herself would shortly come to a similar reasoning, in telling herself, *This is proof that God never lets anything happen to us that He hasn’t already provided a solution for. But we sometimes have to wait for solutions, for God’s perfect timing, because everything He ever does is perfect.*

Chapter Ten

Oodus Becoming Newdus

Zin was feeling much better the next morning, but decided to stay home and rest for the day, to ensure that the headache wouldn't return. She would end up mainly strolling in the gardens and watching the magic show with Magsen while Luis returned home to get a few things done.

With Zin and Luis waiting on their next miracle, this might be a good time to look in on Winston, who, on his break from work, ended up spending some time with his birth mother and brother (both of whom he had only just met recently), his adoptive parents being just fine with this since they felt Winston was old enough to make up his own mind about this sort of thing. While he felt a little awkward at first, Winston ended up having loads of fun, especially in watching various sports, which the self-sustaining communities had a great many of, both team and individual. The events weren't televised (because a system for this wasn't in place at this time), but many people traveled to attend various games and competitions. Plus, walnut broadcasts were common, and were thrilling enough to be thoroughly enjoyed, as Winston soon discovered. Although basketball was his favorite sport, he enjoyed attending a wrestling tournament with his brother, along with an equestrian event, and a volleyball match in Kiana's community. She, of course, didn't participate in sports, as she didn't think it would be fair to have such a physical advantage over others.

Spending time on Lion Mountain, and in other self-sustaining settlements, got Winston thinking about how things were in the cities versus how they were outside. *It's not so bad outside*, he decided, *and the people are pretty nice*. Having been brainwashed for so long, like many young people are in schools, by the media, and even just from living mainly sheltered amongst their own kind (in Winston's case, the elite), it was often hard for folks to conceive that people are pretty much the same everywhere; and that it's often simply our manner of

interacting and our attitudes that set us apart and cause friction. Of course, Winston had already been learning how to interact better with others (and think better of them) due to his parents developing a recent friendship with a commoner family in Supe-10 that even Winston no longer looked down his nose upon. Nor did he still think of them as commoners, but more just as friends. Winston ended up introducing his parents to Ethan and Holly Stanley one afternoon when the pair was invited to come to have coffee at the Hardcastles' apartment in the city.

With regard to Winston being saved, he was starting to think of how his parents also needed to be saved so that they, like he, could avoid Eternal Death and inherit Eternal Life. This was according to what he was learning from the bible, and from asking questions of people like Ethan and Holly.

"Because through Jesus is the only way Eternal Life can happen," Winston related to his mother one day. Mr. and Mrs. Hardcastle had already been hearing some of this from their new friends, but even more decided to take an interest when their own son, whom they knew to be incredibly intelligent, began bringing up the subject. If he could reason out that the Gospel was Truth, then they certainly should make an effort to at least look into the matter.

While Winston did know certain Truths, he hadn't quite figured everything out yet and was not quite yet interested in improving all that much. (Sometimes we keep the Holy Spirit subdued, or just ignore the Spirit's leadings.) For instance, he was still friends with Tanner, and could even empathize with him. Of course, to hear Tanner tell of it, he was never an instigator in any of his conflicts with the godly (Winston's brother included); rather, he was always out simply minding his own business when these people just set upon him, for no reason.

As far as Winston not thinking the sorcerers in general to be all that bad, well, he would eventually learn, as quite a few sorcerers themselves had over the years, which was why so many had turned to Jesus; Luis, for one. Even Telén Mayhew, the sorcerer in charge of all the U.S. Supercities and work camps (the Governor Ruler and head of the Council of Twos), was converted, this being a great secret at this time; though he would end up being exposed, actually not too long after Heather ended up getting found out.

We shouldn't be too hard on Winston; after all, he was progressing; just not as fast as Eizel, this being understandable not only because Winston was younger by several years, but also because we are all individuals. Plus, God's plan for each of us is completely individual; and sometimes the plan doesn't include being a model Christian right off the bat, because we each need time to learn and grow. The important part is to pray and read the bible, and then just strive to do our best while following God's leadings as closely as possible.

Winston ended up spending a day at the twin plantations, where his brother had officially moved to in recent weeks; though Ethan was still going back home to visit his mom a lot, in being concerned about her living entirely on her own. While at Laurelstone, specifically to see the horses and get to ride one (which was really exciting), Winston was given a supply of Shatter Whammy kernels to carry. This was perfect timing because he ended up crossing paths with three teraphim the very next day when back home in Supe-10. Two had been posing as a mortar-and-pestle set in the home of one of Winston's neighbors, and the other had been impersonating a red wasp outside. Upon finding three popped kernels in his pocket, Winston was quite amazed. From communicating with his brother by walnut, he discovered Ethan to have dealt with three teraphim himself in recent days. One had been posing as a vase, another as a pendant on a necklace, and the third as a child's marble. Over the next couple of weeks, Winston would end up taking out four more teraphim, one in his natural clay-man state, with the others having taken on the forms a katydid insect, a kitchen trivet, and a golden tortoise beetle.

Back at Doyle Mansion the next morning, Zin checked her foreshard and the Sage Key, but got nothing. So after doing a few chores, she decided to just read the bible in her room for a time. At one point looking out the window on a break, she saw a lovely redbird sitting in a backyard bush and standing out very prominently because this was a male, brightly colored. The sight prompted Zin to read a poem she had noticed listed in the contents of her mother's poetry book.

The Snow Bunting and the Cardinal

A snow bunting and a cardinal happened one day to meet,
Over a winter stubble field with stalks of corn and wheat.

As they passed in the air, each decided to have their say,
In lilts and chirps to complement the brightness of the day.

The stubble field was nicely fringed by rail, rock, bush, and tree,
Upon which critters often perched to have a good looksee.
The birds soon landed on a branch to further their discourse,
And to peer at a nearby blanketed grazing farm horse.

“Why are you so loudly red?” the bunting wanted to know.
“The color makes you stand out so amongst the piles of snow.”
“I was made this way,” the cardinal replied in tweet and chink.
“I think it’s much better than being a pale milky pink.”

“Perhaps,” the snow bunting answered, “but I still wonder why.
You can’t hide from the kestrel, or the merlin hawk, like I.”
“You have colors too,” the redbird twittered, “there on your back,
Looking like a brown saddle, or maybe a storage pack.”

“Up high, my underneath blends with clouds to camouflage me.
Sitting, my back looks like ground patches, or bark on a tree.
So you see, I’m made to hide from the likes of hawk and fox;
But you’re like a bullseye, or a bow on a Christmas box.”

“I live in thickets,” the redbird said. “Foxes and large fowl
Are stopped by the thorns and brambles, even the strongest owl.”
“But in the open,” the bunting cried, “you’re a sitting duck.
Can you evade a screech owl out here? Well, I wish you luck.”

Though it is not at all a kindly thing, to criticize,
The redbird did decide to remark on the bunting’s size.
“You are a lot smaller than I am, probably by half.
So the thought of you evading an owl; well, I might laugh.”

The blanketed farm horse, shaking his head, was listening in.
To the bunting, he said, “What about your bright blue cousin?
The indigo can hardly be hid from anyone’s view.
And the painted bunting; isn’t he your relative too?”

The horse addressed the redbird next, in equally strong word.
“Do you really think it’s better to be a bigger bird?
That means you have to eat more in order to stay alive,
So each new day two times harder than he you have to strive.”

Both the bunting and the cardinal took this scolding to heart;
And so, from being critics, they decided to depart.
Instead, they shared some apple peels and wildflower seed,
Brought to the field by people who the birds they like to feed.

The fat farm cat also liked to visit the winter field,
To see what the corn and wheat stubbles, and bushes, might yield.
The cat didn't notice the bunting that had taken flight;
Nor did he give the colorful redbird much of a fright.

As the bird into a brambly hedgerow thicket did race,
One full of long thorns fit to tear the ears and poke the face,
The cat gave up the chase to merely yawn and lick his paws,
And groom the whiskers on either side of his jowly jaws.

When the snow bunting and the cardinal chanced once more to meet,
Over the winter stubble field with stalks of corn and wheat,
The bunting simply remarked, "You're such a bright pretty red;
I like the way you decorate the roof of the tool shed."

"I almost missed seeing you there," the cardinal did reply.
"You're such a stealthy traveler against the cloud-filled sky.
Come, let us share some peels and seeds, and also a nice chat;
Then we can visit the farm horse, and maybe tease the cat."

Upon finishing the poem, Zin got to thinking. There was something about the style of writing in both *Graham Rumpole* and in her mother's poetry that reminded her of something. However, she couldn't think of what that something was because it was out of reach of her brain at the moment, like something she had forgotten and needed to remember, but couldn't. *This isn't related to the Memory Hypnoid*, she decided, correctly as it were because it was actually more like not being able to connect the dots as far as figuring something out. *It's so maddening when this happens*, Zin's mind whined.

A little fearful that her headache might return, she ended up letting the thoughts go, opting instead for a stroll outside where she found something quite exciting happening on the front lawns, in the form of Lista carving on three dozen boulders that had just been brought in by bigfoots.

Em was outside as well and was scolding somewhat over there being *so many* boulders, while Lista was shaking her head and rolling

her eyes. In her view, there weren't too many because, as she carved them, into kooky-looking creatures with good-natured expressions, she was going to bring them to life. So they were going to be scattered about the neighborhood, eventually, to help provide protection. As Lista mimed her plan, with Pipac gesturing too to help add to the story, Em shortly began nodding in agreement. With the increase in the numbers of flash dragons these days, there was no denying that more help was needed to protect the neighborhood. And living boulders were a perfect choice, since rocks could withstand fire better than most other materials.

“Okay, carry on,” Em said, receiving a smile and a somewhat superior, I-know-best look from Lista, which was actually true in this case.

But how could a little puck troll less than one year old actually know best? Em's brain wondered in amazement, not even touching on how tiny Lista could even manage to carve boulders at her age, let alone thirty-six of them in what would turn out to be a mere two weeks.

In the end, Em simply chalked the amazing feat up to the powers of magical creatures getting stronger, just as the gifts of human beings were getting stronger; and she could only imagine that this meant the Endtimes were near, or that the earth was already in a portion of them, which many people believed these days.

Lista was destined to be a stone carver, in the same way her mother was a sculptress and her father a sketch artist and painter. (Plus, Pipac and Kisi both liked to blow glass, weave baskets, draw, and make jewelry.) Eventually, instead of working at home all the time, Lista would end up doing some of her carving in abandoned quarries. And as far as some of her carved boulders staying at Doyle Mansion, these were mainly stationed outside the walls of the estate, so that when they wanted to roam, they didn't end up trampling the gardens or doing other damage from being so large and heavy. The boulders did prove an excellent deterrent to flash dragons that were often targeted and brought down with large rocks and chunks of rubble, which the living boulders had no difficulty throwing.

Checking her foreshard the next morning, Zin was thrilled to be given a new vision relating to the miracles; and when she contacted Luis, he was excited that this was going to be another time-travel trip.

The ninth miracle evidently had to do with the wormlike magical creatures known as oodus that liked to work in the underground libraries of the world. Generally ranging in size when lying flat from about two-and-a-half feet high to nearly eight feet tall, with lengths varying from as short as about six feet to as long as fifteen, the oodus looked much like monarch butterfly caterpillars as far as their general shape and markings. With regard to their work in libraries, the oodus were not only adept at carrying people and loads of books, but also at tunneling through rock, which they enjoyed eating.

Again, Zin and Luis would be going back in time by genie grapevine, after first making a stop at Laurelstone to coax one of the oodus working in the Labyrinth Library to come with them on their trip. This was not difficult because the creatures were able to communicate telepathically much as wind horses and thunderbirds could; plus, oodus were notoriously helpful. Luis and Zin were careful to select a smaller specimen, one about waist high and around eight feet long, to ask to accompany them.

While oodus were just as fast on land as they were in the library tunnels (with top speeds reaching around sixty mph), they couldn't fly. Since Westerwing wasn't quite built to carry such a creature, Zin and Luis engaged the help of Lyydu, Charlie's thunderbird protector who happened to be in the area for the day. Easily twice the size of most rookhs, Lyydu had no trouble carrying the oodu, who seemed to enjoy his time up in the air on the thunderbird's back as they soared about looking for a grapevine entrance, which Lyydu was actually the first to spot in a hilly area of Montana.

As they landed, and as the oodu slipped from his back, Lyydu, by thought, bid his friends farewell, afterwards quickly departing to head to Wharton Farm for the rest of the morning.

The oodu had no trouble traversing the scrolling tendrils of the grapevine alongside Luis, with Zin in the lead from using the Sage Key to guide them. At one point in their travels, they passed a boy spreesprite hard at work pruning a section of the vines. Zin only became aware of the little gardener when Luis tapped her on one shoulder to get her to pause so that she might notice the tiny fairy, barely over half an inch in height. Spreesprites generally tended to ignore other creatures; however, because visitors to the grapevine were

so rare, this one ended up giving a wave to Zin, Luis, and the oodu, before once more returning to his pruning task.

Spreesprites themselves were something of a rarity, so much so that Luis had only seen three others in all his long years on earth; and Zin had never seen one before, though she had in recent months read up on spreesprites from being curious about one called Figlin that liked to secretly visit Linn in his lab. The one pruning in the grapevine on this day was named Weyland. Boy spreesprites took turns tending the genie grapevine; and while Weyland had had a recent turn, he was taking an extra one now in order to skip a couple in the future because his wife was expecting their first child and he was planning to be at home more after she delivered.

Moving on, the time travelers shortly exited in a semi-forested valley full of mist in an unknown mountainous location. They were in an unknown time period as well, but had come far enough back for Zin to wonder if this might be perhaps even before the Great Flood. She had deduced this from the reason they were there, the information of which she had gotten from her foreshard and had already shared with Luis and the oodu. They were there to track down an ancient oodu so that the present-day one could learn something extremely important from his ancestor, namely, how to transform into a butterfly-like creature, which was evidently something newer oodus had lost the know-how to do.

Scooting about the valley, the oodu, with Zin and Luis following as quickly as possible, was able to find one of his ancestors tucked under a cliff overhang. The ancient oodu was roughly three times the size of the one visiting from the future.

After the oodus introduced themselves to one another, what followed was something of a telepathic question-and-answer session between the two, the details of which Zin and Luis couldn't quite discern because the thoughts were flying too quickly. However, the humans could feel bits of the discussion on their brains, like swift breezes rippling through their minds.

Moving away from the overhang a short distance, so as not to interfere with the conversing oodus, Zin was practically giddy over how far back they might have traveled. "Maybe even before the earth tilted on its axis, when there weren't any seasons," she speculated, basing this

idea on the mild climate, which made it difficult to discern what season it might be.

Most scientists believed the earth at one time had not been tilted (or had been tilted differently), but that some catastrophic event had caused the tilt, such as a gigantic meteor hit. And some theologians speculated that this happened during a war between the angels, fallen ones versus godly ones, and that the gigantic hit might have been Satan himself (as a powerful and star-like heavenly body) being thrown down to the earth by God.

In basically three minutes, the newer oodu evidently had all that he needed from his ancestor, and the two were nodding farewell to one another.

Amazingly, the grapevine wreath had stayed in place, so there was no need to search for an entrance. Just before stepping through to make their way home, they spotted a behemoth across the valley. This made Zin smile in thinking of her Uncle Otto, whose favorite of all magical creatures was the behemoth. This one was nearly twice as large as any Zin and Luis had ever seen. Fishing in her pack for her camera, Zin managed to take a snap of the creature just before he transformed to his smaller self, looking much like a cottontail rabbit but perhaps slightly furrier and with a fluffier tail.

Upon entering the grapevine, Luis suddenly thought to ask, “If this is one of the miracles, what’s the miracle?”

“That will happen at home,” Zin replied, smiling, because she had been keeping the miraculous part as a surprise.

It was no accident (but rather Providence) that they exited the grapevine in Mississippi and very near the Inn at Magnolia Hills, which held an entrance to the Magnolia Archive, a library nearly as vast as the one beneath the twin plantations. In a large cavern chamber of the library, with Zin and Luis standing by, the oodu gathered twenty-seven others of his kind in order to share information with them gleaned from the ancient oodu.

While the exchange was going on, Zin quietly told Luis, “For some reason, the oodus at a certain time in history all went under ground, so they didn’t need to transform. Now, it’s time for at least some of them to live more the way their ancestors lived, above ground and even in the skies.

After roughly four minutes, the explaining oodu had managed to procure three volunteers from amongst his audience to engage in the proposed metamorphoses, at which point, Luis and Zin needed to get involved. They both knew quicken spells, which served to speed up the whole process for the three oodus, from silk spinning to chrysalis to emerging totally transformed; thus, what was meant to take about two weeks ended up happening basically in three minutes flat.

Although Zin and Luis knew what was going to happen, both were tremendously awed by the transformations. Not only were the sizes of the butterfly-like creatures incredible (ranging between eight and twelve feet high), the colors and markings were absolutely spectacular.

So they didn't turn out like monarchs, Zin's mind mused in wonder, as she might have assumed based on the oodus' original markings. In truth, though starting off similar when in caterpillar form, the transformed oodus would end up as varied as a whole range of traditional butterflies, and perhaps even fancier (if that's even possible, since butterflies are pretty fancy already).

The ones that had just hatched out were incredibly fancy, and very different from one another. The largest was a shimmering blue and green, with gray and purple markings adorning the edges of fringed forewings and lacy hindwings. The middle-sized one was bright yellow, with orange and brown markings and a long curving tail that split into multicolored curlicues at the very tips. The smallest of the three was extra fuzzy in colors of bright pink and creamy white, with huge blue forewing eyespots and a series of bulb shapes along antennae whose ends sported flowery yellow projections.

The changed oodus were going to be called newdus, in order to be distinguished from their earlier forms. The three left one at a time through a natural cavern chimney that, although large, was just barely big enough to fit the enormous fluttering creatures who were off to spread the word about how to become newdus. So too were the remaining oodus in the cavern planning to spread the news, by various means including their telepathic powers, which could actually reach others of their kind at great distances. While many oodus would choose not to transform, a healthy percentage would. Thus, newdus would shortly become plentiful in the world; and because the oodus had always enjoyed giving people rides, the newdus would as well,

achieving even faster airspeeds (by more than quadruple) than the earthbound early versions of themselves.

The oodu that had traveled with Zin and Luis didn't need help getting home because the tunnels of the Magnolia Archive actually connected to those of the Labyrinth Library. Thus, bidding his human friends goodbye via a thought message, he soon set off.

Heading toward Doyle Mansion, Zin and Luis were mostly quiet, from the incredible experience of bringing something so amazing from the past into the future, and even getting to see it come to perfect and exquisite fruition.

While dropping Zin off at home, and after assuring her that he was on call for the next miracle, Luis also let her know that he had promised to go to a soccer match the next afternoon with a friend. Plus, he wanted to help Bernadette with a couple of projects. (While the blacksmith didn't actually need anyone's help, Luis wanted to learn some metalworking skills.) Since Zin didn't want to totally monopolize his time, she of course encouraged Luis to spend as much time as he wanted to with his friends.

In her bedroom, with the oodus' ancestors and the idea of transformation on the brain, Zin got to thinking of how early man was much different than present-day man, a purer creature that not only lived much longer, but perhaps even had the ability to heal his or her self. *We've been decaying ever since the time of Adam and Eve*, her mind told her.

But we're supposed to transform, she decided, specifically thinking of her Aunt Vini, and even to a certain extent her mother, who had in recent months been taking on more of a glow than at any time previously. *If we get back to some of our ancient ways, maybe more of us can transform*, Zin told herself. *But the only way to transform to good is through a relationship with Jesus Christ, and having that relationship is a choice. God isn't going to force it on us because we have free will. He expects us to choose it; then He will transform us, if we don't fight against it.*

Next taking up her bible, as she turned pages, Zin was drawn to Roman 12:2. "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." *So the key to transforming is*

in the brain, Zin reasoned. And that's where all the unicorns are hiding, and where a door to Quintessence lies.

Ephesians 4:24 also drew Zin's attention. "...and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."

Finally, as she flipped pages, a quote from Jesus in John 3:3 jumped out at her. "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

The emphasis is on being saved, Zin's mind told her. That's what's really important, because we can't improve and become what God wants us to be unless we're saved. To her way of thinking, this explained why the unsaved, no matter how hard some of them tried to transform into do-gooders, couldn't make any real progress. *Even if they are wildly successful by the world's standards, they can't truly do good; and so they will always be searching for meaning in life, but will always come up empty.*

After making a few notes in her journal about the oodus becoming newdus, Zin jotted down a few things relating to the genie grapevine. They had passed through a couple of dormant sections—without leaves, blossoms, or fruit—in which Zin remembered something her Aunt Vini had shared with her. Although the grapevine was called such, it was related to wisteria as much as to grapes. Since both grapes and wisteria go through winter dormancy, the leaves, blossoms, and fruit were all seasonal. But because the grapevine was running through time, only certain sections were barren. Zin found these stretches of woody vines, twisted into interesting sculptural shapes, to be just as beautiful as the areas of lush greenery holding blossoms and fruit.

As far as the significance of newdus to the future, this would involve more than just giving rides to people because the skills of the creatures would end up extending far beyond that. In keeping with enjoying eating rocks as oodus, the newdus were largely impenetrable to things like the fire of flash dragons, the acid spit by nyregs, and even the energy blasts and projectiles the sorcerers often liked to launch.

Kiana was actually getting this information from an auto-writing session, which she would eventually share with Zin and others. So too did she learn that the scorching heat of the sun didn't bother newdus; so they, like cloudbirds, could provide shade protection for various

creatures and plants in certain hotspots. Another power had to do with the human brain, as the telepathic powers of the newdus could serve to awaken a correct sense of right and wrong in people who had either lost this innate ability from giving in to their own sin nature, or who had been brainwashed by various aspects of popular culture into believing certain wrongs were right, and vice versa. Along the same lines, newdus were going to be able to open some minds that had been shut by powerful delusions, thus uncovering the memory of Truth, and thereby giving both hope and a future to many.

The final piece of information Kiana got while auto-writing was in keeping with Zin's thoughts about how human beings were meant to transform during their lives. In a similar manner to the metamorphoses of the oodus into newdus, people were definitely meant to change during their lives from being creatures of the earth, to ones more suitable for life in the heavens. *We're supposed to transform to show what kinds of citizens we're going to be in heaven*, Kiana thought as she put down her pen.

Eizel had been on Em's mind quite a lot for the past few days, mainly from Em being incredibly grateful to her for healing Zin. In considering some of the struggles that new believers go through, particularly as regards to the issues of sin and guilt, Em decided to give Eizel a book of her poetry, doing so the morning after the three oodus became newdus. Instead of using a message kite or dawn pigeon, Em asked Halli to take her to Supercity Ten so that she could in person deliver the book, which had two specific poems earmarked.

"I wrote these in my younger years," Em explained to Eizel who was pleasantly surprised by the visit. "They were the result of trying to work through both the consequences of past sins and the guilt from them, as a Christian, and coming to the conclusion that everything happens for a reason, even the bad things. Anyway, I just wanted you to have them, in case they might help you."

"Thank you," Eizel replied, also inviting Em to stay for coffee.

"Not today, but thank you; maybe next time," Em replied, bidding Eizel farewell with the triangle hand symbol.

After returning the hand symbol and closing the door, Eizel poured herself a cup of coffee before sitting down to read the first tagged poem.

The Shadows of Sin

We cannot run from the shadows of our sin.
If we take no notice of the voice within,
Then we will definitely hear God's footfalls,
On garden paths and sidewalks, in building halls.
Sin's consequences never fail to follow,
Leaving us to feel frustrated and hollow.
Whether quickly like a streaking red-tailed hawk,
Or slowly as though on a leisurely walk,
The shadows catch up, even overtaking,
Bringing storms we trace back to our own making.
Aside from the storms, guilt plays its vicious game,
Often handing to us a lifetime of shame.
We also tend to wonder what might have been
If we hadn't chosen to commit the sin.
That old saying of how the shadows are long,
Is as truthful as each day brings a new dawn.
Often no amount of recompense
Can help us of the guilt make sense,
As it lingers, even many a long year,
Causing us enormous doubt, pressure, and fear.
Even after we've asked for pardon in prayer,
Sometimes our hearts and souls continue to tear
At our insides, and sometimes even our out,
Since gray hairs are a sign, as are hives and gout;
Also the aching shoulder, or neck and back.
Feeding weakness too is a form of attack
By both the fleshly desires in our mind,
And he who preys on us and is never kind.
The devil, of course, wants torment to prolong,
Which is why he sings such a familiar song.
"You'll find your answer in a bottle or pill,
Or by hanging rope on that tree on the hill."
In listening to this, we tend to forget,
Our Heavenly Father knows our every regret.
Not one of our thoughts can be hidden from Him;
He knows when we're truly sorry for our sin.
Along with promising our sins to forget,
He's already pardoned each and every debt.
Trust in God's mercy gives power to banish
Our lengthy sin shadows that swiftly vanish
In the brightness and warmth sent down from above

By both the Father and His Most Wondrous Dove,
Whose protective shadow will follow instead,
As into the vast Eternity we're led.

Rereading "The Shadows of Sin" over the years would end up helping Eizel, as a reminder that God is ever near, and that He's already forgiven all of our sins—past, present, and future.

In being very appreciative of Em's unexpected visit and gift, Eizel smiled as she sipped coffee and read the second indicated poem.

Advising My Younger Self

If I could travel back in time, maybe for just one day,
I might visit my younger self, with a few things to say.
I'd give advice such as don't a particular bridge burn;
And don't, after a popular person, let your heart yearn.
Don't hold various grudges. Do let the little things go.
You'll be much happier if you do; believe me I know.
Also, if you spend a lot less time out in the bright sun,
You'll avoid getting skin cancer when you are fifty-one.
Beware, that girl is a bully; and that boy is a cad.
Don't even think of following that particular fad.
You don't need that new pair of shoes; save the money instead.
Same with jewelry; get that silly notion out of your head.
You'll avoid embarrassment if you learn to hold your tongue;
Otherwise, you'll pay the price for many a song that's sung.
Give more while expecting less; study harder; don't be proud;
Don't show off. And for goodness' sake, try not to be so loud.
Be more helpful to others; avoid greed and telling lies.
And strive to look at people with kind and generous eyes.
If you take everything I have offered to mind and heart,
From a lot of stress and insomnia you will depart.
However, even as more soundly, smoothly goes your life,
Something else will happen, something that cuts like a sharp knife.
From changes to experiences, I will disappear.
I am the sum of what's happened to you year upon year.
So you'll likely never meet me if you fix all the bad;
And now that I think about it, I would be rather sad
Not to exist at all, or be in such a different state
That to your future self, I could barely at all relate.
I've learned many lessons from my missteps, as we all should;
And I have learned to bear the bad things along with the good.

So I have had a change of heart as to what I might do,
If given the chance to go back in time and advise you.
I now think it is best that I choose not to go at all.
Or maybe just to help one time to catch you as you fall.
No, that is not a good idea either, to interfere,
Especially since Our Savior is already ever near.
As far as the better creature you might have turned into,
You won't be better to the One Who already loves you
Exactly as you are (and were) on each and every day,
Even with the mistakes you might have made along the way.
He never asked us to be perfect (in fact, we can't be),
But just to do our best to learn and grow, and strive to see
The Truth through many a worldly temptation and disguise.
He will help us to overcome; He'll help us to be wise.
So we simply need to trust Him to guide us as we age
Through life's ever-changing book that we're turning page by page.

The time-travel aspect of “Advising My Younger Self” was a little funny, since people could and regularly did travel back in time; but Em had considered over the years whether she would want to change her past, if she were allowed to. For instance, if she went back in time to save the lives of her birth parents, she never would have known her wonderful adoptive parents. Thus, she had firmly decided that any changes would not be wise, but rather foolish, because who knows what even one little change to history might bring about. Plus, the whole idea was a moot point because, unless directly ordered by God, time travelers were never allowed to go back and change things about their personal lives. Birch had recently wished for the opportunity to fix a past mistake, but was explicitly told no, by both God and the person in charge of the TKTs, which were what Time Key Travelers were still called even though some were time traveling by other means such as by unicorn and, now, the Magical Grapevine.

While Eizel found the poetry enjoyable and helpful, she was of course relying more on God's Word for answers, solace, and direction in her life. And so, putting aside the poetry book, she picked up her bible.

As she flipped pages, Romans 8:38-39 seemed to jump out at her. “For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor

depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Jeremiah 29:11 also provided an encouraging and reassuring message. “For I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

Eizel ended up attending an afternoon bible study having to do with the transformation Christians are supposed to make during their lives, the lesson being centered on 2 Corinthians 5:17. “Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.”

We transform by the way we think and act, Eizel reminded herself of the main point of the lesson as she was heading home.

As far as acting (with specific regard to use of her gift), in addition to what she had been doing in recent weeks—planting good and healing thoughts into the minds of distressed and hurting people—Eizel was basically on standby, waiting to hear of more Memory Hypnoid victims needing her help. Birch would most likely be the one letting her know of these cases, and he had offered to accompany her to treat them.

It's nice to be needed, Eizel thought, of the excellent motivation to keep looking forward in her life.

Chapter Eleven

Windows of Opportunity

The start of November was actually a little milder than October had been, at least less windy, though the nights were still fairly cold. Zin hadn't gotten anything from either her foreshard or the Sage Key for the past few days, so this turned out to be a perfect time for Luis to be busy with friends. While waiting for the next message pertaining to the Twelve Miracles, she too was keeping busy—in her lab, reading, and doing chores around the house and gardens. Taking a break from home life, she decided to visit Quin early one morning.

Landing her bike next to Netherwind's croquet lawn, Zin happened to notice Ethan and Winston in the distance on their way to a cafeteria to have breakfast. Ethan was wary of meeting Zin while Winston was with him, in knowing that she full well knew his brother to be the one responsible for creating the hypnoids. While Zin did recognize Winston, she chose to avoid an encounter, instead simply giving a short wave in Ethan's direction while heading to her Aunt Vini's cottage where she had planned to meet Quin.

Ethan recognized Zin's good judgment in avoiding a confrontation; however, he was rather dismayed that his brother had yet to show any good judgment with regard to the issue of the hypnoids. Even after having met Birch, a victim of the original hypnoid, Winston still seemed oblivious as to the problems and suffering he had caused.

Over breakfast, Ethan couldn't help saying, "You're lucky that girl who waved at us has a forgiving nature. Otherwise, you'd be in a lot of trouble because she's one of your victims, and she's a powerful magician."

"So she's the one Tanner is constantly talking about," Winston remarked. "She's always making trouble for him."

Shaking his head, because Winston still didn't seem to get it, Ethan went on to say, "You know she let him go any number of times when

she could have killed him. And she even helped him once when one of his own spells backfired on him.”

“No, I didn’t know that,” Winston answered.

“You don’t know a lot of things, Winston,” Ethan said in an exasperated tone. “You may be really brainy, but you’ve still got a lot to learn.”

“I wouldn’t want to get in the middle of their little war,” Winston stated.

“You *are* in the middle,” Ethan stressed, “because of your work for the sorcerers.”

“There are two sides to every story,” Winston countered.

“Oh, don’t throw your stupid clichés at me; you’ve only been getting one side and it’s the wrong one,” Ethan replied. “Despite what Tanner and others have led you to believe, these are good people, and they don’t deserve the kind of malice being directed at them by you and your city friends. I just hope, and pray, that eventually your mind will be opened and you’ll see the truth.” (In truth, Winston was starting to see certain things, but wasn’t quite ready to admit them to himself.)

After taking a pause and a deep breath to cool down, Ethan added, “Thank goodness she got her memories back.”

Winston could barely believe what he was hearing. While he knew about the counter for the original hypnoid, he didn’t think anything could neutralize the memory one. After being dumbfounded for about thirty seconds, he said, “So, she’s completely cured?” (He had assumed she still had missing memories, but was just being sheltered from the sorcerers.)

Ethan knew better than to tell his brother exactly how Zin had gotten her memories back because this would have put Eizel in danger. The sorcerers would eventually find out; but by that time, Eizel would already be living in one of the self-sustaining communities. In fact, Birch was shortly planning to discuss with her the need to move out of Supercity Ten to possibly a ranch or a farm; and maybe her parents too, for safety’s sake. Eizel would wholeheartedly agree, especially since she could clandestinely return to Supe-10 at any time to attend bible studies and check on the elderly people she was now friends with.

But in truth, the Memory Hypnoid wasn’t destined to be used for very much longer anyway because Eizel wasn’t the only force that

could counter it. Since she couldn't cover the whole world, and sorcerers around the globe were starting to use the hypnoid, God, in the very near future, would end up engaging sylphs (air spirits), whose abilities had been growing in recent years. Sylphs had long been able to influence thoughts; now, with heightened powers, they could easily restore memories. And being incredibly fast, they were able to cover great distances in mere seconds.

A super-enhanced sense of smell was in keeping with the "air" aspect of sylphs, who could easily sniff out the chemical used in the Memory Hypnoid. A specific younger sylph named Egykor, who had actually once lived in Supercity Ten, would prove particularly adept not only at catching the scent of victims, but also ampules, which were no trouble to relieve the sorcerers of (by windy powers), along with various propel-tubes.

Of course, sylphs like to visit people for many reasons. For instance, they can calm our fears, encourage us, soothe troubled minds, block demon-planted thoughts, help us work out problems, and even impart pleasant dreams. But the trick to getting a sylph to visit involves opening a window once in a while. Throughout history, sylphs have been known to visit houses with open windows, while avoiding ones whose windows are always closed. So, in addition to getting fresh air, cracking our windows more often might actually result in fresher thoughts.

With regard to the Memory Hypnoid, along with Eizel's work, sylphs would render the sorcerers' efforts completely useless in a mere two months' time. (Godliness always reigns supreme over evil; we have the Lord's assurance of this.) And as far as who was getting infected, God was in complete control of this, as He is everything. In fact, several of the sorcerers' intended targets ended up developing sudden fevers, so that their body temperatures were off, thus not allowing the Memory Hypnoid ampules to break as they were meant to.

Winston had actually been working on a third type of hypnoid, the notes pertaining to which were recorded in the almanac that he had earlier lamented the loss of. (This was the burned book Luis and Zin had found, that Luis restored and then found missing.) The first hypnoid forced people to act in various ways without their knowledge, basically making them into robots designed to work, commit murder,

steal, spy, etc. The second erased memories to create a blank slate so that people could be reprogrammed in certain ways or be made to believe certain things. The third was intended to produce intelligent and aggressive fighters by enhancing specific brain workings and character traits.

By Winston's earlier misguided thinking, the new hypnoid would have been an improvement on the first two. However, in spending time with his brother, and in reasoning out a few things about what it actually means to be a Christian, he was now coming to the conclusion that his work might well be on the wrong track. And he was even starting to consider what his skills might accomplish in a field such as medicine. Thus, at this point, Winston didn't consider his missing almanac to be any big deal, especially since no one else could use the notes because many of them were in his own private code of shorthand that only he could decipher. He had started thinking along these lines after talking to Birch who had evidently needed to have counseling after being hypnoid infected. So while Ethan thought nothing was getting through to his brother, certain things were actually getting through. It just sometimes takes a while for information to sink in, and for people to change. This is, of course, part of growing up, as it often takes many of us a long time to get over being selfish and recognize that we're not the center of the universe and that other people are important too.

At the same time Zin was visiting Quin, and the two were braiding each other's hair (Zin by magic and Quin just by using her hands), Eizel and Birch were on their way atop Naya to an earthship community in Idaho to cure a Memory Hypnoid victim, a fifteen-year-old boy. Eizel was smiling as they flew. Though of course she wasn't happy for someone being afflicted, she was thrilled to be doing something so useful with her gift.

Zin did a little schoolwork after she got home. When she tired of working geometry problems and reading short stories by Tolstoy, she headed down to her lab. Pleased that she no longer needed to work on a counter for the Memory Hypnoid (which would have been futile because Eizel and the sylphs were always meant to be the counters), Zin decided to have a look at the blueprint she had gotten from her older self.

“It’s a foreshard enhancer,” Zin said, amazed, after studying the plans for about twenty minutes.

“Really?” asked Magsen who had been reading in one of the book aisles. “I would have thought a foreshard was complex enough; I didn’t think it could be enhanced.”

“I wouldn’t have thought so either,” Zin replied. “But evidently it can be, and evidently God wants me to be able to do this now, rather than later.”

“I think His plans are often flexible,” Magsen responded.

Zin was starting to think this as well. “To take into account all kinds of variables in the universe, I imagine,” she answered.

While the blueprint was incredibly complex, she was able to complete the project in basically two days.

In the form of a small disc inserted into the bottom of her foreshard, the enhancer allowed Zin to see not only future events, but past and present as well. It could also act as a detector for entrances to the Magical Grapevine, so that she wouldn’t have to hunt for a wreath window by sight when God led her to time travel in this way. The enhancer could also serve the function of letting Zin know when to exit the grapevine, thus eliminating the need to carry the Sage Key, which actually needed to be returned to Vini for use by various others, including several leaders of the Underground Army.

Since we travel to the past sometimes, it makes sense to be able to see past events, Zin reasoned, very pleased with the new tool God had provided for her. She was perhaps most surprised at being able to see present events such as her mother baking in the kitchen and Luis at a soccer match with his friend.

So whatever God wants me to see—past, present, or future—I’ll now get to see, Zin thought, as she next viewed a scene of Tanner out on an airbike. *So I can better counter some of Tanner’s mischief; that’s why I’m allowed to see this.*

On a whim, when looking into her foreshard, Zin said aloud, “Show me Devin Helm.” When an image of Devin sitting at a table and eating a sandwich suddenly appeared in the crystal, she was incredibly surprised; as was Magsen nearby whose mouth had actually fallen open.

After a moment of startled silence, Zin said somewhat defensively to her protector, “I’m not planning to look in on him when he’s in the

shower. It's just so I can know what he's up to some of the time, to be able stop some of the evil in the world."

Having simply been startled (like Zin), Magsen actually didn't have any sort of problem with this; in fact, she smiled when her charge said, "So, when the enhancer is activated, it's going to show me people I'm thinking of, or ask to see. That's pretty neat."

On the same day Zin completed the enhancer, Ethan ended up saving the life of Winston's father who had accompanied his son to a mothership settlement to meet up with Ethan to see an afternoon soccer match. No sooner had two rookhs dropped the pair off by the soccer stands and departed, than an albino puma the size of a small house attacked, heading directly for Mr. Hardcastle. Ethan, on the approach to Winston and his dad, ended up sprinting to head off the puma. Unable to draw his mirror weapon quickly enough, Ethan was severely slashed by claws over two feet long on the cat's front left paw. While this would have proved fatal to anyone else, Ethan's body swiftly healed itself due to his Fifty-One Medallion, the powerful magical object he always carried that allowed him fifty-one chances each year to cheat death.

Although many people had powerful gifts like super hearing, shapeshifting abilities, or incredible footspeed, Ethan had none of these. Nor did he have an assigned protector such as a wind horse or thunderbird. But God was providing him with a certain amount of protection in the form of the medallion, produced several years back by a bagical.

Five people attending the soccer match ended up taking out the puma using flutes and ropes before the cat could manage to slash, bite, or pounce on anyone else.

When the fray was over, and rookhs were carrying away parts of the dead cat to various communities to be used as dogfood, Winston, in an awestruck tone, managed to say to his brother, "You used one of your chances to save my dad. Thank you."

Mr. Hardcastle was also very grateful, especially since he somehow knew that Ethan would have acted the same way even without the safety net of his medallion, this being a fact Winston also surmised from lately getting to know something about his brother's character. So this was another thing that helped to set Winston on a better path—considering

that his brother was actually willing to die for someone he didn't even know very well. And even though Mr. Hardcastle, if killed by the puma, might have been brought back by dragon tears, there was never any guarantee of this, especially since the cat might have carried the body off to someplace where it couldn't easily be found. Albino pumas were notoriously secretive, often living deep in caverns and seldom emerging, so this would have been perfectly possible.

At around the same time the puma was being killed, Heather, out of breath and in something of a panic, was arriving at Doyle Mansion by rookh to ask for Zin's help. From spying on Tanner, she had just gotten wind of a necromancer in Sweden planning something incredibly nefarious that Heather felt only a powerful magician might be able to counter.

"His name is Largen Bothware," Heather began in a strained and hurried voice, "and he's only one step away from finishing a spell that can raise all fallen demons from the past five centuries—those killed by ancient metals, unicorn light, magical weapons, accidents, and so forth. He's planning to raise all of them, millions upon millions, which means mankind won't stand a chance if they all get raised at once."

Zin could definitely get why Heather was so panicked; in fact, she was starting to feel some of this herself.

"Largen is friends with Tanner," Heather went on, her voice still sounding stressed and hurried. "You know they all share secrets, resources, and whatnot." (Zin was nodding.) "Well, he's only waiting for Tanner to bring him some sort of rare plant pod called a pliva that is poison to most creatures; but it can revive demons, like in some super-nourishing way. So as soon as Largen has that, he'll be able to enact the spell."

Zin's brain had been working even as Heather was talking. She couldn't counter a spell like this after it was enacted; no one could because of the individual imprint of the spell. Even a sorcerer couldn't undo the magic of another sorcerer unless it was something incredibly simple, which this obviously wasn't. Therefore, Largen needed to be stopped, or possibly Tanner before reaching his friend to deliver the rare plant pod.

"I'll go with you," Heather said, "but I'm not sure how much help I'll be." The rookh that had brought Heather was standing by.

“We’ll have to hurry,” Zin said, calling by thought to Magsen, who was by her side in a flash.

As she was hopping aboard, Zin used her newly-enhanced foreshard to locate Tanner, who was displayed in the present time in the crystal as handing what appeared to be a long, purplish seed pod to a man wearing traditional sorcerer robes and who looked to be roughly forty years old. While the image was dismaying (because she feared they might be too late), Zin quickly took heart in knowing that God’s timing is always perfect. In this case, He had given her the means of easily tracking down this necromancer, whose exact location in Sweden was displayed in the foreshard in the form of a detailed map.

After crossing the Atlantic and reaching Europe (where it was already nighttime), following the map, Zin was able to give telepathic instructions to Magsen, who was soon landing alongside Heather’s rookh in front of a mid-sized two-story red house in the Supercity that had overtaken Stockholm and its surrounding areas.

The necromancer had his den in this house. Tanner had already left to return home by this time, which meant Heather and Zin weren’t going to have to deal with any interference from him; though this might not have been a problem anyway since the girls were both well shrouded, Heather from her natural gift, and Zin from use of one of Heather’s star sapphires. In order not to draw attention, Magsen and the rookh swiftly took to the skies, to circle and await instructions from Zin and Heather.

Sadly, the girls were about a minute too late in preventing the necromancer from enacting his spell, the form of which appeared as great clouds of inky darkness (fairly well visible by streetlights) seeping from the windows, doors, and even the home’s three chimneys. Although this dark energy would take roughly twenty hours to spread its long arms over the earth and locate the mostly miniscule, but nonetheless decrepit remains of all demons fallen in the past five centuries, the spell could not now be stopped.

Although Heather was practically in another panic over the implications of the inky clouds, Zin was remarkable calm. On the flight to Sweden, she had been thinking of a back-up plan, in case they were too late. She had briefly thought of calling Luis, but had decided against this, as she didn’t think he would be able to help. Then she

considered going back in time, just by an hour or so, to stop both Tanner and Largen. However, based on a nudging she was getting from the Holy Spirit inside her, Zin listened carefully to the small voice in the back of her head saying, *No, that's not right*. And so, her brain moved on to a third idea, which turned out to be the correct solution.

It had helped to have Luis slightly on her brain, because she chanced to remember the reversal spell he had used on the burned book. While Zin couldn't undo any specific spells of sorcerers, she suddenly realized how easy it would be to create a reversal spell for sorcerer spells in general.

"Don't worry," Zin told Heather who was practically shaking like a leaf beside her and therefore needed some soothing.

"No worries?" Heather said in a voice shaking about as much as her body as she looked to her friend for more reassurance.

"No, because this will be easy with mirror magic," Zin answered.

In fact, she only needed about thirty seconds of working with two small pieces of mirror plucked calmly from a vest pocket to create what she would later term her Reversion Hex. *An image in a mirror is always reversed*, Zin's mind mused, as she completed the hex and decided on granite stone dust (retrieved from another pocket) as the method of delivery, so as to make the spell as permanent as possible since granite rock is about as solid a sort of material as one could hope to find in the natural world.

When directed through an open window of the red house, Zin's dust-carried hex located the source of Largen's spell in a mere six seconds, at which point, the mirror magic caused the demon-raising magic to swiftly work backwards, to the extent that the sorcerer's spell completely reversed itself in two minutes flat.

Heather and Zin were both smiling as they watched the arms of oozing blackness stream back to the sorcerer's red house, and back through his windows, doors, and chimneys. The smiles ended up turning into laughter when they heard the sputtering cries of dismay from Largen inside the house when he realized something had just gone horribly wrong with his spell.

So that they wouldn't risk being found out, Zin and Heather by thought quickly called to Magsen and the rookh, who swiftly swooped down to whisk them away from the scene, unnoticed by Largen who

had come to a window to look out, but who only caught a glimpse of a golden flash and a darting dark shadow as the gryphon and rookh took off. Thus, he had no idea he had just been thwarted by a magician. In attempting to again raise the demons, several times over the next few days, he would always be unsuccessful because this particular spell of his was now permanently set to reverse, and would always end up undoing itself. While Zin's hex was a general one, whatever it managed to take hold of in any specific situation would always end up affected by the magic from that point on.

Heather accepted Zin's invitation to have dinner at Doyle Mansion, after which, she returned home by rookh, feeling largely satisfied with the day's events, though some had been, admittedly, rather stressful.

The next morning, Zin paid a visit to Marlon and Mr. P, who both lived and worked at the twin plantations. When she shared the details of the Reversion Hex with them, both were amazed that she was the first magician in history to have found a way around the issue of sorcerer imprints.

"I can't believe we never thought of simply getting sorcerer spells to undo themselves," Marlon told Mr. P.

"Sometimes the solutions to our biggest problems are just staring us in the face, but we just can't see them for some reason," Mr. P replied.

While magicians sometimes kept their secrets, the Reversion Hex definitely needed to be shared, so that others could help counter the sorcerers' magic. Zin would end up thinking that Vex Hex might have been a better name for the spell, since it ended up completely vexing many sorcerers' schemes, including a few of Tanner's.

Zin also showed her foreshard enhancer to her mentors, who were incredibly impressed because the magic needed to create the device was actually far beyond their abilities.

And speaking of the enhancer, Zin wasn't the only one creating new gadgets these days because Tanner had just completed work on one. Since he no longer had the star sapphire Heather had once given him, Tanner had decided to create a shroud of his own, called a cloak, based on the technology of stealth airbikes. In the form of a clip-on device no larger than a small belt buckle, he would end up using the cloak in the near future to spy on many people, including Heather and Telén Mayhew. Thus, Tanner was instrumental in their being exposed.

However, this didn't particularly matter because both Heather and Telén had more than served their purpose in the Supercities, and were ready to move on by the time they were found out as being traitors to the cause of the sorcerers. And with regard to Tanner's new device, Zin would end up developing a detector capable of exposing those using the cloak.

Chapter Twelve

The Remaining Miracles

The week before Thanksgiving, and on Tuesday to be exact, the neighborhood containing Doyle Mansion and the Galloway Estate was abuzz with early-morning excitement because several newdus in the area had just hatched out and were soaring about. Bigfoots and gnomes were out newdu watching like they might be for birds. Jenny, Otto, Em, Pizzo, and Kisi were all in the top of Jenny's gazebo with spyglasses and binoculars scanning for the lovely creatures. "Look, there's a lilac one!" Jenny exclaimed.

Zin might have been in the gazebo too, except for having just gotten a vision in her foreshard relating to the next miracle, which had prompted her to call Luis who was on his way to pick her up.

Magsen was destined to see four newdus on this day, while out on an errand delivering more batches of Shatter Whammy kernels to various communities who had actually run out of them in recent days. Although many teraphim had been dealt with, still quite a few more around the globe needed to be shattered.

The tenth miracle was evidently going to be a healing one, and the location was a self-sustaining ranch in Wyoming where a toddler boy was suffering from the severe effects, both physical and mental, of fetal alcohol syndrome.

"This is proof that children do sometimes pay for their parents' sins," Zin said privately to Luis as they arrived at the ranch. (Whether people wanted to admit it or not, the bible makes it clear that drunkenness is a sin.) While the mother had managed to stop drinking, the damage was already done.

"And I can see why the Bloodstone would be needed to fix this," Luis quietly returned, "since people with healing gifts generally can't cure things like this."

This was true of Quin, who had the gift of healing by touch, but who, like doctors, had never been able to cure things like multiple

sclerosis and diabetes, no more than anyone could heal developmental disabilities such as fetal alcohol syndrome or issues relating to malnutrition.

Zin and Luis were given entry to the household based on telling the family that they had been directed by God to come to them for the express purpose of healing the boy, who was still asleep in his bedroom.

The aunt of the toddler was in the room as the magician and sorcerer entered, and Zin specifically noticed that she was wearing an exceptionally blue pendant sapphire necklace. *Maybe a healing sapphire, Zin pondered. Though healing sapphires can't heal things like this any more than doctors or gifted people can.* (Neither were dragon tears designed for this type of healing, in case we might be wondering.)

Zin ended up performing a charm she often used to make people with colds and flu feel better, while Luis used a similar spell designed to soothe symptoms such as earache, sore throat, cough, and such.

The child woke up mere moments after the spells were enacted; and from that point on, he ended up like any other child, healthy both physically and mentally, able to learn and grow in keeping with his peers, and never showing another sign of what he had previously been afflicted with, that would have followed him his entire life if he had not been cured.

The miracle-working visitors might have stayed to breakfast with the family by invitation had not Zin, in taking a quick peek at her foreshard, received a vision pertaining to the next miracle.

Thus, Luis and Zin set off, hurriedly because miracle eleven had to do with a bomb. The sorcerers still had some terrorists working for them in this day and age, and one had planted a fluidic bomb in a farming and livestock community. In total, over two hundred people were in danger, plus nearly four times that many animals to include goats, cows, pigs, chickens, horses, and sheep, along with a few border collies and miscellaneous other dogs and cats.

They weren't going to be able to move the bomb, which was set to go off in less than a minute by Zin's estimation from the vision she had received. Immediately as they landed, pretty much in the center of the farm next to a sizeable barn in which the bomb had been placed, Zin performed a widespread immobilization spell designed to freeze everything in the community in place, while Luis enacted a halt curse

that had worked in the past to suspend all motional activity in a given area, in this case, about a square mile, which would more than cover the intended blast zone of a thousand feet in diameter.

In less than three seconds after the dual spells were performed, everyone and everything (including the bomb's timer) was frozen in place inside the square-mile boundary. Even in its immobilized state, the bomb couldn't be moved without risking explosion, so Zin and Luis were going to have to move the people and animals, this being easily done by magic; though the task turned out to be easier for Zin who was a true master of levitation spells. Luis ended up performing a series of float jinxes on various groups of people and animals, until he suddenly remembered that, as Westerwing, he could easily grab and carry those in danger out of the blast zone, which actually worked much faster than his sorcerer magic.

Despite the speed of the rookh, all of the moving took nearly an hour, during which, Zin and Luis noticed that the sun never moved. *Just like the miracle of the sun standing still in the bible*, Luis said telepathically to Zin as they worked.

Zin agreed that time had definitely stopped, which could actually happen in other ways, but the length of time in this situation was truly a miracle. Quin was able to stop time for five seconds at a stretch, using a bagical-produced watch and with help from a magical white hummingbird. Also, from reading up on spreesprites, Zin knew that girl spreesprites could stop time for up to one minute, also with help from a white hummingbird. *But not for this long*, she thought at about thirty minutes into the task of levitating groups of people and animals out of harm's way.

After nearly an hour of work, with the sun standing still the whole time, Zin and Luis moved the final fifteen sheep and two ragdoll cats to outside the blast zone, landing beside the fluffy creatures just as time started again and the bomb (barely two seconds later) went off, taking nearly everyone by surprise, not just because of the tremendous explosion, but because most of the community residents were, of course, not where they had been previously.

There were plenty of homes, barns, pens, corrals and such outside of the area of the damage. So although things were going to be cramped for a while, those in the farming community would be able to make do

without having to move either people or animals elsewhere while rebuilding certain structures and replenishing food stores, tools, and whatnot.

Receiving thanks from many people, who were quick to recognize the reason everyone had survived, the visitors left about ten minutes after the explosion.

Back at Doyle Mansion, Zin and Luis had a late breakfast of French toast and scrambled eggs whipped up by Otto, who was anxious to show the pair the snaps he had taken from atop Jenny's gazebo of five exquisite newdus. Slicing up a cantaloupe to add to the fare, Otto wanted to hear the latest news of the project involving the miracles. He hadn't yet heard exactly how the newdus came about, and listened with great interest to the details, after which, Zin remembered to show her uncle the picture she had taken of the behemoth.

After learning about the miracles involving healing and the sun standing still, Otto rather thoughtfully said, "There was a time when many people, skeptics, wouldn't have believed miracles even if they were performed before their very eyes. Thank goodness more people these days are less skeptical, and more able to believe."

"That came about because the sorcerers and demons started operating more out in the open," Luis remarked. "It's like their magic ended up creating more believers."

"So something good came from something bad," Zin stated.

"You know," Otto went on to say, "the Antichrist, when he comes, will be a worker of miracles; and maybe some of his followers too. This will be done to deceive, so people will have to be careful not to be deceived."

Em was writing in the parlor, working on a poem inspired by Halli having earlier taken her for a ride to scout for more newdus. While they hadn't seen any on their jaunt, Em had enjoyed the outing, particularly the view, which had brought up memories of her younger years when Zapor used to take her for rides. Upon finishing the poem, Em shared it with the portrait of her former protector.

A Bird's Eye View

Seen from a bird's eye view, the people below look like ants,
Except ants don't often wear pants, and they don't dance,

Unless they have taken lessons, several sessions.
The four trucks of a work crew might be beetles, green and blue,
Bustling about with much to do, ten chores anew,
Before heading home to have spicy veggie stew.

From the cloud-filled milieu, the bus looks like a loaf of bread,
Except for having tires with tread, and being red;
Plus, the bus is chock full of noise, from girls and boys.
They are heading for the zoo to see a flouncy emu
And buy yummy taffy to chew; hats blow askew
By winds, as the monkeys raise a hullabaloo.

A flower ripe with dew appears as but a smallish fleck
No larger than a salt speck, a seed to peck,
One a wren will surely devour, and more each hour.
It seems the taller blooms grew just so stalks could get looked through
By smaller creatures, old and new. See it is true:
A chipmunk with his nose full of pollen. *Achoo!*

A caldron full of brew might look like a coin, or a ring,
But not to spend on anything, or wear like bling,
Or give to a far-off sweetheart to soothe the part.
Besides a bird, or a few, an angel might watch, or two,
Since each morning in the brand new, they get out too,
To sing and soar, while enjoying a bird's eye view.

Zapor quickly decided this poem was one of his favorites, and he encouraged Zin, who was just entering the parlor, to read it.

After reading the poem, Zin again found her mind reaching for something with regard to her mother's work. But she still couldn't put her finger on what it was. *Something I'm supposed to do, think of, or remember...I don't know. This is so frustrating.*

As her mother headed up to the sewing room, Zin wandered out to the back porch to join her uncle and Luis who were scanning the skies for more newdus. Taking a look in her foreshard, Zin was a little surprised when she was given a vision of the next, and final, miracle.

Luis too was surprised, and remarked, "Wow, three miracles in one day. Well, I'm game."

And so, the magician and sorcerer set off, this time with the foreshard leading them because they needed to find a grapevine entrance to travel back in time roughly two months.

The twelfth miracle had to do with Eizel's recent past, in which Zin and Luis needed to get tickets to a sold-out play being performed in a mothership community. Actually written by E.R. Tremaine, *Crimson Damsel* was specifically designed to save people; and it had, over the years, brought many people to Christ.

Because the play was sold out, Zin and Luis needed to create two more tickets and add two seats to the theater. Then they needed to get the tickets to a friend of Eizel's who invited her to the performance. Finally, they needed to make sure Eizel was chosen for the audience-participation segment of the play by adding the newly-created aisle seat to the list of the audience members chosen. All of these things were easy for a magician and sorcerer working together to do by magic, with help from the Bloodstone, which the pair made sure was at the performance because they attended, hiding backstage while shrouded. From being part of the show, and delivering exactly one line on stage, Eizel would now definitely come to know Christ as Savior.

So my mom's play actually saved Eizel, Zin said by thought to Luis as they were traversing the grapevine home after the show. *Then she saved me from the Memory Hypnoid. It's kind of amazing.*

God definitely works in mysterious and unexpected ways, Luis replied.

Making notes in her journal after Luis left for home, Zin got to thinking about the final miracle that seemed to her to be a bit mundane. While anyone being saved is incredibly important, the whole thing just seemed too easy, like an everyday occurrence, especially since Eizel being saved could have happened in any number of ways. *Like from reading the bible, from prayer, or from crossing paths with someone who had an impact on her.* Zin happened to know something about Eizel's friend who had invited her to the play, eighteen-year-old Sasha Loll, whom Zin felt probably was a very good influence on Eizel.

In again considering that miracles were not all supposed to be flashy or extravagant, Zin ended up reminding herself, *We're supposed to let God carry us, not the other way around.*

Also, in looking at some of the miracles in the bible, Zin reminded herself that they were not any sort of a struggle. Jesus certainly hadn't struggled when performing miracles, and neither did it seem that the

apostles had any trouble enacting miracles, once their faith was strong enough to do so. *It definitely boils down to faith*, she decided.

In considering her uncle's remarks earlier about skeptics, Zin thought, *The miracles in the bible made some people believe*. Sadly, from biblical times and leading up to the present day, even after witnessing miracles, some people still didn't believe. *Closed minds*, she determined. *Either people have closed their own minds, or God has closed them because they cling to their unbelief*.

This wasn't Zin's own idea, as the bible actually states that God shuts the minds of those who reject Him over and over again, even going so far as to give them a powerful delusion not to believe. While this may seem harsh, God is just. He gives us plenty of chances to accept His Son. But He is not mocked. If people consistently reject Him, they will incur His wrath. With this in mind, Zin looked up 2 Thessalonians 2:11. "Therefore God sends upon them a strong delusion, to make them believe what is false..." She also looked up 2 Corinthians 4:4, which expounds Satan ends up blocking some people's minds. "In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God."

So as not to dwell on the sadness of the lost, Zin simply decided to pray for them—for as many as possible to come to Christ and be saved before the Lord comes again because, at that time, it will be too late. At the hour of judgment, no one will be able to explain or give excuses because no one will be able to speak. Only God will be doing the speaking.

As far as witnessing to people, Zin knew that in the case of certain die-hard unbelievers, this was useless, and a waste of time. *Casting pearls before swine*, she thought, as this was exactly what was meant by Matthew 7:6. "Do not give dogs what is holy; and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under foot and turn to attack you."

This had been the subject of a bible study Zin had attended a few months back. We shouldn't keep witnessing to people who continue to be hostile and attack. If they've already made up their minds not to believe, it's now up to God to convince them, or not. For the ones who have rejected Him for so long, He might have already sent the powerful

delusion to make them believe what is false. And so, ongoing efforts would be useless.

With regard to miracles and believing, Zin suddenly thought of something she wanted to look up in the library book on bible interpretation, about Jonah.

So...some theologians think Jonah was actually dead while inside the whale, and then was resurrected, she mused. That's interesting. It's a foreshadowing of Jesus' death and resurrection.

To those demanding signs in the bible in order to believe, Jesus told them no sign would be given to them but the sign of Jonah; in other words, His own death and resurrection, which should be enough proof for anyone to believe, particularly since it all truly happened. There were many witnesses, and the events were documented. And even if the Dead Sea Scrolls hadn't proved the bible to be true, fulfilled prophecy proves the bible to be completely accurate and truthful. *So really, whether there are present-day miracles or not, there's no excuse for people not to believe.*

Chapter Thirteen

Milkweed and other Circles

Zin's foreshard the next morning led her to perform a task without Luis' help. Again using the genie grapevine, she needed to travel roughly forty years into the past, to New Mexico. At an ordinary trading post, like one that people might stop at to buy t-shirts, sodas, arrowheads, and whatnot, she was to purchase the Bloodstone itself from sorting through a bin containing about thirty similar gemstones.

From closely examining the one in the Chinese puzzle box before leaving on the trip, Zin was able to find the stone she was looking for by identifying the exact markings of the Bloodstone. Also before leaving on the trip, she had obtained money needed for the purchase from a large jar kept at Doyle Mansion for the express purpose of use on various time-travel trips to the not-so-distant past.

After buying the stone, Zin briefly paused to consider how something as amazingly special as the Bloodstone could be found at an ordinary trading post, which led her to surmise the answer as being an echo of Luis' earlier words. *"God definitely works in mysterious and unexpected ways."*

Leaving the trading post, Zin again located a grapevine wreath and stepped inside to follow the vines to another destination in history, this being Doyle Mansion approximately ten years in the past, where she placed the Bloodstone inside a specific springtime milkweed circle on the back lawns. Her mother, on an afternoon stroll, would end up finding the stone, which would then be placed into the puzzle box that would eventually find its way into Zin's keeping.

Upon returning to her own time, with the milkweed plant on her mind, Zin again got to thinking about circles. Of course, there were different kinds of milkweed, but the type she was most familiar with was the kind that most often grew to produce a circular plant, with its blossoms forming a definite circle to prominently stand out in fields, on hillsides, along garden paths.

It's a wheel-like pattern, Zin thought, with a picture of the plant in her mind. Like the wheels in Ezekiel...Providence...the Hand of God, her brain further told her. Next connecting this to the time travel she had recently been engaging in, something finally clicked in her mind with regard to the circles she had been contemplating in recent weeks. Time isn't a straight line; it's a circle! Of course...it has to be, in order to fit with Eternity. But not like a flat circle, more like one with dimension, like a sphere.

The whole thing now seemed so simple, and Zin ended up realizing that it's thinking too hard about things that can often make them seem not so simple. Her mind turning back to the blueprint she had acquired from her older self, she recalled that the work was circular in reasoning, which translated to the eventual function of the device. And it now became obvious to her that time being circular was the explanation as to why the enhancer was even possible at all. *And why the spherical Sage Key is able to see backwards as well as forwards*, she reasoned.

Zin ended up recording a few notes in her journal relating to time being much more of a circle than a straight line.

Eizel happened to be journaling at the same time as Zin; and surprisingly, about the same subject, because her recent thinking had led her to conclude something similar (though slightly different) about time. Eizel's thoughts were focused on what she was calling the Time Trinity, which she surmised was much more complex than time simply being divided into the three traditional parts of past, present, and future.

It's really not separated like that, she decided, because, from the perspective of God, Who is outside of time, all things have already happened, are happening right now, and have yet to happen. So this was the real Time Trinity, and only made sense when thought of as a circle. *Time is definitely a circle*, Eizel concluded, as something of a mirror to Zin's ideas.

Imagining time to be a straight line can really limit our thinking, Eizel also decided. Having recently read the Book of Revelation, she reasoned that the Time Trinity could help explain why some events in that prophetic book were told in flashback. *And that's also why the chronology of the Endtimes might not be what a lot of people think it is. Circles within circles*, Eizel imagined, of some of the events described in the Revelation. *Overlapping, shortening of time, intersecting of*

events, some events being described twice...or possibly happening more than once...who knows? Only God knows, and He might not want us to know. Some things are supposed to remain as mystery.

Eizel concluded her journal notes with the statement, “Past, present, and future in the Time Trinity are all one, in a similar manner as to how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all One.”

Taking an outing on her airbike shortly before lunch, Eizel saw a breathtaking blue newdu soaring about. As she was flying fairly low through a patch of trees, something below her also caught her eye.

A toadstool ring, she marveled after landing to investigate. Taking a snap of the circle of mushrooms, Eizel recalled from fairy tales she had read as a child that toadstool rings were thought to be evidence of fairy activity in woods and glades. This prompted her to fish in her belt pack for Em’s book of poetry, which included several fairy poems. Sitting on a mossy stone next to the fairy ring, Eizel chose one to read.

Fairy Imprints

With the ability to glow at night, both softly and bright,
And with amazing speed at flight,
Fairies may be small but they hold great might,
Indeed, a mere glimpse of a wood fairy
Can kindle thoughts most wistful and airy
Of enchanting castles, moated and spired,
Hosting guests most splendidly attired
In colorful hats, waistcoats, frilly frocks,
Attending weddings with scores of peacocks,
A hundred rows of singing hollyhocks, white doves in great flocks.

The musical whisper of fairy wings, much happiness brings,
Like the uplift we feel when the lark sings,
Each lovely summer and in fragrant springs.
As sweet as melody of flute and lyre,
The tunes oft fanciful stories inspire:
Genies emerge from lamps to grant wishes,
Better than layer cakes and other sweet dishes.
Elven maids dance for many an hour
In glades glinting from a sunny shower.
Goblins hold a prince in a tall tower for trolls to devour.

The prince, of course, fairy magic can save, by a mere wand wave,
Before also taking care of a knave
Stealing royal jewels hidden in a cave
By the king who intended to ransom
The charming prince, most handsome.
Instead saved from the trolls by magic,
From a fate that would have been most tragic,
After the stress of the near troll-rending,
The prince can find peace, and begin mending.
Thus, we have many blessings extending—our happy ending.

As one of God's fanciful creations, imaginations
Stir to give protective designations
To certain natural destinations,
So that roads go around instead of through
The hill, valley, boulder, oak grove, and yew
That a fairy might call his or her home,
A favored spot to both rest and roam.
A fairy is always a welcome guest,
Whether snuggled into a soft home nest,
Or out in the wilds—north, south, east, or west—on some sort of quest.

Sensations can stir (that may not endear) when fairies are near.
Goosebumps might be raised, and we might feel fear,
As most cautiously around us we peer
For the spirit we sense, who's out on a jaunt,
Who probably doesn't intend to haunt,
But who does tend to raise hair on the nape.
Though some of our minds manage to escape
Into a world of dryads and rainbows,
Tulips and carnations dancing in rows;
As a ladybug alights on our nose, nymphs flit through meadows.

Though one of the smallest wonders we might meet, and possibly greet,
The effect is an encounter complete,
As even melancholy finds defeat.
Though most sprites are no larger than a leaf,
They melt away even great disbelief.
In truth, we can't judge much by their size;
Their full power would be hard to surmise.
Age also can't be judged by what we see.
The fairy might be two hundred and three,
Very much like the less-tall-than-a-knee cherry bonsai tree.

To engage evil forces in a fight, the daintiest sprite
Turns expanses of darkness into light
To protect us as well as give delight.
A fairy might with one snap, hop, or leap
Put an entire plantation to sleep,
Or zip up a mountain in a short wink,
At speeds much faster than a single blink.
With a wave of a wand, flowers renew;
A man or woman finds a love most true;
Spider webs are strung with droplets of dew; vast skies are kept blue.

All deeds are of import, both large and small (and those wide and tall):
Saving a centipede from a footfall;
Stopping the cave-in of a great stone wall;
Singing for fifty-seven full hours;
Tending to masses of trees and flowers;
Dancing with graceful turned-out twinkle toes
On the petals of a climbing tea rose.
A fairy might in the air help along
Dandelion seeds seeking soil to bond,
Or uncurl a lovely lacy fern frond with flick of a wand.

A puff of breath helps propeller seeds soar a good mile or more
To land in leaf piles, or by a front door,
Where they springtime sprout baby trees galore.
A fairy who is fonder of people
Might visit a church with a tall steeple,
Or spy on the likes of great queens and kings,
Going unnoticed, like the bird that sings.
Though a bird might be a fairy's disguise,
Or a boulder, or a mellow sunrise,
Sprites can still be seen by those who are wise, if we have keen eyes.

Fairies oft mean mischief in tales of lore, but they're so much more.
(In truth, that's part of what we adore,
Never quite knowing what's in store.)
Certain stories tend to get these things wrong,
Whether written in books or sung in song.
The Fairy Queen is not really that mean.
She allows winter travelers to glean
Berries and nuts from her snowy hedgerows,
Also shielding them as the harsh wind blows,
And putting warmth spells on fingers and toes, and on the cold nose.

For all of the fairies' powers most renowned, that truly abound,
Possibly their greatest skill can be found
In reminding us to look up, not down.
We might miss seeing footprints in the snow,
In desert sands, or other spots below;
But we sure won't miss the rainbows and clouds
That give our minds an escape from the crowds.
And we might even have a fanciful dream,
One with ten wheelbarrows full of ice cream;
Fishing for wishes by the moon's soft gleam in a magic stream.

When we keep focused on the things above, the most Wondrous Dove
Shows us our Heavenly Father's great love,
Wrapped about us like a well-fitting glove.
Of all of the things God has created,
Fairies might be the most understated,
Having power over the mind and heart,
Delighting with the magic they impart,
While reminding us of the final goal,
In which we all play an important role.
As a family in this world as a whole, we imprint the soul.

Having only just finished the poem, Eizel was in the process of stowing the book in her pack when she received a walnut call from Zin, who was inviting her to lunch at Doyle Mansion. Since the distance was a little too far to travel by airbike and still arrive in time for the meal, Eizel ended up pocketing her bike and calling a rookh.

She was welcomed in a warm and friendly manner at the mansion, and the situation didn't seem at all awkward.

After a yummy lunch of salami sandwiches and tossed salad with pickled eggs on the side, Eizel and Zin took a stroll through the gardens, pausing to watch Kisi and Lista playing in the sandbox, and also admire several of Lista's most recent carved boulders, one of which seemed to enjoy working in the gardens, pruning on this day. And he was being very careful around the planting beds and near the garden shed not to do any damage with his heavy feet or long swinging arms. The octopus sand sculpture was helping with the pruning by snapping the cut branches into small pieces with his strong arms and carrying them to the compost pile.

After an hour outside, Eizel and Zin spent some time in the upstairs library where Eizel borrowed a couple of books. She left a short while later from the back gardens, calling a rookh to take her home, and bidding Zin, Magsen, and the puck family farewell with the triangle hand symbol.

Barely a minute after Eizel left, Kiana landed in the gardens on a bright pink newdu. Laughing as she slid from the creature's back and thanked him as he swiftly took to flight, she told Zin, "They like to carry people as much as their caterpillar selves do. I felt just like a fairy up there."

"You'd make a pretty good fairy," Zin offered, with Pipac and Magsen nearby nodding.

At Em's invitation, Kiana had come to learn some cooking skills, particularly because Em was all set to do some serious work in the kitchen in preparation for Thanksgiving. Given the appetites of the pucks, she often gave herself a head start for celebrations, mainly baking, as was the case on this day in preparing five pies and four batches of cookies for the freezer, along with a cobbler and chicken enchiladas for both dinner and for Kiana to take a pan each home with her. Zin helped in the kitchen for a time, before retreating to her lab to work on a couple of projects, only to emerge shortly before dinner to bid Kiana farewell as she was departing from the back gardens on a rookh, while carefully balancing a pod pack in her lap so as to keep the pans of food inside level on the journey home. The pack had a warming feature, which meant her family would be able to enjoy dinner right away without even having to reheat the fare.

The next morning found Zin hopping aboard Westerwing after breakfast, and in a hurry because they were needed for an emergency of some sort in Supercity Six, which had been formed from what was once Dallas, Fort Worth, and many surrounding suburbs.

Luis was the one who had gotten the initial message from Chevy by walnut. *It's something to do with the Shatter Whammy kernels*, he told Zin by thought. *They don't work anymore.*

What?! Zin was truly surprised.

They were heading for the western-most part of Supe-6, a factory district that also held a number of residential buildings, a rail hub, and

was connected to several work camps including a hay farm and a quarry.

Tanner's twelve-year-old brother, Patrick, was with Chevy; and both were fighting alongside several members of the Underground Army (mainly using flutes and mirrors) against what appeared to be a small army of teraphim that were, at present, anything but small in having grown to their maximum sizes when attempting to take over the factory district. The clay giants were doing this with help from a troop of ESS members and several sorcerers who had organized the whole thing in an attempt to help the teraphim. Due to so many having been shattered in recent weeks, the sorcerers had a definite interest in protecting the remaining teraphim, about eighty of which had gathered in this locale from various spots around the globe.

"The teraphim can't be recreated," Chevy told Zin and Luis when they landed beside her on the rooftop of a bread factory (which actually smelled wonderful, by the way). "Since they are now incredibly endangered because of your whammy, the sorcerers have been calling them here."

Patrick, nearby, was nodding as he took a pause from delivering flute strikes to breathlessly say, "The power of the ancient sorcerers evidently can't be duplicated right now because the Holy Spirit is preventing some of the malice going on in the world, including amongst the ranks of the sorcerers. The Holy Spirit evidently wasn't a force working against them when the enhanced teraphim were originally made because the Spirit didn't completely arrive on the scene until the Day of Pentecost." (Although the Holy Spirit has ever been present in the universe, the Spirit worked much differently amongst mankind in Old Testament times, as opposed to later, and unto today.) Patrick had evidently found out this information from using his gift of heightened senses (super hearing, eyesight, and so forth) to spy for the Underground Army, which he hoped one day to join.

"But why doesn't the Shatter Whammy work anymore?" Zin questioned as she and Luis drew mirrors to help with the fighting efforts, which were going on from various building and ground locations.

"Because the sorcerers have fashioned a blocker as a counter to the whammy," Patrick answered.

So far, the fighting efforts of the godly had yielded very little results against the giant teraphim, other than pushing back the assault of the clay creatures just enough so that factory workers could begin fleeing their workplaces and nearby residences to get to safety, mainly carried away on rookhs or riding airbuses, though some were boarding the rails, an act which actually wasn't safe at this point, as evidenced when two of the teraphim kicked several cars clean from their tracks with very little effort. Thus, any attempts by humans to escape by trains were quickly abandoned.

Several sorcerers aboard nyregs, including Tanner, were launching energy strikes with their staffs at those opposing the teraphim. Tanner had been instrumental in developing the blocker, working with his mentor, Vidas Farr, who was one of the two sorcerers in charge of Supercity Nine; though Vidas often worked in other Supercities, as was the case on this day.

The ESS, both on the ground and atop nyregs, were largely ineffectual with the guns they were using because the members of the Underground Army, and Chevy and Patrick, were carrying shield dimes, one of which Luis also had, while Zin's sapphire ring ended up protecting her by deflecting bullets, along with sorcerer blasts.

Penelope had just shown up on a nyreg to launch a windy assault against those trying to keep the giant clay men at bay long enough for more people to escape the area. Blessedly, Kiana had also just arrived, on a wind horse named Barát who often liked to take her places. Barát was incredibly powerful and managed to counter Penelope's gift to the extent that she was forced to retreat and keep something of a distance between herself and the wind horse, a wise decision since the rider of the horse was expertly wielding a flute.

About twenty bigfoots had arrived on the ground to help battle the teraphim by tripping them and throwing large stones. However, the stumbling did little more than delay the giant statues, and the stones didn't even chip their clay. Nor were the magical weapons having much of an effect, other than perhaps keeping the fearsome creatures somewhat at bay.

Luis ended up stowing his mirror and taking to flight to begin crashing into the teraphim as Westerwing, this serving to slow the advance of the creatures to aid the other efforts. More help soon arrived

in the form of forty-three living boulders from the nearby quarry. A local boy puck troll named Farfu, who was not much older than Lista, had recently been carving them to help protect the area against just such a menace as these horrible clay statues. Farfu had gotten involved on this day when noticing several teraphim kicking bales of hay around at the hay farm where the little puck resided with his family. While the boulders couldn't do much more than the bigfoots and magical weapons could, they did serve to distract many of the teraphim.

On a whim, Luis landed on the shoulder of one of the taller distracted teraphim, while swiftly drawing his dragon feather and giving a hefty swipe at the creature's shoulder. Slicing through the air, the feather rapidly shapeshifted to become a long sword, the blade of which completely severed the arm of the teraphim, who howled with pain. Luis took off as Westerwing a split second later to land on yet another shoulder to employ the sword, then another.

However, despite the pain, the teraphim were able to reattach their limbs without too much trouble, the arms, after being retrieved, melding themselves to the shoulders in basically less than a minute each.

Penelope had reentered the fray while Barát was dodging flashing energy strikes from sorcerer staffs. In fear for Kiana's safety, the wind horse ended up retreating.

Tanner had actually drawn back, in catching a glimpse of his brother, whom he had no idea was involved in this. With a muscle working in his jaw, while shaking his head and cursing under his breath, Tanner considered what to do. Despite being angry over the interference, he was not willing to hurt his brother, and even went so far as to gesture with his staff for two of the teraphim to back off from the building upon which Patrick was stationed.

Sadly, the rest of the teraphim were not backing off; and the situation was starting to look somewhat grim for the people still trapped inside buildings, or cowering outside behind whatever they might have found to use as cover.

However, the whole direction of the battle was about to change because fifteen newdus had just shown up, decorating the skies with their brilliant colors and exquisite forms. Diving at the teraphim, with wings smashing into the clay, the giant butterflies managed to shatter the creatures at least as well as Zin's whammy ever had, thus rendering

the clay men way too damaged to be able to meld themselves back together again.

After taking care of all of the teraphim, including a couple who had tried to shrink to smaller sizes and hide, the newdus cleared the dust from the shattered clay with great flaps of their enormous wings, before sailing away at a leisurely pace in various directions. A lingering bright yellow one ended up giving Penelope a fright when directing a great flapping gust of wind in her direction to knock the nyreg she was riding backwards in spinning loops, after which, the miscreant girl chose to flee, which the ESS were also doing, with the sorcerers shortly following suit.

While Tanner might have been mad at his brother, Vidas was at least twice as angry at Tanner, whom he had never been particularly proud of. Now, seeing him protect a family member over accomplishing a task at hand left him practically fuming. The success of the plan on this day would have not only protected the teraphim (so they could continue to be useful to Satan), but the sorcerers were planning to use the clay men as taskmasters in the factories, to increase production and keep the workers cowed and in line.

Vidas made the decision on the flight home that it was time to sever ties with Tanner; and perhaps later he might arrange some sort of demise for him, since Tanner obviously wasn't dependable anymore, in being compromised by sentimentality. While it was unusual for sorcerers to kill one another, it was not unheard of; and so, Vidas would have to consider the possibility.

Members of the Underground Army would be staying to help get as many people evacuated as might want to leave Supe-6, which would amount to most of the population of the factory district, thus effectively shutting down the factories. The adjoining camps would end up either abandoned, or taken over by nearby self-sustaining communities, which were plentiful in number and could incorporate as many new residents as wanted to settle in them, particularly because several were located inside roomy pockets. The area bigfoots were happy to help move people's belongings, as were many rookhs and topes happy to be of like service.

“The sorcerers are not doing a very good job of retaining employees for their factories and work camps,” Luis remarked, watching Barát leave to take both Chevy and Kiana home.

“Not with these types of antics,” Zin agreed. “It’s like they can’t help themselves.”

“They definitely don’t have much good sense,” Patrick remarked, in having long known this about his brother. “It’s like with the terrorist attacks; they’re just shooting themselves in the foot. If they keep this up, they’ll completely empty the Supes.”

Zin and Luis left as Patrick was heading off to meet up with a couple of his army friends.

The sorcerers’ blocker had rendered Zin’s Shatter Whammy permanently inert. This wasn’t all that troublesome because the kernels had already served to make a huge dent in the numbers of teraphim. While some would continue to exist, they would mainly stay in hiding in fear of the newdus, who could evidently easily break them, the word of this spreading rather quickly throughout the globe. Zin’s Reversion Hex couldn’t be used on the sorcerers’ blocker because the blocker was not a traditional spell, being circular in fashion and intended to form a protective circle around the teraphim. With no beginning and no end, the blocker had no way to move backwards to undo itself.

In contemplating this, Zin had to admit the sorcerers were very clever. “It’s like we’re playing a chess game with them,” she remarked to Luis on their way home. “God is making sure His children make good moves, but the game won’t end until Jesus returns.”

Except Jesus has already won against Satan, Luis responded by thought.

Staying home for the next few days, Zin helped her mother with more Thanksgiving prep, also spending some time in her lab and catching up on reading.

Luis ended up working with Bernadette on a few projects, while also going on a couple of outings with Quin and her dragon protector, Cuoré, to hunt for dragon feathers, which Luis felt might be as useful to the future as leviathan scales.

“Many people wouldn’t even know what they are,” Quin explained, “because, if shed in dove form, they’re smallish, looking like any other feather found lying around on the ground or caught in a bush maybe.”

Well, Quin and Cuoré certainly knew how to recognize the feathers, and where to look for them because, all in all, they found ninety-seven dragon feathers. While a few were given to friends, most went to the Underground Army to be kept for future use.

Luis spent Thanksgiving Day at Doyle Mansion. Before joining everyone for the traditional noonday meal, Zin in her bedroom gave thanks in prayer for how much she personally had to be thankful for this year, which included a long list of blessings even aside from the recent ones involving the Twelve Miracles and the countering of the Memory Hypnoid by Eizel.

Chapter Fourteen

A Cascade of Eye-Openings

The day after Thanksgiving, the mystery as to what had happened to the missing book of legends was revealed. The snow gryphon, Telános, who often visited Doyle Mansion's libraries, had borrowed the book. However, on the day he borrowed *Jasper Diamonds and Other Legends*, he forgot to sign it out, being in a hurry when Alex, whom Telános enjoyed keeping company with and helping, suddenly called to him by thought. "Sorry, I forgot," the snow gryphon said, as he was having a piece of leftover Thanksgiving cherry pie on the back porch with Zin and Em.

Also on the day after Thanksgiving, Luis discovered the answer as to how his own imprint came to be on his pack when the burned journal he had found and restored ended up missing. Kiana had gotten this information from an auto-writing session. Paying a visit to Lion Mountain on a newdu, she told Luis, "The journal belonged to Ethan's brother, Winston. And Winston himself—well, a future version of Winston who's evidently changed his name to Jonathan—came back in time to steal the journal and burn it. Then when you found the book and restored it, Jonathan asked a future version of you to help him get the book back. So at some point in the future, you will travel back in time to help Jonathan steal the book from your pack so that he can destroy it again. I just wanted to give you a heads up," Kiana added. "But for now, we just need to keep all of this a secret."

"So that we don't change anything about the past, present, or future," Luis said.

"Correct," Kiana confirmed. "Like, we don't want to do anything that might suggest to Winston that he needs to change his name. That's all supposed to happen however God means for it to happen."

The Hand of Providence, Luis thought with a smile.

As far as burning the almanac in the first place, Jonathan had done this to hinder the work progress of his younger self, and to keep

Winston from ever being tempted to go forward with the third type of hypnoid. In destroying the book for the second time, he had made sure to drop it into a volcano, so that some well-meaning soul like Luis wouldn't again recover and restore it.

At about the same time Kiana was visiting Luis, a unicorn skipping through the twin plantations and passing very close to Ethan's apartment ended up giving him a revelation that led him to conclude that he shouldn't be so hard on his brother, because everything truly does happen for a reason, including the hypnoids. In fact, in the not-so-distant future, the Memory Hypnoid would end up being used to treat people suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (often simply referred to as PTSD) by helping them forget certain horrors, to the extent of even preventing many suicides. Modified, the original hypnoid would be used to counter the pain of people suffering from various physical ailments.

In truth, although Ethan hadn't quite recognized it, Winston was changing; and while the result wouldn't be as radically noticeable as that of an oodu transforming into a newdu, he was definitely on his way to becoming a new creature. With regard to past mistakes, Winston, like Eizel, was having regrets and feeling guilt. However, also like Eizel, he was starting to recognize what a wonderful future he might have ahead of him, in which to do good and make a difference in the world. Like many of us, Winston still had a lot to figure out; but he was well on his way.

At about the same time the unicorn was skipping by Ethan's apartment, Zin was in her room wondering what to do with the Bloodstone, which she took out of the puzzle box to hold and look at. (Was she just supposed to keep it safe? Maybe pass it on to someone?) For the time being, she would end up just keeping it safe in her possession. Suddenly feeling inspired to use her foreshard, she was shown a series of astounding visions relating to the Twelve Miracles.

In the first vision, Zin saw herself and Luis standing next to the gorge containing the pile of sand that would end up becoming Jasper Diamonds. Unnoticed by the magician and sorcerer, who were busy performing their synchronized spells, a genie on the far side of the gorge was using some sort of colorful little stick to perform magic on the pile of sand. As she watched this, in the back of her mind, Zin heard

the words Louetta had uttered upon learning of the sand being transformed into diamonds. “*Sounds more like what the genies are capable of.*” Her mouth falling open, Zin suddenly realized that she and Luis hadn’t done anything to the sand with their measly little spells. But the genie had because the magic of the genies was incredibly powerful; plus, they were the Great Multipliers.

Continuing to gaze into her foreshard, Zin next saw herself and Luis with the W’eepers. In this vision, she ended up viewing Levegð’s activities inside his little underwater bubble ship, which led her to conclude that both the “empty glass” and the countering of Devin were the twelf’s doing. And she couldn’t believe she hadn’t thought of this before, especially after reading about the water manipulation abilities of twelfs. *So Luis and I didn’t have anything to do with that either*, Zin thought. She was now also considering the possibility that the Bloodstone itself might not be a powerful magical object, but maybe just something written of in a story.

Zin wasn’t shown a vision regarding the incident where the man had walked on water. However, in the back of her mind, she remembered Golli telling her that some people had already learned the Secret of Rainbows, which meant they could walk on water. Perhaps that man was one of those people. *Or maybe he just had enough faith*, Zin’s mind suggested, *like Peter, who briefly walked on water before he got scared*. Whatever the case, Zin was now pretty sure that she and Luis didn’t have anything to do with that miracle. And she now thought it likely that the Bloodstone didn’t either.

The next vision Zin received from her foreshard had to do with the share bins, which both a genie and a twelf had helped to make by visiting her lab. The genie that she and Luis passed in the stairwell had enacted a bit of magic on the bins while they were getting the acorn squash and kohlrabi to perform the first test. *Of course, the genies made the bins multiply things*. And the twelf had evidently made the transport magic possible. *The bins being metal helped*, Zin’s mind told her, when remembering metallurgy to be one of a twelf’s special gifts, along with numerology. The number of multiples being seventy-two should have given her a clue that a twelf was involved because her research had indicated that this was a special twelf magical number.

Twelfs can become invisible, Zin also recalled, as she deduced that the eerie presence she had felt in the lab was an invisible twelf.

The foreshard also gave Zin the information that both genies and twelfs were helping with the ongoing efforts to reproduce the share bins because the magic involved was still beyond that of human beings. While magicians were getting more powerful with each new generation, they were not anywhere near able to match the magic of either genies or twelfs.

Zin's brain ended up telling her that the bone box was a boxical (very like a bagical but in box form), as she suddenly remembered Alex telling her that a friend of his living in Scotland had a boxical that produced, in abundance, both magical and everyday useful items.

Gazing into her foreshard again, Zin next saw a close-up view of an idomoly using little tools to fix the chainsaw used to vandalize the yew cross. (She ended up seeing this in slow motion because the idomoly's actions were actually too fast to be seen clearly at normal speed.)

Making a quick trip down to the subbasement library, Zin brought back to her room a book on magical insects. *So the idomoly fix all kinds of things, but they mostly like to follow gremlins around*, she discovered, while recalling about a year ago seeing one in a barn at Wharton Farm sitting on the seat of a corn husker machine. The husker—ridden like a stationary bicycle to turn the grinding mechanism that husked the corn—had been jammed for over a month. Then it suddenly started working again the very day Zin had seen the idomoly in the barn.

The twelf didn't need any help to make the sunbird out of the tears in the tidal pool, Zin told herself when considering the seventh miracle. *And the Bloodstone didn't need to do anything either.*

Checking her foreshard again, Zin saw the little mouse, shoed from the home of the woman who was raised from the dead, scamper off into the woods while shapeshifting himself into the white lion of Lion Mountain. Having long known that the breath of the white lion could raise the dead, Zin couldn't believe she hadn't considered before now that the creature didn't have to be in lion form to do so. The lion actually liked to stay in mouse form much of the time, a fact that didn't hinder his magic all that much, since size often isn't a factor when it comes to magic.

Gryphixes can also raise the dead, Zin recalled from having looked this up shortly after one had, a couple of months back, visited the twin plantations to help fight flash dragons and raise people killed by the falsies. Having been incredibly rare in previous times, gryphixes, like cloudbirds and sunbirds, were only now just coming onto the scene more, a fact which reinforced in Zin's mind that the End of the Age was likely fast approaching.

While Zin and Luis had performed quicken spells to speed up the transformation of the oodus to newdus, the real miracle had come about simply from the oodus themselves believing the change to be possible. *They had faith*, the little voice in the back of Zin's mind told her. Of course, she and Luis had also had faith, which never hurts in any situation, but is quite necessary for miracles to come about. However, because seeing often leads to believing, the speeding up of the process by the magician and sorcerer possibly helped some oodus believe more quickly than they might have otherwise. Since the end result came about so rapidly, patience didn't need to be a factor. *But faith was the key*, Zin firmly decided as she recalled one of her favorite quotes by Jesus from Matthew 17:20. "For truly, I say to you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, "Move from here to there," and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you."

The foreshard ended up giving Zin the information that the boy with fetal alcohol syndrome had been cured by a super-powerful one-of-a-kind healing sapphire, in the aunt's necklace that she had purchased only the day before at a market. In knowing of the existence of a one-of-a-kind killing sapphire, Zin felt she should have thought to consider the possibility of a special healing sapphire. *But sometimes we're not meant to know things right away, only later when God chooses to reveal them to us*.

The aunt actually had no idea that the sapphire could heal; she had simply purchased the necklace because she thought it was pretty and her birthday was coming up. *It's probably best not to let her know what the stone can do*, Zin decided. Then God alone would be guiding the healing events of the sapphire, which would probably be best since mankind often can't be trusted to make the right choices. Zin also had to consider that perhaps the sapphire was mainly meant for use in the

future, like the leviathan scales, since dragon tears were set to stop working at some unknown time in the future.

The next vision from the foreshard again made Zin's mouth fall open because a tiny newborn spreesprite had made the sun stand still for the eleventh miracle. Born only three days before, to Weyland and Martella, Griselda could stop time for as long as she wanted to (and in as large of a geographical area as she wished), and was also born with the good judgment of knowing not to abuse this power. She had been out in a little baby sling with her mother on the day Luis and Zin showed up at the farm. In recognizing the direness of the situation, Griselda had stopped time for a full hour at the entire farm so that the sorcerer and magician could get the people and animals away from the scene of the bomb. Although she still needed the help of a white hummingbird, there would never be a limit as to how long she could stop time for. (In case we might be wondering, Griselda was being carried in a sling because her wings were not quite strong enough yet for long-distance flight, this being something that would come along in another week or so.)

As far as the twelfth miracle, Zin ended up deciding that God had led Eizel to want to see *Crimson Damsel*, though Luis and Zin had had a small hand in getting her there. However, based on how the underground ticket scene often worked for sold-out shows, Sasha and Eizel might have been able to get tickets to the play anyway. *God would have made sure she got there with or without the help of Luis and me*, Zin concluded.

With all of the Twelve Miracles pretty much explained, Zin was surprised to be given yet another vision from her foreshard, one that simply showed her mother writing at her desk in the parlor; and in the present time, based on the clothes Em was wearing on this day. The scene was a little perplexing to Zin, who wondered if she might simply be seeing this from her mother being on her mind with regard to Eizel having been converted by *Crimson Damsel*.

No, that's not why I'm seeing this, Zin surmised, as she continued to watch her mother write...and take a slow sip of tea...and push up the sleeves of her sweater before taking another sip of tea.

Of course! Zin thought, as something suddenly clicked in her brain that turned out to be the answer to what her mind had been reaching for with regard to her mother's writing.

After racing down to the subbasement library to retrieve *Jasper Diamonds and Other Legends*, Zin breathlessly arrived in the parlor, where she said to her mother, "You wrote this book!"

Smiling, Em confessed. "Yes, and instead of using my first and middle initials with my last name, like I have for so many years, I decided to use my real first and middle names; though Rose Armene is an anagram of Emerson Rae."

Zin hadn't figured it out because of the anagram, but because the voice of the writing in the book of legends was the same as that of her mother's poetry, and *Graham Rumpole*, and other works by E.R. Tremaine.

The finding of the Bloodstone in the garden had actually prompted Em to write the stories in the book that she finished earlier this year, after which, genie bookwrights published the book.

"I heard a legend once about people finding magical objects inside of milkweed circles," Em stated, "and I think that's what started me thinking that the Bloodstone might have actually touched Christ's blood, which would make it more than capable of performing miracles."

As Zin was smiling and nodding, her mother added, "I got some of the material for the legends from dreams. Then, when I was writing the stories...well...it was the closest I've ever felt to having the gift of auto-writing. The words just kind of flowed without my really thinking about them, like God was guiding me, writing through me."

Zin was again nodding, because she fully believed God had written the stories through her mother, and possibly even for the express purpose of inspiring Zin to carry out the Twelve Miracles with the Bloodstone.

"I got the puzzle box on a trip one time," Em went on to say. "It's very similar to one I had when I was about your age; but that one was red, not blue. Anyway, I put the stone in one of the two compartments, and my magic key in the other, and then hid the box away in the secret niche at Netherwind just for you to find."

"I was led to the niche, and that's how I inherited your magic key and the Bloodstone," Zin remarked, choosing at this time not to share

that she had actually traveled back in time to purchase the stone and place it into the milkweed circle.

However, Zin did tell her mother that she and Luis actually thought they were performing miracles with the Bloodstone. “That was our project. But I’m now pretty sure the miracles happened by other means, like by everyday things that happen in our world, but that are still magical.”

Em was smiling as she said, “The Clock of the Universe ticking along.”

“Exactly,” Zin said in an earnest tone, “along with the workings of other Instruments of Providence.”

After a short pause, Em ended up saying, “I think people are often God’s strongest Instruments of Providence, which means every one of us has the potential to be a miracle worker.”

In the afternoon, Zin made a trip with Magsen to Netherwind to return both the Sage Key and the *Hope Joy Peace* painting to her Aunt Vini. During the visit, Zin took the opportunity to ask about the odd look that had been on her aunt’s face when they were in the gazebo and she was holding the Bloodstone.

“Could you tell that the stone wasn’t magical just by holding it?” Zin asked.

“Yes,” Vini replied. “But I didn’t want to rain on your parade, so I didn’t say anything.”

“I’m glad you didn’t,” Zin answered, “because I think I needed to keep believing the stone had the power to perform the miracles.”

“But then you figured out that the real power was inside you, and inside others,” Vini offered.

“Well...yes,” Zin responded. “But only because of what God does inside us.”

“Exactly,” Vini answered.

Her head practically spinning with thoughts of faith, Providence, miracles, and so forth, Zin decided to do some journaling after she and Magsen returned home. When jotting down a few things relating to Providence, Zin suddenly remembered her Uncle Otto’s warning about false prophets, which led her to write, “In contrast to Instruments of Providence, the world also has Instruments of Satan. While these might be devices, most of them are people. Satan can very well work through

people, even our family members sometimes, so we have to be on our guard. But if we stick to the bible, and stay on the Narrow Path, we'll be fine."

After dinner, Zin felt inspired to again use her foreshard. For some reason, she had Tanner on the brain, her thoughts being somewhat along the same lines as those of Luis when he was holding himself back (with Eizel's help) from killing Tanner, while considering that there must be some reason he was still alive.

Because Tanner will eventually be saved, Zin discovered from carefully studying the vision, saved because of a blessed diamond. Oh, but that's way in the future, she realized in noting that Tanner appeared to be probably thirty years older than his present self. I guess sometimes these things take time. At least I know I won't end up killing him during one of our duels. Or, if I do, I guess he'll get raised from the dead somehow.

In another vision that she surmised was probably of the past, Zin saw several angels making the Seven Blessing Boxes, after which, they began work on another project—the making of the seven trumpets and seven bowls mentioned in the Revelation. *So the trumpets and bowls are already made, she mused.*

Of course they are, if time is a circle, her brain answered.

The final vision shown to Zin by her foreshard on this day was of Lista who, at some point in the future, was evidently going to bring to life the largest statue ever created, one that looked in the vision to be at least as tall as many of the skyscrapers in the Supercities. The statue had actually been made by the sorcerers, but was now being used against them to destroy several of their strongholds. *Well, serves them right, Zin concluded.*

Chapter Fifteen

The Names of the Stars

The Monday after Thanksgiving was cold and clear as Zin made her way to school at Netherwind on her airbike, super early in the morning because she was planning to have breakfast at one of the cafeterias before heading to her classes for the day. Flying over a lake, she noted the glints of stars reflecting on the water, as though fairies might have alighted for a dance across the lake's surface, one much like a slow waltz given the gentle movements observed on the flyover.

Leaving her last class midafternoon and checking her foreshard, Zin received a vision indicating that she needed to visit the Garden of Stars on the mezzanine; and she was to take with her Luca and Pone, who were visiting Louetta for the day. Located inside the Realm of Nonessence, and filled with many celestial bodies, the Garden of Stars formed something of a bridge between heaven and earth, where those still living on earth could occasionally connect with departed loved ones. On this occasion, Zin and the pucks were going to meet Morgan Scull.

Luca and Pone sat on Zin's shoulder as they entered Nonessence, which was absolutely filled with anything and everything astronomical including nebulae, planets, comets, galaxies, moons, asteroid belts, pulsars, and so forth. Though gravity felt the same as she was used to, Zin couldn't feel any floor beneath her feet. Nor could she see a floor, ceiling, or any walls, but simply a vast expanse of space all around her, which was lovely. The door leading back to the mezzanine was left cracked, so the visitors could see a way to exit; otherwise, they might have been lost in the seemingly unending Garden of Stars.

Though Zin had never met Morgan, she had seen pictures of him; but he would have been easy to recognize anyway given the mile-wide smiles on the faces of Luca and Pone, as the spirit of their friend glided towards them looking much the same as he had in life, though in a

slightly transparent state that seemed aglow with light from the surrounding stars and moons.

“You must be Zin,” Morgan stated, since he had of course known whom he was to meet on this day. His voice sounded much the same as that of his former earthly self, but had a bit of a watery undertone to it, as though a slow-moving brook might be softly babbling in the background of his words.

Nodding and smiling, Zin was surprised when Morgan next said, “The Jasper Diamond is looking for Eternal Life. It’s like the original tale of the Little Mermaid. She didn’t want the love of a prince; she wanted the chance to have Eternal Life, which she got when she was turned into a sylph at the end of the story.”

“And the Jasper Diamond,” Zin remarked, “along with all of his brothers and sisters, will inherit Eternal Life when becoming part of the walls of New Jerusalem.”

To this, Morgan nodded, before specifically telling Luca and Pone, “I was taken early because there is important work for me to do in the hereafter. I’m not at all idle and waiting; I’m already at work.”

With his tiny friends actually weeping with happiness to see him again (and blowing him kisses), Morgan added reassuringly, “You’ll definitely see me again, like eventually for all Eternity.”

Soon, it was time for Morgan to go. He evidently needed to leave to get back to work. Watching him turn and drift slowly away, they eventually couldn’t distinguish him from one of the stars.

“So I guess he mainly came to tell us what the Jasper Diamond is looking for,” Zin remarked, while also thinking that they might be in the Garden of Stars for more than just their brief meeting with Morgan. Except, at the moment, she couldn’t figure out why else they might be there.

She was just on the verge of turning to head to the cracked doorway when they were treated to the most amazing star shower overhead, one filled with hundreds of blazingly bright shooting stars, more numerous and breathtakingly brilliant than any the visiting trio had ever seen before. Zin always saved her wishes from falling stars (to use for something important and special later), and she collected quite a few on this day to store up for future use. They left a few moments after the star shower ended.

As she was slipping out the door into the mezzanine hallway, and setting the pucks down so they could head back to Louetta's studio, Zin found herself again thinking about circles and orbits, particularly as related to time. *If time is a circle, and Eternity is a circle, then New Jerusalem is actually already built*, she reasoned. *And the Jasper Diamond already has Eternal Life*. In the same way that people could exist in multiple places within time, so could Jasper Diamonds; and the Bloodstone too, for that matter.

While it had been thrilling to see the Garden of Stars and hear what Morgan had to say, Zin couldn't help feeling there was something more she was supposed to learn from her visit to the mezzanine on this day. With the afternoon sun streaming through the windows and forming interesting patterns on the walls and floor from various-shaped glass panes and clouds meandering around outside, it suddenly occurred to her that she had never really thought much about the windows on the mezzanine. *Because the magical doors have always been the focus*, her mind decided.

As she watched Luca and Pone disappear through the door at the end of the hall, Zin happened to notice the sister portraits of Lizzie and Edna Dwyer smiling at her; and she didn't think it was her imagination that Edna's eyes were repeatedly darting to one side, in the direction of one of the mezzanine windows.

"Are you trying to tell me something?" Zin asked Edna.

"Who me; why no, not particularly," Edna answered, in seemingly genuine surprise.

Given Edna's response, Zin didn't inquire anything of Lizzie, whose left-hand forefinger seemed to be pointing to another of the mezzanine windows, which Zin wandered over to. Looking out, she saw nothing more than the normal happenings on Netherwind's sprawling back lawns. The window was actually stuck when Zin tried to open it; though another, next to the stuck one, did open. Leaning out and looking around, Zin saw nothing remarkable, as she noted a potted plant on the patio below looking somewhat scraggly, and perhaps in need of a little water.

Leaving the mezzanine a short while later, on her way to water the plant, Zin didn't quite know what to think of the issue of the windows, other than the fact that they might somehow be important.

At home later, and just before going to bed, Zin decided she would have liked to have seen her mother actually find the Bloodstone in the milkweed circle in the past. Asking her foreshard if she could see this, she was pleasantly surprised to be given the vision of her mother strolling through the gardens and discovering the stone. A milkweed circle adjacent to the one containing the stone actually looked more like a triangle than a circle, and this again got Zin thinking of the importance of shapes. Connecting this to her earlier visit to the mezzanine, her mind ended up fixed on the Realm of Octessence, which one of the magic doors on the hall led to. Octessence held the Peacock Garden, a feng shui inspired eight-sided garden containing a variety of artistic features representing not only the five elements of Chinese philosophy, but also the productive and destructive cycles of these elements.

Cycles are circles too, somewhat like orbits, Zin's mind told her. *And like blood circulating*, she suddenly thought, as an image of the enormous rainbow-colored peacock (over ten feet high) living in the garden sprang to mind. *And blood circulation is somehow related to the Secret of Rainbows, according to Alex*. However, while all of this was interesting, she didn't quite know what to make of her musings, other than the fact that rainbows represent promises in the bible, including the promise of the covenant of Jesus' blood saving us.

Glancing back down at her foreshard while thinking she might be shown the rainbow peacock, Zin was surprised to see another scene of her mother. In this one, Em was writing while sitting on a bench near the Clock of the Universe, which people could visit by entering the Realm of Undecessence on the mezzanine. A unicorn was winding the clock with its horn.

It's hard to tell if some things I'm seeing are symbolic or real, especially in another realm, Zin thought, surmising the unicorn in this case to be symbolic, particularly because her mother in the scene never looked up from her writing. So here was an Instrument of Providence (the unicorn) winding an Instrument of Providence (the clock).

The horn of the unicorn was still largely a mystery, even to people like Zin's Aunt Vini who had been able to tap into the powers of her personal unicorn. Some speculated that the horn might be capable of piercing any darkness, perhaps even the darkness of the mind to cure unbelief and evil thoughts. *By drilling into a darkened mind to allow*

light in so a person can experience freer, lighter thoughts, Zin considered, though it was hard to tell if some of her more fanciful imaginings might be true or not.

Zin went to sleep dreaming of unicorns and stars.

If we take a moment to backtrack a little, to around the same time Zin and the pucks were visiting the Garden of Stars, we find Luis and Kiana working on a project together.

Based on information from an auto-writing session, Kiana had learned of another use for dragon feathers. “They have restorative powers,” she told Luis. “In connection to dragons helping to remake the earth with fire in the Endtimes, their feathers can revive burned things. In the future, this might mean trees, butterflies, rivers, and so on. But right now it means things like burned books and paintings.”

“So that means we can restore art and books destroyed by the sorcerers’ Torch Squads,” Luis replied.

“Exactly,” Kiana answered. She was truly excited because so many wonderful things had been destroyed over the years from being either hated or banned by the sorcerers. While the genies could restore some burned items, often things destroyed by the Torch Squads were too far gone.

As an initial test, Westerwing with Kiana aboard headed to Virginia, to an old mansion abandoned after a sorcerer raid probably twenty years past. Inside, they discovered several torched paintings. As Luis simply passed the feather slowly back and forth over the surface of one, they watched as a lovely scene of a country churchyard with a mountain in the background was miraculously restored to its colorful and pristine self in under a minute.

“I wonder why no one thought of this before now,” Luis remarked. “Since dragon tears can raise the dead, it makes sense for their feathers to be able to restore art and literature.”

“Especially because art and literature are often considered to be living things,” Kiana agreed. “It does seem odd for this to be something new.”

“I guess God just lets us know to do things in His own timing,” Luis suggested by way of answering the question.

As Luis used the feather to restore a second painting, a landscape scene of hills covered with wildflowers, Kiana remarked scornfully, “Why would the sorcerers have objected to this?”

“Beats me,” Luis responded.

“Now this makes more sense,” Kiana stated with regard to a third painting, the subject of which was a Madonna and Child.

When nothing happened to the next two paintings Luis tried to revive, he speculated, “Maybe these had ungodly subjects, something irreverent to God in some way.”

Kiana was inclined to agree as she said, “God is not mocked, and the feathers are a divine gift, so they probably can’t be used for ill.”

“If not ungodly subjects,” Luis offered, “maybe these are just ones God didn’t think needed to be saved for some reason.”

The three restored paintings fit nicely into an elongated pod pack.

From a brief auto-writing session in her journal, Kiana learned that the woman who had owned the mansion presently lived in an earthship community in Oklahoma. Setting off right away, Luis and Kiana delivered the three paintings a mere five minutes later to their rightful owner, who was overjoyed to receive these family treasures.

From once again scribbling in her journal, Kiana learned that she and Luis were meant to next visit a basement in a home in Missouri, where the pair found a shelf of torched books, nine of which were restored to whole and unharmed when the feather was used on them in a similar fashion to the three paintings. Eight books on the shelf were not restored. Acting on instructions from Kiana’s auto-writing, they delivered the books to a library in Kentucky. The owner of the cottage had evidently passed away; thus, the books needed another good home.

Luis’ feather ended up restoring six additional paintings, a sculpture, and thirty-five more books on this day, all of which were taken to specific people and places. Over the next few months in their spare time, Luis and Kiana would often team up to revive additional treasures and make further deliveries.

In getting back to Zin, she had only morning classes the next day. Returning home just after lunch, she discovered that one of her Uncle Otto’s newest projects had just failed. “The back half of the building collapsed,” he stated, almost glibly. “Good thing we test these things before putting people or any other living things inside.”

Zin was a little surprised to find her uncle in such high spirits; in fact, he was practically skipping about the mansion in helping Em and Pipac do some dusting and sweeping. “So you’re not upset that the building fell down?” she questioned.

“Well, I’m a little disappointed,” Otto replied. “But upset, no, not at all. The work of human beings is nothing compared to that of God, and we need reminders of this.”

As Zin was considering this, her uncle added, “We always observe strict safety precautions, especially when trying something new, so people don’t get hurt during construction and testing.”

“What was new about this building?” Zin asked, while still in something of a state of surprise that the building had failed, since she had never heard of one of her uncle’s buildings collapsing before.

“It was an invert,” Otto replied, “meaning the support walls are opposite what we might think of with regards to weight and gravity. And that’s mainly because they are in the air, rather than on the earth, so the triangles are inverted. I know,” he added, “I could just go to Antica, and the architects there would be more than happy to share how they make their floating structures. But I’d rather learn these things on my own. It’s like a challenge.”

Although levitation (in a temporary sense) was never a problem for her, the whole idea of floating structures was a little lost on Zin’s mind; and she was glad that she was only meant to deal with magic in general, and not magical architecture. However, in keeping with how God often speaks to us through other people, she was smart enough to recognize there was something in her uncle’s words on this day that she was meant to pay attention to. Heading up to her room, she ended up writing the word “invert” in her journal because this was what had stuck most in her mind from their conversation.

On the flight home from school earlier, she had been thinking of the teraphim. Although the newdus could destroy them, Zin felt the clay creatures would likely stay in their smaller forms to be less noticeable to the giant butterflies. *So the teraphim are still going to be out there causing problems with their favors and curses*, she thought.

So invert them, her mind suddenly suggested to her, while thinking along the same lines as her Reversion Hex. Although she couldn’t do

anything to directly counter the sorcerers' blocker of her Shatter Whammy, she could invert some of the malice of the teraphim.

Hurrying down to her lab, she began working with both mirrors and a basic kitchen egg timer. In less than an hour, she was finished with what she would end up calling her Invert Timer. "Any teraphim wandering to within six hundred miles of the egg timer will find his magic relating to favors and curses permanently inverted," Zin told nearby Magsen whose nose was buried in a book.

"So the good luck the teraphim try to bestow on the families they're attached to will become bad luck?" Magsen questioned.

Zin was nodding as she said, "Exactly, and curses will turn into blessings, hinders into helps, falters into sure footing, and so forth."

"Does the sand have to be running in the timer for the inversion to work?" Magsen wondered.

"No," Zin replied, "but the timer has to be inverted at least once a year to retain its magic." She would end up making forty more of these special timers over the next few months to distribute to various places around the globe as a counter to the activities of the remaining teraphim.

Making notes in her journal later, Zin had to consider that the teraphim might find a way to work around the inversion magic. *But I doubt they'll figure out to bless people in order to curse them, or dole out bad luck in order to grant favors*, she ended up deciding. This would turn out to be correct, as the brains of the teraphim were not really clever in that way.

Before leaving the subbasement, Zin took a stroll among the books looking for something to read. Flipping through a volume of collected fairy tales, she was surprised when a small booklet titled "The Snow Image" by Nathaniel Hawthorne fell out of the larger book.

Sitting down to read "The Snow Image" right away, Zin discovered the story to be about the absolute childlike faith of two children, a brother and sister, who had fashioned out of snow a sister that came to life. Sadly, the disbelief of a parent, who was too common-sensible (by the author's determination), ended up killing the snow sister by melting her by the fire in an effort to warm her up.

"Obviously a lesson about what gets taught to children," Zin remarked to Magsen. "They don't become ruined, hardened, and

skeptical about all the wrong things, like miracles, until people teach them to be that way.”

“And they don’t become snowflakes either until taught to be that way,” Magsen responded.

“According to Hawthorne,” Zin went on, “a rigidly common-sense person, no matter if he or she has good intentions, will never believe. Even if stared in the face with majesty and miracles and blessings beyond imagination—that person will always ignore the wonders and magic of the world, even the miraculous, and opt instead for down-to-earth practicality.”

“I hope people are wiser now than when Mr. Hawthorne wrote that,” Magsen suggested.

“I’m not sure people really change much throughout the centuries,” Zin countered. “But you’re right, we can always hope; especially because miracles are everywhere, just staring us in the face.”

“Flowers, colorful birds, tall trees...” Magsen said as she was nodding.

“And gryphons and dragons and newdus and topes...” Zin offered with a smile.

At the same time Zin and Magsen were talking about the story by Nathaniel Hawthorne, Birch was accompanying Eizel on a trip to Canada to cure another victim of the Memory Hypnoid, a woman living in a mothership settlement. And at the same time Eizel was healing the woman, Egykor was entering an open window of a Swiss chalet in order to cure a man of the same malady.

After her classes the next day, Zin got a foreshard message to again go to Nonessence; but not to meet someone this time because, instead, the Garden of Stars was going to show her something.

In fact, the garden had the capacity to act a lot like her foreshard, but on a much larger scale. Indeed, as Zin stood amongst the stars, she found herself watching what amounted to a spectacular 3-D movie playing out all about her. And not only that, she ended up hearing a little voice in the back of her head describing to her exactly what she was seeing in the various scenes. It was almost as though she were being told a quiet story, but one so astounding that her brain almost couldn’t comprehend it. Nor could her eyes barely keep up with the splendor she was viewing. If this truly had been a movie, set inside

some elaborate planetarium, she might have called it, *Unicorns and Stars*.

No, *Star Shadows*. That was the name that suddenly popped into her brain, as Zin began speaking aloud in order to tell herself some of the story she was being told in the back of her head.

“A unicorn recently visited every star in the universe for an important reason. He was delivering Soul Seeds to begin the process of creating Star Shadows. While human beings each have a unicorn attached to his or her soul as a Soul Shadow, we are meant for so much more than just connecting with our personal unicorns in Eternity. In fact, we will each connect to a star and become Star Shadows, which are immensely more powerful than Soul Shadows.”

So we're each connected to a unicorn and a star, that's amazing!
Zin's brain reinforced to her.

As the story she was being treated to in the Garden of Stars continued, Zin could definitely understand why the universe was expanding, and so rapidly. “As the universe continues to expand, more unicorns will plant more seeds to sprout more Star Shadows because there is a star out there for every person ever conceived within all of time, the number of stars exactly corresponding to the number of individual human souls.”

From the next segment of the story, Zin was amazed to discover that Star Shadows were not on the distant horizon, but were set to come onto the scene in the not-so-distant future. “While Soul Shadows can help us see the good in bad situations, Star Shadows have the power to actually change bad situations into good ones, as tremendous Instruments of Providence.”

Star Shadows were also evidently incredibly unique. “In the same way no two people are the same, no two stars are the same; and each will be given a special name known only to God and the individual.” With this, Zin was given a quote from Revelation 2:17. “...and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone which no one knows except him who receives it.”

Gazing at the stars all around her, Zin ended up deciding that all of the mentions of heavenly bodies in the bible were like little clues as to the type of creatures we were meant to eventually become. *Star Shadows will make our world's future brighter*, she suddenly

recognized. Except that the future was actually the present, and to some degree the past too, in keeping with the Time Trinity, as this circular concept of time would eventually become widely known as. Zin had always thought that unicorn time travel was possible because unicorns were able to move faster than the speed of light, but she now realized it was so much more than that. *They can time travel because time is circular.*

In considering the transformation human beings were supposed to make during their lifetimes, to become more like their Soul Shadows and ultimately more like Christ, a thought suddenly popped into Zin's brain. *Like our blood moving within us, the answer to transforming is circulating within us. The power is within us.* (This was exactly what Vini had been trying to get across to Zin in their conversation about the Bloodstone not having magical powers.)

As she was leaving Nonessence a short while later, the windows on the mezzanine again grabbed Zin's attention. While she still didn't know exactly what she was supposed to make of them, she was starting to get the idea that the windows might somehow be just as important as the doors."

Opening one window to let the afternoon sunlight stream in, Zin suddenly felt inspired to look at and hold the Bloodstone, which she retrieved from the puzzle box in her belt pack. While she had decided that the stone didn't have any real power, she was suddenly struck by a very different thought. *The Bloodstone has power over the heart, which is truly one of God's most splendid miracles. But we have to look with more than just our eyes, she reminded herself. We must look with faith...to beyond...even to the stars.*

"What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him..."

—1 Corinthians 2:9

Clock Winders Chronology

Part I

Wind Horses and Horned Lions: June 2015 to May 2016
Burnished Doves and Sky Serpents: June 2016 to May 2017
Netherwind and Laurelstone: June to August 2017
The Clock of the Universe: December 2041 to May 2042
The Once and Forever Mountain: June 2065 to July 2066

Part II

The Protector of Dragons: August to September 2066
Time Key Travelers: August to December 2066
The Promise of the Snow Gryphon: January to August 2067
The Lost Genie Diaries: Diaries found August 2067
Spreesprites and Soul Shadows: August to September 2067
The Bloodstone Miracles: October to December 2067
Noontime in the Peacock Garden: December 2067

Although the main events take place within the dates listed for each book (spanning 52½ years), we flashback and flashforward many times to have a look at both past and future happenings. While no one can ever know for sure when the events of the Endtimes will occur, the Clock Winders Series puts the Second Coming of Jesus at no sooner than one hundred and twelve years from the date of our first adventure, but probably not much longer than that. The series is designed so that Part II can be read before Part I, which might be preferable to younger readers as the latter adventures are somewhat shorter and quicker reads than the earlier ones.



Works by J.H. Sweet

The Fairy Chronicles
Clock Winders Series
The Wishbone Miracle
The White Sparrow
Juan Noel's Crystal Airship
The Heaviest Things
Foo and Friends
The Time Entity Trilogy
Cassie Kingston Mysteries
The Gypsy Fiddle

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