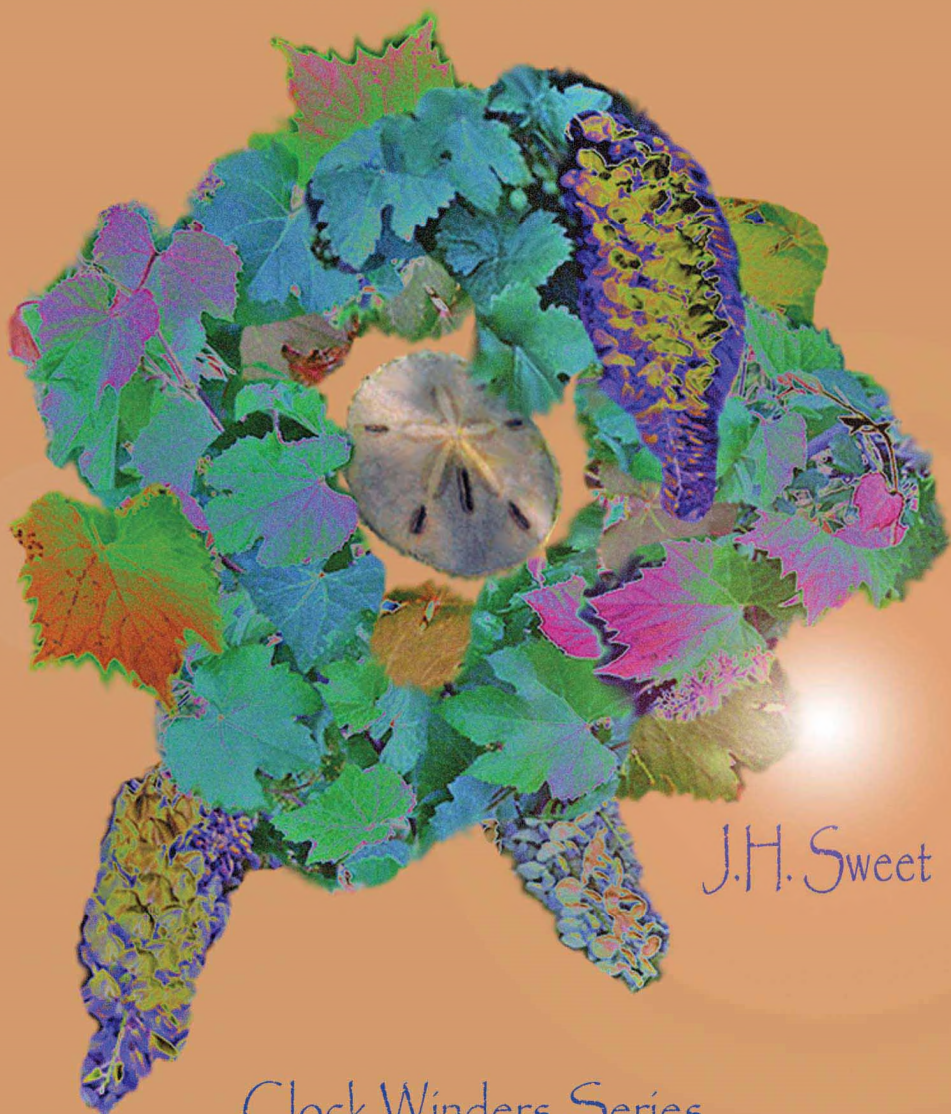


Spreesprites and Soul Shadows



J.H. Sweet

Clock Winders Series

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“No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar or under a bushel, but on a stand, that those who enter may see the light. If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light.”

—Luke 11:33&36

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Chapter One

Crowds and Shrouds

Quin Brinker's glowing gold rope crackled with energy as it sliced through the neck of the tallest of the six demons that had just landed to attack her and her two friends. Instantly dissipating from the death blow, the demon was now merely a small pile of sludgy mess left on the ground in the field behind the bowling alley.

At seventeen, Quin felt protective of her younger companions, Sal Ricci, who was not quite fourteen, and Kiana Jackson, about to turn fifteen. Thus, she tried to keep an eye on them as she took on the next tallest demon whose wingspan was over fourteen feet. Catching one wing with the sizzling rope, she jerked the creature to the ground, after which, she was forced to back off from the flurry of claws slashing at her legs from the long arms of the grounded demon.

About fifty feet from Quin's position, Sal was battling two of the smaller demons using a flute weapon, the music of which resounded eerily in the field, particularly because the early evening had become somewhat windy. The sharp notes slicing through the air hurt the demons' ears nearly as much as the energy cuts from the flute.

Nearby and wielding a flashing mirror, Kiana was doing her best to deal with the other two demons. However, not being particularly proficient with magical weapons of any kind—whether color, music, or light—she wasn't faring all that well. Thus, she ended up simply taking off at a run, mainly in an effort to lead the two demons away from her friends; though, of course, her own safety was important too. And the tactic of leading them away might have worked, except for the two megahobs (giant hobgoblins) that were also in the field and that had just roused themselves. One had been impersonating a stack of pallets, and the other, a large oleander bush.

Since megahobs couldn't hold their camouflage when in motion, they were naturally revealed when dashing out to block her path and attack. The only thing that saved Kiana from their onslaught—and

likely certain death because the mirror wasn't a good weapon at close range—was her gift of incredible foot speed. Indeed, she could already easily outrun a horse, as well as creatures like megahobs and demons on foot.

However, she couldn't simply flee and leave Quin and Sal to deal with the menaces in the field, especially since nine more demons had just flown in to land in the midst of the fray. So, instead, in a matter of only about seven seconds, Kiana circled the field three times, which served to distract the megahobs and about half of the demons as they dizzily watched. Coming to a stop in a position with her back against a wooden privacy fence separating the field belonging to the bowling alley and a residential neighborhood, Kiana used her mirror to shoot energy blasts at the hobs and nine new demons, until, that is, she lost her grip on the weapon from her hands being somewhat sweaty and because three of the demons had been hurling large dirt clods at her, one of which had struck her wrist. Unable to retrieve the mirror that had landed out of reach, as the demons and megahobs closed in on her position, Kiana drew a blue rope that she had been wearing as a belt.

Meanwhile, Quin had managed to deal with the grounded demon, after which, she and Sal together had taken care of the two he was fighting. However, the megahobs and four of the newly-arrived demons had just turned on them, and were gaining ground by dodging Sal's flute strikes and blasts from the mirror Quin had just drawn from a shoulder pack. Though Sal and Quin were skilled, with neither particularly being combat experts, their situation was very rapidly starting to look bleak.

Kiana was in even more dire circumstances, being so outnumbered, and now also trapped by the fence, which meant she would have difficulty trying to flee, no matter how fast her footspeed. Three bowling alley employees had just emerged from a door at the rear of the building, drawn to the noises of the demons howling and the energy bursts. But without any types of weapons, other than perhaps a couple of scrap boards beside a dumpster, the three weren't going to be able to help. Nor would help be coming from seven bowling alley patrons that had just rounded the corner of the building to investigate the odd flashes of light, along with strange musical sounds, crashes, and yowls. Plus, since none of the onlookers had ever seen demons or megahobs before, they were all basically in a state of shock, and thus were simply rooted

in place like statues, sporting gaping mouths and wide eyes. So now, they were in danger too because the demons and hobs certainly weren't going to stop once they had killed their original three targets. While this was a time in history when the likes of hobgoblins and demons were mostly still in hiding, once exposed, they didn't like to leave witnesses.

However, while this might have seemed like a fairly hopeless situation, things were very quickly about to change because Quin's Grandma Vini had just arrived in the field, apparently from out of nowhere, in a soft flash of golden light. Rapidly tossing out a shroud curtain (basically a protective magical shadow emitted from a device on her belt), which raised itself behind her to shield the eyes of the stunned onlookers, Vini's body then lit up with intense light for about a second and a half. The light instantly killed the demons and megahobs, all of them dissipating, leaving nothing more than bits of muck and slime strewn across the field that would wash away with the next decent rain.

Sal, Kiana, and Quin had all known to shield their eyes when Vini arrived. Otherwise, they would have risked permanent blindness from the flash of unicorn light her body had emitted.

In another flash (of quickness this time), Vini retrieved an item from a pocket of her vest, this being the Mind Key, a powerful magical sphere, which she used in speedy fashion to alter the memories of the onlookers who, in a matter of only about six seconds, had their brains filled with the idea that the four people in the field had just put out a small grass fire that had started from someone's carelessness with a cigarette butt. So this was the flurry of activity in the field, and the odd noises were from a few pallets falling over and wind whistling through the trees. With nothing all that out of the ordinary to either see or think about, the bowling alley patrons and employees all swiftly returned to their normal activities, leaving Sal, Kiana, Vini, and Quin alone in the field.

Sal had an ugly gash on his left leg from a demon's claws. However, Quin was easily able to treat this using her gift of healing by touch, which soon restored his leg to healthy and whole, the gash gone in less than fifteen seconds basically as she placed her hands on either side of the wound. Blessedly, Quin and Kiana had suffered no injuries from the encounter, other than being naturally a little stressed and upset.

They all calmed down fairly quickly as Vini, by thought, called to Valo and Dara, the two wind horses who had been helping them on this time-travel trip.

Vini had known Valo and Dara since she was a young girl, Valo being a wind horse she had worked with in a camp hippotherapy program, and Dara being sister to Tulko, Vini's longtime protector assigned to her by God when she was a mere fourteen years old. Quin, Kiana, and Sal were familiar with Dara in the future, though the future version of the wind horse had never related to her young friends that she had helped them in the past, this being a safeguard against influencing any of their actions, such as whether or not to take this specific time-travel trip in the first place. At this time in history, Vini's younger self was in college; and Sal, Kiana, and Quin had, of course, not yet been born.

Vini had been running an errand while her charges were having dinner at a hamburger restaurant about a quarter of a mile from the bowling alley, the back field of which the teens were crossing on their way to meet their chaperone in front of a convenience store down the street. Since Vini couldn't be with the three all of the time, they would, on occasion, have to handle things themselves, which they were usually capable of doing, this time being something of an exception based on the surprise of the attack and the large number of foes.

Dara and Valo responded quickly; and in less than ten seconds, the group was airborne, with Kiana and Sal aboard Valo, and Quin and Vini riding Dara. Barely eight seconds later, the wind horses dropped their passengers off in the back yard of the three-bedroom bungalow Vini had rented for this somewhat lengthy time-travel trip.

The bungalow was actually only about two miles from Vini's childhood home, which she was mainly steering clear of; though she would eventually end up having some impact during this trip on her family, including her younger self. Doyle Mansion, the site of Vini's first job and the start of her magical adventures, was also not far away, in fact, just down the street from the house in which she grew up. In the time this group was from, the mansion was home to Sal's mentor, the famous writer, E.R. Tremaine, better known as Em to family and friends, or Ms. Tremaine to Sal and Kiana, and Aunt Em to Quin, based on Em being a longtime friend to her family.

The group had come to the past mainly to help slow the progression of certain things. In this day and age, huge leaps were being taken in the U.S. (as in many other parts of the world) toward societies full of lawlessness, in which the persecution of persons holding conservative ideals, and especially Christians unwilling to compromise on the truth of the bible, was becoming not only rampant, but even accepted in mainstream circles, the callousness and commonplace flippancy of this being something that would have been completely unheard of, as well as unacceptable to the majority of people, just twenty or so years previous. Therefore, the help of the TKTs (short for Time Key Travelers) was definitely needed, TKTs being called such even though some, like this group, were traveling back and forth through time via unicorn power instead of using the Time Key, a sister magical sphere to the Mind Key.

Kiana, Sal, and Quin, when they first arrived in the past, had all remarked as to how very different the area, basically Central Alabama, looked in comparison to their own time. Indeed, Montgomery and its suburbs weren't yet in rubble, as they would be in the future, along with most other U.S. cities, both large and small.

Doyle Mansion still looked much as it would in the future, though a larger greenhouse, two wind turbines, and a sizeable water-catchment system had been added. Except for the Galloway Estate across the street from the mansion, the other houses on the block didn't exist anymore in the future, except in rubble, and in having certain components like bricks, fixtures, wiring, iron bathtubs, windows, and such incorporated into Rubble Gardens: elaborate parklike settings containing flowers, shrubs, mosses, vegetables, benches, walkways, retaining walls, fountains, etc. that were developed and tended to by area gnomes, bigfoots, and some people.

Two unicorns had brought this group to the past. Having full unicorn powers, Vini could have easily brought herself. For that matter, if the four had simply linked hands, she could have brought them all to this specific time. However, she thought Kiana, Quin, and Sal might enjoy riding unicorns, which they did, though the trip didn't seem to take more than about three minutes. They felt no movement at all on the journey, except perhaps a small tickle in the brain, as though a gentle breeze had decided to briefly visit their minds, as their eyes

observed colors swirling all about them in a bright, but not flashy, setting. Indeed, the light surrounding them was more like a glow than a glare.

In case we might be wondering, unicorns are able to travel through time because they have the ability to move faster than the speed of light. Vini had been able to call unicorns since her high school years, though she had only seldom relied on them as a means of time travel. Instead, the creatures had more assisted her with other things, like killing demons and other foul creatures. Unicorns are also a natural counter to depression, not only in the power of their light working to dispel dark thoughts, but also in helping people see the good in bad situations, unveiling blessings in disguise, as the saying goes, this information being imparted by the unicorns into the brains of persons struggling to understand why certain bad or disturbing things are happening. Often, events that seem frustrating, unfair, and even hurtful are actually meant for our benefit. Unicorns are also known as Soul Shadows, for the simple reason that each person has a unicorn attached to his or her soul, though few people during their lifetimes are able to tap into the powers of these creatures.

After a restful evening and night, the four departed the bungalow after breakfast the next morning atop Valo and Dara, the group's destination being a protest-turned-riot taking place in Oregon.

Wind horses have excellent camouflage, often looking like the soft pinks and oranges of dawn, the yellows and browns of golden sunsets, or simply patches of sky and clouds in various shades of blue, gray, cream, and such. Therefore, the riot crowds didn't notice either the horses or their riders to whom the camouflage extended. After dropping off the four in a heavily-treed area outside the fray of the protest, Valo and Dara sped swiftly away, leaving only streaky imprints of soft blue, gold, and peach colors in the sky that would fade within a few seconds.

People all over the place these days were protesting for all sorts of reasons. Sadly, many were not simply exercising their right to peacefully assemble and let their voices be heard. Instead, they were gathering together in angry mobs, often funded by wealthy agitators so that these people wouldn't have to work, their jobs being simply to gather into packs to stir up hatred and violence whenever possible, while drawing in others to do the same. Indeed, many college students

were promised good grades by their liberal-minded professors for participating in these demonstrations, most of which were taking place for little or no reason, but simply to protest anything and everything going on with the president these days. In fact, he couldn't have a bowl of ice cream or sneeze without someone raising a ruckus because he didn't chose a politically-correct flavor, had two scoops instead of one; and the handkerchief had a red border, instead of blue or green! In addition to wanting to belong to a movement, and feel as though they were accomplishing something in this world, many of the protestors were being misled by deceitful news organizations, mainly publishing and broadcasting lies instead of truth, along with opinionated commentaries lacking any facts to back up even extreme claims.

Destruction of property, both public and private, was a huge problem these days, as the mobs had no problems setting fire to things, smashing windows, denting cars, slashing tires, breaking up benches and planters, etc. Also common was violence against counter protestors—those tired of being treated with contempt for having opposing political, religious, etc. views. Tired of being harassed, shamed, and treated as punching bags on various social media platforms, many couldn't help but show up, to stand up for themselves and their beliefs. However, in doing so, they became the natural targets of the angry mobsters, both for hateful language and for physical attacks.

The TKTs were getting involved in order to influence situations such as this, toward peace rather than violence. However, acting mainly as a supervisor and back-up on many of their excursions, Vini held back on this occasion to simply observe, as Quin, Kiana, and Sal slipped into the crowds to do their work.

Kiana immediately targeted two protestors wielding baseball bats, which she relieved them of. Stunned that a mere girl would confront them, they weren't able to keep her from snatching the bats from their hands. Then, they barely caught a glimpse of her backside as she zigzagged off through the throngs at speeds that made her look more like a streak of smoke, than a person, to those who observed her. After depositing the bats into a dumpster about a mile from the protest, Kiana speedily returned to scan the crowd for other possible dangers. In noting a man shoving another man for wearing a t-shirt in support of the

president, she made a running pass behind the back of the aggressor, grabbing his shoulders and giving him a spin as she went by. Spun in a circle four times by the force of this, the bully was basically too dizzy to continue his assault on the other man, who had wisely backed off.

Meanwhile, being a gifted wordsmith, Sal was using felt markers and strips of blank adhesive paper to alter the picket signs of many in the mob, often changing them to mean something totally opposite what was originally intended, and sometimes even turning them into something funny. “Get Rid of Bigots” became “Get Really Big Heads, Like Mine.” And “Defeat Fascists” was changed to “I’m a Defeated Fascist.” Also, “Resist and Obstruct” was made over into “Respect and Offer to Help Others.” Some signs were hung on buildings, retaining walls, vans, and such. By Sal’s hand, “Preserve Our Rights” was changed to “Preserve Our Right to Act Like Babies.” Another message about impeaching the president was changed to one promoting peach pies from a bakery down the street.

Quin was helping Sal, and neither was noticed in their efforts because they were carrying shroud sapphires, black star sapphires to be exact. Produced by the tears of a gifted person in their own time, the magical stones made those bearing them nearly invisible.

Upon noticing the alterations to the signs, being slightly more baffled than angry, many of the sign wielders simply had to laugh, which served to lighten the mood of the crowd somewhat. Thus, slightly less shoving, punching, shouting, and other types of malice were occurring. Also, by this time, Kiana had managed to remove four more bats from the crowd, along with two knives, and six short pieces of pipe that had been brought for smashing people, as well as property. Those who had brought these weapons should have been arrested; so too the forty or so people who had shown up wearing masks, since this was also illegal at public assemblies. Sadly, at this time, and especially in certain parts of the country, many people were not being arrested for their illegal acts. Even many of those committing physical assaults were not being arrested and charged; and this was serving to embolden many others to commit similar acts, adding to the spirit of lawlessness pervading much of the world at this time.

Observing the anger and hatred, Vini had to say a prayer for the miscreants: *Dear Lord, please open their hearts and minds, and help*

them come to know You. Please turn their thoughts to loving You, and their fellow man. Please, save them. I pray in the name of Jesus, Amen.

It was pretty obvious to her that the majority of these folks were not part of the Christian family. Therefore, the “save” part of her prayer meant save the lost from hell, because there is only one thing that can save anyone from the terrible fate of ending up there. Each person must accept Jesus Christ at some point during his or her lifetime. And since we can never know how long or short our lives might be, the sooner the better. After death, there will be no chance to accept Christ, no chance to explain anything or barter with God. Instead, a person will face only Judgement, because there are no good reasons for intelligent people not to accept the free offer of Salvation. The stubbornness and sin keeping many people from accepting this gift, God cannot and will not excuse.

As her three charges were finishing up their efforts, Vini used the Mind Key on the crowd to dispel any ideas that something incredibly odd had happened in the midst of the riot. Although the Mind Key had mainly been designed to influence the brains of individuals, Vini’s unicorn powers served to amplify the magic of the sphere, allowing it to be used on groups of people. In this case, the Mind Key mainly just disoriented the crowd, particularly those who had observed Kiana’s gift of speed, or who might have been tempted to believe something like witchcraft was involved in the changing of the signs. Thus, these people ended up thinking that they might have seen something unusual, but they couldn’t quite grasp what that thing might be, the truth remaining permanently just out of reach of their thoughts.

In addition to use of the black sapphires, the TKTs had also brought two shroud mirrors with them, one of which Vini was regularly using in order to remain as low-key and hidden as possible, this being necessary due to the constant glow of her body. Being fully connected to her personal Soul Shadow, she couldn’t help but give off at least some measure of unicorn light at all times. Along with use of the shroud sapphires and mirrors on this trip, Vini was wearing special clothing designed by genies to dampen her glow, which, if not subdued, often made people wonder and stare. Plus, unshrouded, she was difficult to look at for anything other than brief stretches of time.

Even at home she tended to wear shroud garments, so as not to force others to wear sunglasses, or shield their eyes in other ways when

in her company. Vini's husband wore a sleeping mask to shut out the light at night, having done so for the past eighteen months or so, which was when his wife's glow had become more pronounced as she neared full sanctification, a term referring to becoming more Christlike. For this was what was happening to Vini: She was becoming more and more like Christ, as we all should during our lifetimes.

On a particular day in the bungalow when Vini was wearing simply a regular pair of jeans and a t-shirt instead of her shroud clothing, Kiana ended up quoting Matthew 5:14. "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid."

Also noting Vini's radiance, and shielding his eyes somewhat, Sal followed up with Matthew 5:16. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

No sooner had Sal, Quin, and Kiana met up with Vini on the outskirts of the protest, which was now wrapping up as a relatively peaceful gathering, than Dara and Valo arrived, Vini having called to them by thought just a few moments before.

Boarding the wind horses, the four were whisked away to a college campus in Missouri. This happened to be the middle of the spring semester. The TKTs had actually left home for this trip in the third week of a sweltering August, and what a relief it had been to arrive at their destination in a cooler season. They were going on two weeks now in the past and had so far visited six college campuses, though not yet the one Vini's younger self was attending. She was just finishing her second year of college at this time, and would shortly be moving home from living in a dorm in order to commute for the next year and a half to complete her Bachelor's Degree, finishing a semester early from having attended summers too.

At the college in Missouri, large crowds of protestors had gathered in the quad, intent on getting their message out by whatever means necessary, particularly uncivil and hateful means; and this meant not just punishing peaceful counter protestors, but also any conservative students just trying to get to their classes and other activities for the day.

Observing six people shouting through megaphones directly into the faces of others, who were just trying to get away from the assault, Vini couldn't resist getting involved. So too were about fifteen people

getting right up next to certain targets to blow screeching whistles into their ears. Shaking her head, Vini pulled an extra-large roll of tape from her belt pack, which was a pod pack designed by gifted technologists to hold much more than its appearance might suggest. Using unicorn speed, she had the mouths of all of the megaphone shouters and whistle blowers taped shut in four seconds flat. And since she had applied the tape to encircle their entire heads, those with bound mouths would stay silent for a good while, in having to take the time to get the tape unstuck from their hair. Vini then took the opportunity in the next three seconds to gather all of the megaphones and whistles so that others couldn't take them up and use them. She also procured two knives, a piece of pipe, and four collapsible batons, which she dumped with the megaphones and whistles into a large trash bin behind one of the campus cafeterias.

Meanwhile, Quin was taking the opportunity to politely recite bible quotes from atop a stone bench, while handing out a hundred New Testaments she had just unloaded from her shoulder pack, also of a pod design like her Grandma Vini's, because this was what many godly people of their time carried. Quin smiled very largely when four people who had just started hurling profanities at her suddenly found their mouths taped shut. Not only did many cussing students, teachers, and others these days not care about hurling vile language at rivals, many didn't even know it was illegal to do this, having gotten so used to hearing and seeing people cussing at others without suffering any sort of punishment.

What a peaceful world we might live in if all illegal acts were taken note of, and justice doled out to the perpetrators. Since this wasn't happening, the law abiders of the world were simply going to have to wait on God's justice, which was coming, and would arrive much more rapidly than most people might expect. In truth, many of these very protestors would find themselves (along with their children and grandchildren) enslaved in the Supercities and work camps of the future, under the rule of the cruel sorcerers and their followers.

However, while waiting on the future, including God's justice, the TKTs could help curb some of the vileness, and slow the progression of things down a bit in accordance with God's schedule; for He was the One directing the time travelers. They were getting their instructions from Him by various means. In addition to simply hearing His still,

small voice in the back of their minds, Vini and Quin both had the gift of prophetic dreams and daydreams, which served to lead them. So too were they getting some of their information from auto-writing, a gift which Kiana, Vini, and Quin all possessed. Though not having the prophetic gifts of the girls, Sal was incredibly observant to the many ways God might be speaking to His children in the world: through the bible, sometimes via newscasts, and often even through things like clouds of certain shapes, the number of clock chimes, or by making writing appear amongst the threads of tapestries.

On the other side of the quad from Quin, Kiana was also atop a bench; but instead of quoting, she was tap dancing, which was drawing considerable attention because her foot speed didn't just apply to running, but to other coordination skills as well, which was the main reason she had never engaged in any type of competitive sports, out of fairness. Upon drawing the attention of a crowd, she too was handing out New Testaments that also included the Psalms and Proverbs, of which Kiana was recommending certain Psalms that were her favorites. Psalms 37, 46, 51, 91, and 119 she definitely highly recommended. When a couple of thugs started throwing things at Kiana, she easily dodged. Plus, several people taking an interest in the bibles, and in what she was saying, ended up preventing others from throwing things, bravely standing up for her against the mobs.

Sal was keeping busy as well. For a few skirmishes popping up here and there, he was employing word and phrase flashcards, or flashers, as he liked to call them. With the letters of the words on the cards written in specific ways (wide, slanted, skinny, elongated, etc.), and by use of certain colors, words like "calm" and "tranquil" were able to slow people down, quieting their minds, which resulted in the cessation of certain actions like yelling and screaming, as well as shoving and hitting. While letters written in a flowing style and in cool colors such as blue and silver tended to soothe emotions, in some cases, a more staccato or halting style of letter formation worked better, especially in combination with more vibrant colors. For instance, the words "slow down" drew more attention when penned in red, especially with the "o's" being octagonal in shape to register on the brain like stop signs.

In between using flashers, Sal chalked words like “still” and “quiet” on the sides of buildings, so those passing by would notice and become more still and quiet. On a side walkway, he used blue-hued pebbles to spell out “Peace like a River.” The stretched-out cursive letters almost appeared to be a rendition of a slow-moving river, rippling as it meandered along the edge of the sidewalk; this, like his other messages, serving to slow people down and make them think. For some reason, Sal had always been drawn to Isaiah 48:18, which expounds that if we follow God’s commands, our peace will be like a river.

While the efforts of the TKTs at this particular college did help to quell the anger and violence for the day, sadly, on campuses across the nation, many people were being unduly influenced by evil forces, including by their teachers, many of whom were fully in the service of Satan, whether they were capable of recognizing this or not. Many were promoting hatred toward both Christians and Jews, with some even denying the Holocaust.

In addition to people acting as influences, quite a few demons were present in the world at this time, though most kept themselves hidden, being able to do this due to their shapeshifting skills, to include sizes. Indeed, even monstrous demons could shrink themselves down to fit into some fairly small places, like cracks and crevices in the stonework of old buildings, narrow tree cavities, chimneys, even shoeboxes if they wished. Not being made of much earthly substance (mainly just evil energy), they could also easily hide inside human beings. From their hidden spots, demons were able to enact their influences by planting thoughts, some very powerful, into people’s brains, even the brains of God’s children.

With regard to not standing out amongst college students, Kiana was tall enough to easily pass for one, while Quin was old enough to look completely at home in this setting. Sal also didn’t particularly look out of place, since he could have been someone’s younger brother on campus for the day, or a visiting high school student checking out a college he might want to attend.

Getting hungry for lunch and ready to wrap things up, Vini ended up using the Mind Key on the crowd, to make most people think they were late for classes, work, a racquetball match, or other sorts of appointments; thus, the protesters swiftly started to disperse. However,

before leaving the quad, Quin did take the time to heal the bloody nose of a girl who had been punched by an angry rioter. “Here, let me help you stop the bleeding,” she said, raising a tissue to the nose; though it was her touch on the girl’s cheek that actually stopped the bleeding, as well as the formation of a black eye, this being a common result of trauma to the nose.

TKTs tended to carrying plenty of food and water in their packs. Walking to a city park about half a mile from the campus, the group enjoyed a leisurely lunch of peanut butter sandwiches, bananas, and grapes at a picnic table, unaware that they were being observed, as they had been for most of the morning, the observer being none other than a spreesprite, a fairy-like being generally not much taller than half an inch in height. This was a girl spreesprite, which meant she was a keen observer, in contrast to boy spreesprites who more liked to roam around playing pranks. However, being an observer did not at all mean that girl spreesprites were reluctant to get involved. Rather, it meant getting out a lot and looking for things to get involved with. In truth, the interventions of girl spreesprites into the affairs of others were possibly as common as those of other magical creatures such as wind horses, gryphons, and puck trolls.

Martella was the name of this spreesprite, and she had been tempted to get involved with the Oregon riot, but hadn’t because the TKTs seemed to be doing a good job, which they had also done with regard to the mobs at the nearby college, so she hadn’t felt the need to get involved there either.

Although spreesprites are very fast in flight, and definitely fast enough to keep up with wind horses, they often choose to ride about on the likes of dragonflies, bumblebees, wrens, and such. However, in order to keep up with Valo and Dara on this day, Martella had enlisted the aid of a magical white hummingbird, one that often helped her with a specific one of her interventions—that of stopping time. (Although all girl spreesprites possess this skill, a white hummingbird must help to fully enact the magic.)

Martella nibbled on her own lunch, two sesame seeds wrapped in a small pink rose petal, as the TKTs were finishing theirs. As the four set off on their wind horses, she decided to follow them to the site of another riot taking place in a large city in Texas. In this case, people

were protesting against the police. And, in fact, many police officers were in danger because several people had brought guns to the riot with the specific intent of targeting the police.

On the verge of stopping time, Martella held back in noticing that Quin had just called another white hummingbird, using a small musical triangle that she generally carried handy on her belt. Like girl spreesprites, Quin was also able to stop time in conjunction with a white hummingbird, but only by using a pin-on watch that had once been inside a bagical (a magical bag that liked to turn ordinary objects into magical ones).

Using the watch, Quin stopped time for five seconds (the limit of the watch), which was plenty long enough for Kiana to run in and relieve three people of their guns, which were swiftly placed into a pouch and handed off to Valo who then sped away to drop the pouch into an active volcano. Kiana was protected from the effects of stopped time due to her speed and because she was carrying a blue sapphire, a stone of similar magic to the black sapphires, but that instead acted more as a shield than a shroud. In fact, all four of the TKTs were carrying shield sapphires, with Quin having had hers implanted into her ankle. In addition to providing physical protection, the stones were able to prevent mind intrusion from things like demon-planted thoughts, or from someone attempting to use a magical device like the Mind Key. In the time the TKTs were from, certain gifted people were able to manipulate dreams, plant thoughts, and even read minds. Thus, the sapphires were a great help in protecting against this type of mind intrusion as well.

However, because the range of Quin's watch was fairly limited, at one hundred and twenty square feet, Martella did end up getting involved with the issue of the guns in order to protect people on the opposite side of the crowd as to where the TKTs were doing their work. In comparison to the pin-on watch, spreesprites were able to stop time in much larger areas, to include whole countries if they wished. Plus, they could stop time for a full minute at a stretch, which Martella did in this instance in order to fly in on the hummingbird to place magical thistle seeds, one each onto the barrels of four guns, which instantly disappeared from the hands of the criminals wielding them. She also changed the trajectory of two bullets that had just been fired, but had

not yet reached their targets. Thus, the bullets simply ended up hitting the ground, instead of people, when time started again.

In surveying the crowds below, having missed one gun that had been inside a person's jacket, Martella decided not to stop time again, instead choosing to leave the back of the hummingbird to simply zip into the crowd herself and employ another thistle seed to vanish this gun as well, all of this happening within just a couple of seconds, so she wasn't at all observed.

Back on the TKTs' side of the crowd, Quin was just clipping the triangle back onto her belt while thanking and bidding farewell to the hummingbird that had helped her. After giving Quin a tiny nod, the glistening white creature disappeared in a mere blink as he streaked off into the blue. With the crowds fairly under control at this time, especially because many police officers were aboard horses (famous for their crowd-control abilities), the TKTs left in short order.

Martella, too, needed to be off, specifically to home. She was getting married in a few weeks, to her best friend, Weyland; and she had much to prepare for as far as invitations, decorations, food for the reception, dresses for her bridesmaids, etc. Weyland was likewise busy these days, in getting his home ready for Martella to come to live with him once they were married. Occupied with this, and tending his garden, he hadn't been out much lately. After getting married, he also likely wouldn't be getting out much. In truth, rather than playing pranks, older boy spreesprites were often much keener on keeping house for their wives, who tended to stay super busy with their observation activities, and so needed their homes to be well-kept and restful places to return to, along with having a good dinner on the table at the end of a busy day.

When nearing home, instead of going directly to the bungalow, Vini asked Valo and Dara to drop them off at a branch of the local public library. However, the TKTs were not there to access the books or any other materials. Instead, Vini wanted Kiana, Sal, and Quin to be able to see a lovely fountain in a reading garden behind the building. The metal centerpiece of the fountain was shaped like a dried dandelion, with each of the seeds giving off a spray of water. Glittering in the afternoon sunshine, the sculpture was absolutely beautiful, as it had been when it first captured Vini's fancy when she was in high school.

Plus, the somewhat musical sounds of the water softly splashing and tinkling were very soothing, serving to calm the minds and spirits of the TKTs from the frenzies they had been exposed to for much of the day so far.

From the library, it was only a mile or so of a walk to the bungalow, so Vini didn't again call Dara and Valo.

As they strolled down sidewalks and alleyways, Kiana's was lost in thought over the many wondrous things (like the dandelion fountain) she had seen in the past two weeks. Unlike Quin and Sal, who were fairly seasoned TKTs, this was her first time-travel trip; and the strangeness of it all had been somewhat unsettling at first, particularly seeing cities that she knew of as being only in ruins looking pristine and whole, with great numbers of people bustling about. Ordinarily an outgoing and even somewhat boisterous person, when they first arrived in the past, Kiana had actually turned somewhat shy for the first few days, even on occasion sort of hiding behind Sal and mainly just watching while taking everything in and adjusting to her surroundings. Even though she knew her history, and had been prepped for the trip by a TKT research partner (an historian, advisor, and coach basically), seeing it all in person had definitely been very strange. Now that she had adjusted, she was pretty much back to her old self, as evidenced by things like the tap dancing on benches and charging through crowds in search of weapons to relieve people of.

Quin's mind was also occupied as they walked. While she was a valued member of the team, she wasn't necessarily on this trip because of her skills, but more to spend time with her Grandma Vini, whose presence was a natural counter to depressive symptoms, which Quin had been experiencing lately, mainly due to something that had happened earlier in the summer. Without even knowing it, she had been under the influence of a hypnoid, a fairly new tool (chemical in nature) being used by the sorcerers to bring others under their control. While following orders, she had actually murdered a friend of hers. Blessedly, the friend was found and magically revived. Also while being manipulated, Quin had tried to kill her boyfriend, seventeen-year-old Chase Linn, whom everyone called Linn. Again by divine blessing, Linn had been saved.

Despite the outcomes, Quin was naturally upset over what had happened. Even though she hadn't been in control of her actions, she

felt guilty, mainly because she hadn't taken the hypnoid counter (a simple pill, though a horribly sour-bitter one), which had been available to her as a preventative before she was hypnoid infected. At the time, she just couldn't imagine that she might be vulnerable to this sort of attack. Having had bouts of depression throughout her life, this traumatic event was a natural trigger. But, of course, God's children are not supposed to conform to nature. Reading the bible and frequent prayer were definitely helping, because it's always a benefit for people to spend time alone with God, not only to ask for His help in troubling situations, but to develop a closer relationship with Him.

Quin's Grandma Vini, no stranger herself to depression, was also helping, not only by means of her unicorn-like influence, but in setting certain rules and engaging all three of her charges on this trip in various activities to keep any possible depressive symptoms under control.

For one thing, they were all keeping to a strict sleep schedule, getting up at six in the morning and going to bed no later than ten at night. They were also following a healthy diet by making good choices at home and not eating out much. (The hamburger restaurant thing was limited to once a week on this trip.) Plus, they were all keeping busy. When not engaged in TKT activities, they were having regular bible studies, and doing schoolwork nearly every day. They were all going to be ahead in school upon their return home since time-travel trips took no time at all to complete. In fact, TKTs always arrived back at nearly the same instant they left, whether using a portal (four of which were known to exist) or traveling by unicorn power. Also as a counter to depression, they were all getting plenty of exercise, such as walking home after seeing the fountain instead of calling the wind horses. A jogging track and public tennis courts were also handy nearby, only two blocks from the bungalow.

After a hearty dinner of homemade minestrone and Italian bread fresh from the oven, while Sal and Kiana were reading and Quin was taking a short walk around the neighborhood, Vini engaged in a bit of auto-writing in order to get instructions for the next day's activities. She also made a few journal notes, including one related to the dandelion fountain that was a quote from her good friend and first employer, Mrs. Doyle. "It's every flower's dream to grow up beside a fountain."

In thinking of Mrs. Doyle, who had died at the hands of a demon on the very day that Vini called her first unicorn, Vini was slightly wishing that she could go back in time and save her. But, of course, she couldn't do this because time travelers were to act only on God's instructions. Also, some bad things were meant to happen in this world, as part of God's Overall Plan, which we often can't fully understand.

Even though time travel couldn't be used to save Mrs. Doyle, part of the reason this group of TKTs had come to the past was to deal with the issue of demons who, in the future, would end up operating completely out in the open under the direction of the sorcerers. In this time, however, the majority of sorcerers in the world were in hiding and demons were mainly getting their orders directly from Satan and his army of fallen angels. In addition to planting ugly thoughts into brains, demons were actively killing, mainly targeting God's children who were actively fighting the growing evils of the world.

With regard to the planting of thoughts, Satan was currently pushing his demons to work on the minds of high school and college students, to get them to think and act in certain worldly ways, such as those involving pride, greed, anger, jealousy, laziness, etc. Since sinful habits learned early are incredibly hard to break, many of these young people would be forever lost, nurturing unhealthy feelings and desires their whole lives at all cost, even the cost of their own souls.

For this was the main goal of Satan—to collect as many souls as possible for hell. In addition to influencing susceptible minds, he was having his demons engage in attacks such as the one behind the bowling alley, specifically to stop God's children from doing certain things that might thwart his wicked agenda. Sadly, for Satan that is, nothing can stop what God has ordained. Though, even more sadly sometimes, people are free to choose evil instead of good.

In contemplating Mrs. Doyle's fountain quote, Vini suddenly thought of Psalm 36:9. "For with thee is the fountain of life; in thy light do we see light."

Recording this verse in her journal, she then added, "We are all flowers growing up beside God's Fountain, nourished by both Water and Light."

Quin actually went to bed at nine, falling asleep shortly after her head met the pillow in remembering the lovely watery music of the dandelion fountain.

Chapter Two

We're Not Listening

The next morning found Vini visiting an old friend before breakfast at a church not too far from her childhood home. Anei lived on the top of this church, which was not odd because he was a gargoyle. The sun was just starting to show itself when Vini appeared in a blink beside him on the roof.

Easily recognizing this woman as a future version of the girl he had known for several years by this time, Anei immediately surmised that she was on a time-travel trip; though he didn't ask a lot of questions in knowing that she wouldn't be able to divulge very much about the future. However, being fully free to talk about the present, while shaking his head sadly, he told her, "It's bad right now, really bad." (He was referring to the evil and turmoil brewing in the world at this time.)

"I know," Vini replied, "I remember from having lived through it."

Anei never even needed to leave his spot on the church roof in order to know exactly what was happening all over the world because he could see things in the eye of his mind. In addition to seeing various events playing out, in knowing many languages, Anei was astute at reading newspapers all over the globe. Plus, he could easily read lips in order to understand what was being said on television broadcasts. One of the things troubling Anei the most these days was the lies being spread by many news outlets. Nearly entirely focused on giving personal opinions and issuing propaganda, they rarely reported the facts on anything, the main result being a lot of fuel for the anger and hatred brewing in many parts of the world, and particularly in the United States where media moguls were focused on an agenda of promoting liberalism and quashing the voices of conservatives.

"We have to remember that God is still in control," Vini said.

To this, Anei smiled because it was exactly what he needed to hear, being the absolute truth, and very reassuring. Plus, the nearness of his

friend was already lifting his spirits since unicorn magic didn't just work on human beings. In suddenly noting that the brightness beside him wasn't simply from the sunrise, Anei nearly had to laugh. Although gargoyles tend to have good foresight, he never would have imagined that his friend who could call unicorns might someday practically become one.

With regard to gargoyle foresight, Anei could pretty well guess what was in store for the human race as a result of what was happening today. Throughout history, whenever people strayed from God's ways, they paid a price. Sadly, being fleshly creatures full of sin, people didn't seem to have much capacity to learn from history. Flitting through Anei's mind were events such as the Great Flood and the Tower of Babel. In the Wilderness March, a whole generation had paid the price for disobedience. In noting what was currently going on in the world, Anei imagined that this time would likely be much worse, perhaps extending through several generations. (He was imagining correctly, as it were.) But it wasn't just that people were refusing to learn from history; in this time, many were not even being taught history. Plus, as predicted by bible prophecy, the hearts of many were growing cold; and, as minds were darkening, affection for fellow man was beginning to wane. However, even in knowing that this was all part of God's Overall Plan, Anei was sad over what the human race was setting itself up to endure, setting itself up because of the freewill choice to reject God and indulge in matters of the flesh.

"Have you visited your younger self yet?" Anei suddenly thought to ask.

"No, but I will while I'm here," Vini answered.

"Good," Anei responded, "because I think she probably could use some encouragement." Anei, of course, knew that this would not be a sit-down-to-tea sort of visit, but more something clandestine on the part of the older Vini, who had indeed, as one of her reasons for coming into the past, planned to look in on her younger self. However, she couldn't simply show up and present herself to the younger Vini. Instead, she would make full use of various shrouds while enacting certain influences behind the scenes.

In truth, Vini's auto-writing session the evening before had led her to visit her old friend; and God had led her in this direction mainly

because of Anei's skill of being able to see things in the eye of his mind, which could very well help the TKTs on this trip.

Being perceptive, Anei easily figured out why she might be visiting him, and so he offered, "If you like, while you're here, I can pinpoint certain hotspots and let you know about them by thought." (In the same way that thunderbirds, gryphons, and wind horses could communicate telepathically with humans, so too could gargoyles.)

"Precisely what I was hoping for," Vini said with a smile. "Thank you, my friend."

Along with accurate foresight, gargoyles also have good insight, which prompted Anei to share with Vini something he had noticed that had become a pretty big problem over the past few years. "Not only are people not listening to God, they aren't listening to each other," he stated.

Nodding, Vini knew exactly what he was referring to, which was one of the reasons the TKTs had come to this time. In addition to things like the whistles and megaphones being brought to protests to assault others and disrupt free speech, people were similarly disrupting Town Hall Meetings all over the country by showing up simply to chant, play loud music, shout, blow horns, etc. Crowds of people were also showing up at lectures in order to drown out the voices of those whose opinions they didn't care for.

"A lot of them are just doing it for attention," Anei added, "kind of like how two-year-olds throw tantrums."

Again nodding, Vini answered, "Yes, but it's the wrong kind of attention they're getting, like praise from the media instead of a scolding and a loss of privileges from their parents."

"Some of these people *are* parents," Anei said. "So who's going to scold them and take away their privileges for acting like little heathens?"

"Eventually, God will," Vini replied with a smile, which Anei returned.

Anei was one who could hear the voices of the trees, who often like to tell stories, as well as give warnings, particularly to human beings with regard to things like being on the wrong track. So too do many trees try to report crimes they've witnessed such as theft, arson, and assault. This can even include warnings of future crimes since trees

have the gift of prophecy. Also, from listening in on conversations within earshot of where they are growing, many trees become privy to things like political corruption. Sadly, most people are not capable of hearing the voices of the trees, mainly because people aren't listening, but also because the musical language of the trees (as well as other types of flora) is difficult to decipher. In fact, only certain people, ones connected to nature and who are also math oriented (because music is mathematical), can fully understand the language of trees. And even then, they have to work at the deciphering.

Although Vini was connected to nature, she had never been particularly math oriented; and so, even though she could hear the voices of the trees, she couldn't very often understand what they were saying. However, as one of her gifts, she could hear Winged Words, which are messages from God carried on the Four Winds. While God doesn't very often speak audibly to His children, He does on occasion, sometimes doing so by way of these Winged Words. However, human beings have to be actively listening in order to hear these messages. Sadly, as with the voices of the trees, many of us are not listening.

Heading back to the bungalow, Vini found Sal cooking scrambled eggs for everyone while Kiana was setting the breakfast table and Quin was dishing up a fruit salad of strawberries, bananas, and mandarin orange slices.

Shortly after breakfast, the group headed out to the first of their destinations for the day, a college campus in Nebraska where they engaged in nearly an exact repeat of their actions the previous day at the college in Missouri.

After roughly an hour on campus, when things were fairly settled down, the TKTs moved on to a venue in a mid-sized town in Florida where a man running for city council was trying to give a speech at the local community center. The man had barely opened his mouth to begin speaking when a group of people began shouting and chanting.

While Kiana was relieving two people of megaphones, and Vini was taping mouths, Sal was busy scrawling the sentence, "Listen and don't interrupt!" on three separate dry erase boards on one side of the seating area. With the "e" in "listen" looking much like an ear, and because the words in the sentences were barely separated (basically indicating no interruption), the message took pretty much immediate

effect, with any disruptors in the audience who still had un-taped mouths, and who might have been tempted to sound off, keeping quiet in order to listen. For those with taped mouths, upon freeing themselves from the tape, whenever any of them again began to shout and chant, they immediately again found themselves taped. A couple of these folks were looking to the security guards for help; however, they received only laughter from the guards who, of course, had no idea as to how the taping was happening, but who were grateful for the help in restoring order to the assembly.

One woman freeing her mouth from a second taping complained hotly to one of the guards. "I have a right to free speech!"

"Oh, just sit down and shut up," the guard replied. "You aren't interested in anyone else's free speech rights, so why should anyone care about yours?!"

When the woman later complained about the comment to the head of security, she received the response, "Well, when you're being obnoxious and rude, I feel like any of my officers have the right to say pretty much anything they want back to you. If you expect civility, you must first exercise civility."

As the speech progressed, on a chalkboard on the opposite side of the seating area to the dry erase boards, Sal wrote, "Ask questions at the end, politely." With the second "l" in "politely" resembling a raised hand, many people would raise their hands in order to ask polite questions after the man finished speaking.

At the end of the speech, as people were leaving the community center, Quin and Kiana handed out caramels and chocolates attached to bible-verse bookmarks. Even a few of the would-be disruptors took these, and appreciated them, as the sayings were absolutely lovely, divine actually.

As the TKTs were heading to a secluded spot behind the community center in order to call Valo and Dara, Vini suddenly received a mind message from Anei, after which, she simply vanished, without taking the time to explain to Sal, Quin, and Kiana where she was going. In truth, she couldn't spare the time because she needed to stop a shooting taking place at a high school in Arizona, the school being a place Anei's mind eye had simply wandered into at just the right moment to see a teen boy pull a gun out of his backpack. (God was, of

course, more than capable of guiding the eyes in the minds of gargoyles to exactly the spots they needed to be.)

As a result of Vini's swift response, the lives of twenty-three students and six teachers were saved, though one classmate of the murderous teen, a girl, was shot in the arm. Blessedly, this was not life-threatening and would heal up well. No other harm was done because the shooter somehow ended up roped to a chair, as the pistol he had fired, and his backpack containing five more guns, were instantly delivered into the hands of a security guard racing down the hall toward the sound of the first gunshot. Those directly witnessing this event ended up firmly believing that an angel had saved them because, while they hadn't seen Vini, they had seen a sort of brightness around them that couldn't be attributed to either artificial lighting or the sunlight coming in through windows.

As Vini was returning to the community center, she sent a thought back to Anei. "All taken care of, thank you."

While it was nice to receive the message, Anei didn't really need the update because his eye was still on the situation. An ambulance was just arriving at the scene to take the girl with the gunshot wound to the hospital. And two security guards were taking charge of the shooter.

As another of their skills, gargoyles have control over rocks and earth, which they can move with their minds over long distances, even in great quantities if they wish. Feeling motivated, Anei retrieved several dozen huge hunks of chalk from a quarry in Europe. Flying them over the Atlantic Ocean, he next guided the chalk with his mind to write a specific bible verse, 2 Chronicles 7:14, on the sides of fourteen factories, eleven warehouses, nine high-rises, and twelve schools. With the chalk he had left over, he adorned twenty-six runways at airports in the U.S. with the same bible quote. "If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land."

For, indeed, the United States did need healing. In fact, it was being destroyed from within at this time, reminiscent of how many other great civilizations throughout history had destroyed themselves. But the healing was only going to happen if people repented. Sadly, many would not. However, in order to help His children, God was

allowing certain interventions, such as those of gargoyles and time travelers, to slow the progression of the destruction somewhat, as well as keep various other things on track with His timetable.

Late in the evening, Anei was absolutely livid in seeing a group of masked and hooded people at a riot in a large city in the state of Washington setting fires to several trees in a downtown area. The miscreants were being cheered on by others at the riot, many of whom, oddly enough, were the same people who liked to promote nature causes. After briefly considering, Anei decided he wouldn't call on Vini to help with this. Rather, he would take action himself, in the form of moving in several large piles of dirt from farm fields outlying the city to douse the fires. In the process of quenching flames, Anei didn't particularly care if a fair amount of the dirt also served to douse certain rioters, mainly the ones intent on punching others and bashing the passing cars of people simply trying to get home from work for the day. As mad as he was over the issue of the trees, Anei was actually pleased to see several of the miscreants sputtering from dirt in their mouths, and a couple of others knocked over from being hit with large clods. In his view, these nasty folks were lucky that he hadn't shown up in person to kick a few butts. He, of course, knew that he couldn't do that. However, there was nothing to stop his brain from occasionally engaging in the fantasy that he might one day fly in to one of these riots and grab up a few of the criminals in order to carry them off and dump them into a cold lake somewhere.

By this time, the widespread violent riots and protests in the U.S. had been going on for nearly four years. And the cost as far as personal injury and damage to property, both public and private, was getting hard to measure. Sadly, there didn't seem to be any end in sight to any of this. People weren't going to be allowed to simply lead peaceful lives ever again because this type of lawlessness was like a cancer, growing in large part because many of those committing the crimes were not being punished for them.

Overnight, Anei again flew in large chalk chunks from Europe, this time in order to share a quote from Matthew 12:25. ““Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand.””

Kingdom, nation, same thing, he thought, as his mind energy was guiding one of the hunks of chalk to write along the edges of the pavement of a large parking lot in front of a grocery store.

With the amount of chalk he had flown in, Anei managed to write the bible quote over a hundred times in various places.

However, while many people did take note of this warning, Vini probably could have told Anei that the U.S. was destined to fall, along with the rest of the world, and very quickly by historical standards. Sadly, the Supercities and work camps, into which much of the world's population would be enslaved, were meant to come into being, part of the reason being to draw more people to Jesus Christ before the Endtimes, when it will be too late to save them.

In truth, the only thing that might have saved the United States would have been a massive revival, with people who had turned their backs on God turning back to Him in droves. But with regard to this possibility, we have to consider: What is the point of no return? Already in the time the TKTs had come to, bibles were banned from many hospitals and nursing homes in the U.S. The *Holy Bible* was also not allowed in plain sight at most colleges, and would shortly be banned altogether from campuses because, supposedly, the book was offensive to some students; this being utter insanity. But, so much for Freedom of Speech and Freedom of Religion in a country once known for both and whose founding doctrines were based on both. Sadly, the world was all about political correctness now, and less about personal liberties. While claiming to have open minds, and be all for liberty and fairness, most liberals were actually closed-minded individuals intent on squashing the liberties of others using various unfair tactics such as voter fraud, slander, threats, endless lawsuits, violence, and so forth.

Despite knowing from foresight what might be in store for the U.S. (and many other parts of the world), Anei felt good to be doing something proactive, especially because it was hard sometimes just to sit around and watch. After finishing his chalk-writing late at night, he decided to write in his journal by moonlight.

Anei, like many gargoyles, loved journaling. Having felt a bit melancholy of late, this was something he had been neglecting. Now, he suddenly felt like writing again. At the end of a rather lengthy entry about trees and spring flowers and clouds, Anei wrote about several

pleasant events he had witnessed in recent days such as people opening doors for one another, a woman helping a man with a broken leg up a flight of steps, and a teenager weeding an elderly neighbor's flower bed in secret so as not to be given either thanks or money for the chore.

In wrapping up his journaling session, Anei wrote, "Boy, one little dose of unicorn and I feel like myself again, not just with more energy and a desire to do things, but also, I'm able to notice that there is still some good in the world. Plus, I have remembered that God is still in control, of everything."

Chapter Three

Pertaining to the Brain

With regard to the liberal-mindedness of the day that was basically taking the country in wrong directions, often even into lawlessness and danger, part of Vini's trip into the past had to do with changing a few attitudes, to try to undo a bit of the brainwashing that had been going on for years now by parents, teachers, activists, the media, etc. Using the Mind Key as often as possible, she was planting thoughts into the minds of young people to encourage them to look into things, do some research, and not just accept the ideologies that were being fed to them.

She was also trying to get across that people should study history, truly accurate history, not what was being rewritten and falsified by those with certain agendas. So too was she trying to get across the point that people need to learn what the law is and follow it. People can't simply swing fists and hope to get away with this type of behavior because the rights of one person end where those of another person begin. We can't simply break someone's nose that we don't agree with and consider it just, because the "just" part is that it's just plain wrong to do this.

Unfortunately, many people were being brainwashed into thinking that violence was perfectly okay, because they were in the right and other people were in the wrong. This was what Hitler and his followers thought—that they could just force their ideals onto others by whatever means necessary. In this day and age, "whatever means necessary" often seemed to be hitting people in the head with lead pipes, bike locks, baseball bats, and sometimes even with bullets. Also, social media was being used a great deal, to bully and threaten people, and even drive people out of business who didn't hold the same beliefs as the bullies.

When striving to undo some of the ills being taught to young people, Vini felt very sorry for the teachers involved because the bible states very clearly that teachers are going to be held to a higher account

than others when it comes to Judgement. And since parents, after all, are teachers to their children, many are also going to fall under God's wrath for leading those in their care into various forms of sin and lawlessness.

With specific regard to the media brainwashing people, even as far back as Vini's high school and college years, her gift of discernment had allowed her to easily figure out what was true in the news and what was not. Unfortunately, many people did not have good discernment when it came to sorting out lies and being able to disregard wholly one-sided commentary. However, this matter was actually something the TKTs could at least partly address on this trip.

So let's see if we can make a little dent in this problem, Sal thought, when sitting down to write a series of news articles designed to take on various views of popular culture, and specifically give alternate views. The articles would end up being published in several newspapers with nationwide circulation.

Though online news was a lot more common, this was a time when some newspapers were still being printed. In truth, physical print would never become fully obsolete, this being a good thing because there would come a time in the future (rapidly approaching actually) when electronics were not going to work very well, for various reasons including the activities of gremlins, and EMPs emitted by pods of leviathans (huge underwater dragons basically) in the world's oceans. Based on how bible prophecy had been interpreted over the years, many theologians had warned of this, also stressing the possibility that electronics and most machinery may cease working entirely. This was why horses were prominent in the time the TKTs were from. So too were dawn pigeons, who liked to carry messages for godly people and who were not at all troubled by either gremlins or EMPs.

The publishing of Sal's articles came about by Vini entering newsrooms and typing out what Sal had written onto certain computers. No one noticed, of course, because she did this using shrouds and with unicorn speed. (Sal had handwritten the articles, so she couldn't just bring them in on a flash drive.) Then, she used the Mind Key on various senior editors of the papers to get them to actually publish the articles.

Sal's first name only was attached to the editorials he had written, which made him pretty much anonymous because there were at least several thousand people named Sal in the U.S. at this time. Since the articles still existed in his own time in various libraries, he could eventually claim some credit for them if he wanted to, though this never really interested him. He always kept copies of his writings, so as to have them for reference, but he didn't particularly care if people knew he had written them.

One of the first of Sal's commentaries was entitled, "We Are What We Think," a popular concept to be sure and one Sal exploited with regard to people thinking and acting in hateful ways. Since the article had a conservative slant to it, even including several bible quotes, this was something the newspapers would never have willingly published. Indeed, the liberal owners of the papers were completely outraged over the article, until their sales suddenly shot up and people began clamoring for more contrarian views as a refreshing counterpoint to the same-old liberal nonsense they had been hammered with for the past few years. *Finally, something different to read, not just more of the same!*

Another of Sal's articles, "To Listen is Divine," was about how we don't learn anything, and we don't grow as human beings, if we don't listen to each other. Anei ended up reading and enjoying the article, especially a paragraph in which Sal stressed that all people (no matter how brainy) are limited in their thinking, and therefore very much need the ideas of others in order to solve problems, build better societies, and truly become enlightened. "We can't live in a constricted little bubble and never expect the bubble to either burst, or grow." This was probably Anei's favorite quote from the article, along with the bible verses that had been incorporated.

The TKTs were reading newspapers on occasion, but not regularly. Nor were they watching much television news, mainly because this was a sure way to bring on an attack of depression: with a constant barrage of reports about terrorist attacks, wildfires, flooding, political corruption, gang violence, scandals, suicides, and so forth. Studies had clearly shown that people were much happier when they didn't watch a lot of news.

Actually, these visitors from the future weren't used to watching television at all since there were no TVs in the self-sustaining communities in which they lived. The Supercities had a type of no-screen television system that was mainly used for public announcements, rather than for entertainment programming, though the system hadn't worked well lately, mainly due to the activities of gremlins whose populations were high in the Supes.

Computers were different in the future as well, mainly taking the form of armband devices and foldable keyboards used in conjunction with no-screens. The tablets of the day, used mainly for schoolwork, were collapsible (basically into small sticks) for easy carrying. Smartphones didn't exist at all. And very little voice-recognition stuff was going on because people preferred quietness—in schools, libraries, and even homes—in order to study, do research, write, etc.

Rather than watching television, leisure time at the bungalow tended to take the form of reading, bible studies, and playing a few board games.

In just enjoying talking with one another, the group also regularly engaged in evening discussions, one of which ended up being about Soul Shadows. Since unicorns were largely mysterious, and Vini was something of an expert on them, the younger TKTs were naturally interested in hearing her thoughts on the creatures.

“How did you learn to call unicorns in the first place?” Kiana was curious to know.

The answer was fairly complex, and thus was difficult to express verbally. After thinking for a moment, Vini began by telling her audience, “That old saying about how unicorns are hiding in the unused part of the brain is pretty accurate because every person's brain contains a doorway to the Realm of Quintessence, where all of our personal unicorns reside. However, not everyone can open this doorway. I think the ability to call unicorns is something that is both a gift and something we have to train ourselves to do, the training mainly having to do with the brain because the means of calling unicorns centers on believers being able to attain a perfect state of hope, joy, and peace in their minds.”

With Kiana eagerly leaning forward in anticipation of hearing more, Vini smiled as she continued. “I initially achieved the right state of

mind by reading the bible, which, as we all know, is a completely supernatural book that is more than capable of teaching a person how to call unicorns. Once achieved, the hope-joy-peace state of mind creates a channel through which we can call the creatures, and through which they can travel in and out of our realm.”

As an aside at this point, Vini decided to add, “By the way, genies are also able to call unicorns. But instead of training the brain, they use a Magical Grapevine, one they also use to communicate with their future selves, and by connection, the way future genies connect with their past selves.”

Even Quin hadn’t known this, despite having spent a fair amount of time with her Grandma Vini over the years, and having had contact with genies throughout her life. *Well, you learn something new every day*, she thought.

Since the whole essence of unicorns was difficult to explain, especially in one sitting, Vini felt it best to give her listeners little pieces of the puzzle, from which, hopefully, their own brains could then piece together answers to at least some of their questions.

Taking a sip of water while collecting her thoughts, Vini shortly went on. “Unicorns are rare in this world largely because of their extreme power. Not only can their light dissipate demonic energy and blind others, we don’t know much about their horns, which might hold untold power, well beyond our imaginations. I used to think that I shouldn’t call unicorns because they wouldn’t have enough human goodness to eat in our world, but I eventually came to understand that the greatest care should be taken with regard to their power. They should never be called frivolously. We were following God’s orders in traveling to the past, so I felt like it was okay to call the ones that brought us here. But I’ve only ever called unicorns on rare occasions over the years.”

“That’s probably why not many people can call them,” Kiana mused, “because most people can’t be trusted with that kind of power.”

“Partly,” Vini answered. “But I think there are likely other reasons, ones our brains can’t understand because we aren’t capable of thinking like God.”

Sal was nodding as he ventured, “His reasoning is so far above ours.”

“Calling unicorns is actually different than being connected to our Soul Shadows,” Vini went on to say, after which, the discussion steered in the direction of sanctification.

While it was widely thought that a person had to be fully sanctified in order to connect with his or her personal unicorn and gain the creature’s powers, Vini ended up throwing a little monkey wrench into this idea by stating, “I think I’m still a step or two below that, since I’m still in my old skin, that is to say, my human body. If I’m ever truly fully sanctified, I don’t think I’ll still be in this body.”

“So, you’re still working toward sanctification?” Sal questioned with surprise, having assumed she was fully sanctified, especially because of the constant glow of her body.

Nodding, Vini answered, “Yes, I believe I am still working towards that. And I hold the view that if I not improving in my walk with God, then I’m heading towards corruption, not necessarily falling into outright evil, but in complacency, because we don’t make much progress on anything when we’re complacent.”

“So how do we walk closer with God and improve?” Kiana asked. “How can we understand Him better and learn to please Him better?” (These were things she personally wanted to know, though other people might have different questions.)

“By doing what the bible tells us to do,” Vini responded. “Resist temptation, pray without ceasing, and obey His commands. Be angry but sin not, angry as in righteously angry, about injustices and sin. Love one another, give generously and cheerfully, and so on.” After a moment’s pause, she added, “However, none of this is to be confused with perfection. We’ll never achieve perfection when we’re in the flesh because we are all born sinners. And we have to carry our sin nature with us all of our lives, until our earthly bodies die.”

By way of illustration, Vini pulled a sand dollar out of her pocket, while stating, “The sand dollar contains a lot of lovely symbolism related to the bible—a poinsettia, five doves, the Star of Bethlehem. But it’s also a symbol of our sin in the holes that represent the nails and spear that pierced Christ. Also, a sand dollar is dark until it dies; then it turns white. We hold darkness in us, and it only fully leaves us when we die and go to be with Jesus.”

“But some people, like you, don’t hold very much darkness,” Sal couldn’t resist saying.

Smiling, Vini said, “True, and this happens from striving to become more Christlike. Jesus was the Light of the World. Now that He’s not here, we’re to be lights.”

In truth, Vini was very much a light in the world; and, like a flame, she had no shadow, which unicorns also lack, in being creatures of great light.

Having brought thirty-two journals of her younger years with her in a pod pack, Vini had been consulting many of them on this trip so as not to interfere with certain events of the times, or conflict at all with what her younger self might be doing. Pulling one out of her pack, she flipped pages to find a particular entry having to do with sanctification, shadows, and unicorns, which are not just creatures of light, but also of water, as human beings are too. Although she had learned more over the years, her early jottings were still pretty good, at least good enough to shed a little more light on the subject of Soul Shadows.

Quin ended up reading the entry aloud to everyone.

“The soul sanctified has no shadow. There’s a reason people fear the shadows—dark creatures create shadows. Angels have no shadows. Light is our True Shadow. As the bible says, we are salt and light. Because of the water in our bodies, we are also rainbows, which are biblical and magical. Rainbows rarely touch the ground and are not seen in shadows, but only in light. We can connect this to biblical birds like doves and peacocks because they are not grounded but are still among us. The Dove is always with us. The eyes of the peacock are light. They search out and see what God sees—everything.”

The entry was followed by a quote from 2 Chronicles 16:9. “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show his might in behalf of those whose heart is blameless toward him.”

From another journal, Kiana ended up reading aloud an entry having to do with the Clock of the Universe, as connected to both people and their Soul Shadows.

“God’s children help wind the Clock of the Universe, a magical device that ensures everything happening in the world—from the smallest of actions and words, to the largest—moves along in sync with the Creator’s Overall Plan. The horn of the unicorn is associated with light, goodness, and overcoming evil. Human beings each have a unicorn attached to his or her soul as a Soul Shadow. The saved (believers in the Lord Jesus Christ) have the ability to connect with their personal Soul Shadows. By connection to human beings, the horn of the unicorn helps wind the Clock of the Universe.”

This was all a little mind boggling to Sal, Kiana, and Quin. In fact, they might have had more questions at the end of this discussion than they had at the beginning. For certain, unicorns were mysterious. “Perhaps they are mystery itself,” Kiana ended up writing in her own journal later when contemplating birds, rainbows, shadows, and so forth as connected to unicorns, which had, throughout history, occasionally been called horned lions (according to another of Mrs. Dellinger’s journal entries). In considering Soul Shadows as being horned lions, Kiana also wrote a quote from Proverbs 28:1 in her journal. “The righteous are bold as a lion.”

In wrapping up the discussion, Sal found himself most interested in what happens to the Soul Shadows of people who are lost.

This was something Vini herself had fretted over at one time, and she rather reluctantly told him, “When a person who has not accepted Christ dies, his or her personal unicorn also dies. Although the light is never fully lost, being part of the Light of Christ, the unicorn is lost as far as individuality, which is horribly sad. A lost unicorn will fall out of all existence when the soul it was connected to ends up in hell. Just as there is no way for a person who has rejected Christ to avoid hell, there’s no getting around the lost unicorn either.”

Since unicorns were rather wonderful, Sal was truly sad over this. *Lost people equal lost unicorns*, he thought, *that’s terrible*.

With regard to unicorns being called Soul Shadows, Sal got to thinking that the soul—as our main core or essence, and the part of us that makes us individually unique inside—is mostly connected to the mind, the brain that is, and not the elbow, or foot, or pancreas, etc. So this too fit with the old notion that unicorns might be hiding in the

unused part of the brain. The term “soul” then also fit with the biblical truth that thoughts can be as sinful as actions. In looking up Ezekiel 18:20, “The soul that sins shall die,” Sal decided that this meant thoughts, as well as the rest of what a person does that’s sinful. Matthew 5:28 also seemed relevant. ““But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”” So this was certainly something to think about, guarding our thoughts; though Sal had to admit that this was difficult, especially living in the midst of a sinful world.

The TKTs next listened to a radio bible program that, oddly enough, perfectly fit with what they had been talking about, the lesson being based on Ephesians 5:8-11. “...for once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.”

On this lovely spring evening, Anei happened to be listening to something too, but not a radio. Instead, he was tuning his ear into something that sounded a lot like a tiny chirping cricket, but that was actually something much more unique. Having excellent hearing, Anei could often hear things from long distances, such as this chirping sound located out in the country, about eight miles from the church upon which he was situated.

Smiling as he listened, Anei made a note in his journal. “If we listen better, we might hear the songs of boy spreesprites, who very much like to sing. The songs often contain messages because God likes to speak through these tiny magical creatures.”

This particular boy spreesprite was none other than Martella’s betrothed, Weyland, who, while singing, was doing a bit of gardening by moonlight on an oak tree limb. Both his home and his garden were in the tree. Weyland liked to do five gardens per year—early spring, spring, summer, fall, and late fall. This was the spring garden; and already he had been harvesting many wonderful things, not only for eating, but also for canning, drying, and storing up in his large pantry. Hoeing beside a row of golden wist melons, each currently about the size of the round head of a sewing pin, Weyland was thinking about his dinner waiting for him in his snug little house made of walnut shells,

dried grasses, and thistle down. *Yum, three pickled radish seeds and a tuft of smeelie fluff for dessert.*

In listening to the song winding down, Anei couldn't help thinking, *If the woman in the farmhouse about a hundred yards from the spreesprite tree had been listening, she would have known exactly which stocks to buy as part of an extremely healthy portfolio that would grow and grow in leaps and bounds. It's so sad that people are not listening—to God, to trees, to spreesprites, to each other—so sad.*

As it happens, Anei wasn't the only gargoyle concerned with the issue of human beings refusing to listen. A gargoyle specifically connected to Sal's mentor was as well. In fact, in the future, Yami would end up helping Em interpret the voices of the trees in order to write a novel aptly entitled, *We're Not Listening*. The book would actually become a bestseller, with Yami fondly listed in the acknowledgements as being the Greatest of All Interpreters of Tree Language.

Chapter Four

Business in Scotland

Back in the time the TKTs were from, and at Loch Ness in Scotland to be exact, fifteen-year-old Alex Rodriguez was in the process of doing research into Nessie, the famous Loch Ness Monster of history, who had been as reclusive in recent years as she had been all those decades ago when people first started spotting her. As it happens, people early on had correctly guessed at Nessie being a girl, which she was. This, Alex already knew as well, except he hadn't quite uncovered the rest of the mystery of the monster as yet. But he was confident that he eventually would, since this was his main gift—that of being able to solve mysteries, both great and small.

Seeing the reflection of many puffy clouds in the water as he stood beside the lake, Alex thought, *How lovely*. Indeed, the clouds were lovely, looking like great pillows laid on the water, and making him feel drowsy from the power of suggestion in gazing at them a little too long. *Better look up if you want to cloud-watch for a while, so you'll stay awake*, his mind told him.

Alex was actually from the United States, his home being on Lion Mountain in Tennessee; but he had been staying with a friend in Scotland for the past few days. Sixteen-year-old Jamie Reid lived in a dugout-style home (sometimes called an earth house), which was common in this part of the world at this time.

It was getting on lunch time, and so Alex decided to head to the dugout, which was on the opposite side of the lake from his present location. Thus, he decided to fly, since this was the shorter route. Instead of using an airbike, or calling a creature like a wind horse or a rookh (a giant magical blackbird), Alex simply lifted off and flew himself out over the water, the skill of flying being something he learned when solving the mystery as to how the Chinese dragon is able to fly without wings. (Actually, wind horses are also able to fly without wings, but that is a different matter entirely.)

In truth, Nessie had been very near Alex only moments earlier, though he hadn't spotted her because she was cleverly hidden. However, she was not the only monster in the area on this day because Alex was about to have an encounter with three of the human kind, in the form of two boys and a girl. Devin Helm and Kemp Fischer, both sixteen, and Penelope Coyle, age fourteen, were all from Supercity Eight in the U.S. Alex was about three-quarters of the way across the lake when the three swooped in beside him on nyregs.

Alex had had run-ins with this trio before. They were basically gifted persons who were misusing their gifts in service of the sorcerers, with this little band of hoodlums actually being under the direction of a nineteen-year-old sorcerer named Tanner Ellison from Supercity Nine, who was always interested in attacking godly persons such as Alex, mainly because the godly gifted were constantly thwarting his wicked schemes. While Tanner was not with his friends today, the three were still plenty dangerous, with Penelope having powers very similar to those of a wind horse, Kemp being able to produce and manipulate fire, and Devin having a pearl jewel gift, which gave him incredible fighting talent related to the grit of oysters, and water-related skills like amazing swimming speeds and the ability to hold his breath under water for long periods of time. He could also manipulate water in the form of raising waves, stirring up whirlpools, etc.

Alex had drawn a flute, though he realized it probably wouldn't do him much good, being so outnumbered and soon to be overpowered. Indeed, Kemp had just shot a fireball at him from his palm that a blast of wind from Penelope had enlarged to nearly the size of a beach ball. While Alex was carrying a shield dime (produced by a bagical), the protection of the dime likely wouldn't be able to repel this type of fiery assault for long, maybe one or two blasts at most.

Blessedly, Alex was able to dodge the first fireball; and when the second was launched, a very odd thing happened, in the form of the fireball freezing in place in midair, along with everything else within about five hundred yards surrounding it, including the four people and three nyregs, all positioned about a hundred and fifty feet above the water.

Martella was hovering nearby on a white hummingbird and had stopped time. This was a future version of herself, of course. In fact,

she and Weyland had been married nearly half a century by this time. They didn't have any children yet, but there was plenty of time for that because spreesprites can live for thousands of years. However, they were thinking of having a child soon. Early on in their marriage, they weren't able to have children because of a lack of human goodness in the world. But that had all changed seventeen years back when Chase Linn was born, his main gift being that of overproducing the goodness needed to feed magical creatures worldwide.

Ugly nyregs, Martella thought with disgust in gazing at the frozen scene. This was definitely true of these demonic winged beasts that were something like a cross between a lizard and a bird, but that acted like sky horses basically, since transportation was what the sorcerers had mainly created them for, along with fighting, which they were perfectly suited to having strength, speed, long talons, sharp teeth, and the ability to spit acid. In gazing at the nasty creatures, Martella was almost tempted to think that it might be safer not to have a child just yet, because of the various monsters in the world. Indeed, hobgoblins often liked to shoot rocks at spreesprites using slingshots; and they were a good aim, as they were with poison darts from blowpipes too. While spreesprites are fast, they can become distracted and not notice these wicked creatures.

When the minute of stopped time came to an end, Martella stopped time for a second minute while considering what else she might do to help the flying boy who was surrounded by malicious adversaries. In noticing another boy (who happened to be Jamie) suddenly arriving on a path along the shore, Martella realized that this was the answer. She would only need to stop time for one more minute while this other boy unfolded an airbike and hopped onto it in order to speed out over the lake and pull his friend out of the frozen scene.

Once Alex was outside of the area of stopped time, he was no longer affected by Martella's magic, which his shield dime hadn't quite been strong enough to protect him from, being more geared to shielding a person from projectiles or strong bursts of energy, and not from powerful magical spells. Jamie would have been affected by the area of stopped time if not for a special object (one more powerful than the dime) that he was carrying in a pocket.

Martella might have felt a need to stick around to continue to help, if not for noticing that a female thunderbird had just arrived on the scene carrying yet another boy. Seventeen-year-old Birch Hathaway, a friend to both Alex and Jamie, happened to be out with his protector, Naya, on this day.

Well, this evens things out somewhat, so I don't need to stay, Martella decided, as she then directed the white hummingbird to head to Argentina as their next destination for the day.

The hummingbird and spreesprite were gone in a blink as Naya swooped in to position herself between the three nyreg-riding miscreants and the two boys who landed on the lakeshore just as the time-stopping magic from the third minute was wearing off.

After folding and pocketing his airbike, Jamie had drawn a mirror weapon, a good thing because Kemp had just managed to sneak around Naya and Birch while the pair was occupied holding off Devin and Penelope. While Jamie was not an expert with the mirror, he was able to deflect the darts of fire that Kemp was shooting at him and Alex from his fingertips. Ducking behind several large rocks, Alex used his flute to knock Kemp's nyreg backwards about twenty-five feet, the jarring of this managing to break Kemp's rhythm of shooting the flaming darts.

Meanwhile, in the air, Naya was pushing back the nyregs of Penelope and Devin using great thundering claps of her wings, which also served to neutralize the wind bursts that Penelope was emitting from her palms. Birch had drawn a mirror, but couldn't quite get a steady shot at anything due to the up-and-down movements of Naya as she flapped her wings.

Unpocketing an airbike, Birch solved the steadiness problem by hopping onto the bike that unfolded in midair as he tossed it out beside his protector. The dismounting was perfectly timed because Naya had just spotted a flash dragon, streaking across the lake on a fast approach towards her position. Sometimes called falsies (because they were basically fake dragons created by the sorcerers), flash dragons were even nastier than nyregs, being more dangerous in having nearly the same speed and firepower as real dragons. With this new arrival posing an even greater threat to her human friends than either the nyregs or the miscreants riding them, Naya broke off engaging with Devin and Penelope in order to confront the falsie.

Birch, in the meantime, ended up having to keep some distance from his foes due to the nyregs spitting acid at him, and Penelope's wind energy directing many of these spurts with precision. While dodging the acid, he didn't get in very many good strikes with his mirror, only once hitting a nyreg in one hip, which didn't hinder the beast very much.

No longer blocked by the thunderbird or Birch, Devin and Penelope headed toward the shore to help Kemp who was currently shooting streams of fire at Alex and Jamie who had both taken cover behind boulders. However, the approach of Penelope and Devin was slowed when the heads of their nyregs were suddenly hit hard, one right after the other, by two flying peat blocks that had just been thrown by a puck troll alongside the lake. Tilg was not only a friend to Jamie, but he actually lived in a little den behind a bookcase in his dugout. The peat hits were hard enough to severely disorient the beasts, causing Penelope and Devin to land and dismount while their nyregs struggled to collect their senses.

Meanwhile, in the air over the lake, Naya was valiantly taking on the flash dragon, which was slightly larger than she. The pair had met over the center of the lake with a crash that turned into a midair wrestle, during which Naya had attempted to hold onto the beast in order to dive with him into the lake. However, he managed to break free from her grasp before they hit the water. Dodging blasts of fire from his throat, Naya next swiftly produced a tumultuous cloudburst, the drenching rain serving to quench much of her foe's fire. However, the falsie was fast in flight. Streaking away, he soon managed to outdistance the storm she was producing. Pursuing, the thunderbird commanded the sky to issue lightning strikes at him, in the hopes of driving him away. However, flash dragons are largely fearless; so instead of fleeing, he turned to face her with another fiery assault.

Having followed Penelope and Devin, Birch decided to land in order to more effectively help his friends. By this time, the nyregs had collected themselves somewhat. Again spitting acid, they charged at him with slashing claws and thrashing tails intended to sweep him off of his feet. In close range, a rope was better than a mirror, especially since his mirror was losing its charge from both use and the fact that Naya's storm had darkened the area considerably, thus lessening the light

needed to recharge the weapon. Drawing a red rope, in two precise strokes, Birch swiftly sliced the tail from the nearer of the two beasts, following up with a death blow to the neck. Slashing out again with the sizzling rope, he killed the other nyreg in like fashion.

Pausing only for a split second to catch his breath, Birch next pursued Devin and Penelope, who had just managed to locate Alex and Jamie behind the boulders. Already, Alex was being pushed out into the open by Penelope's wind, which was also rendering his flute ineffective, the musical energy simply floating away on the strong gusts. In order to dodge flaming strikes from Kemp, Alex was forced to lift off and flee a short distance. This left Jamie—nearby and unarmed because his mirror's charge had just been exhausted—without help and completely vulnerable to attack by Devin.

Although Jamie was strong, and fairly scrappy in a fistfight, he couldn't begin to match the fighting grit of his adversary. Nor could he defend long against the rapid succession of pounding punches to his gut, sides, back, and face. The only thing that managed to break the rhythm of Devin's pummels was a softball-size rock hitting him hard in one shoulder, thrown by Tilg nearby. However, being somewhat weakened from the pounding, Jamie couldn't struggle loose when Devin grabbed him and started dragging him towards the lake. Though Jamie tried to resist by grappling and punching, Devin managed to pull him into the water, afterwards getting him into a headlock in order to swim away from shore and into the deeps with him.

Meanwhile, Penelope had turned her wind attentions to Birch, wisely, as it were, since she didn't want him anywhere near her with his red rope. While she was holding him off, Alex was sneaking back into the fray and landing, though he now had to dodge fireballs from the still-airborne Kemp who had briefly ceased his attack when Devin and Penelope had arrived on the scene, for fear of hitting them. Tilg managed to hit Penelope in the back with a chunk of driftwood, thus breaking her assault against Birch. Unsure as to what had hit her, or where the strike had come from, instead of continuing to fight, Penelope chose to flee, doing so using an airbike she was carrying in a belt pouch. Rising into the air alongside Kemp, the pair scanned the waters for Devin and Jamie, this being something Alex, Birch, and Tilg were also doing from the shore.

In the water, Jamie was in even more trouble than he had been on land, particularly because his adversary was so gifted in this arena. At about two hundred yards from the shore, Devin proceeded to drag Jamie under water in order to drown him. However, at barely fifteen feet under, Devin was severely startled, and lost his grip on Jamie, when something suddenly grabbed his legs and began pulling him downward very rapidly. Although holding his breath under water was not a problem, the sudden fright as to what had a hold on him certainly was. Unable to see much of anything in the darkness, Devin's panic intensified when he was unable to struggle free from the iron-like grip and weight on his legs. Fortunately for him, when nearing the bottom of the lake, whatever it was that had dragged him down suddenly let loose, after which, Devin wasted no time in swimming under water towards the shore. Since he was practically as fast as a sailfish, in short order, he was soon clambering out of the water. Unfolding an airbike he had retrieved from a pocket, Devin soon joined his friends in the air. However, the three miscreants quickly decided they had had enough excitement for one day upon spotting a snow gryphon flying in, who also spotted them. Telános, a good friend to Alex, was more than capable of taking on the likes of Penelope, Kemp, and Devin; though he wouldn't need to on this day since they were fleeing.

Jamie had managed to struggle to the surface after Devin lost his hold on him. Being exhausted, he was at this point simply floating on his back while waiting for his body to regain enough energy for the swim back to the shore. However, with the water of the lake being very cold, he was at some risk for hypothermia. Blessedly, Telános arrived in short order to grab Jamie up out of the water by his shoulders and speed with him to the shore where Alex quickly fished from his pod shoulder pack a genie-made thermal blanket to wrap his friend in, the blanket being capable of both drying Jamie's clothing and warming his body.

Some distance away over another part of the lake, Naya was still engaged with the falsie, a scene which Devin, Kemp, and Penelope had wisely skirted as they sped away. Though the sorcerers had ways of controlling flash dragons, since the creatures were very unpredictable, there was no guarantee that this one wouldn't turn on the likes of the three miscreants.

Using both rain and energy bursts from wing flaps, Naya had managed thus far to ward off most of the falsie's fire directed at her. She had twice gotten him to flee, but he had both times eventually again turned to fight. Rushing headlong at the beast, she grappled with him, managing to lock talons with him, after which, she engaged in a mighty dive toward the lake, this being what she felt was a good strategy because she was fairly sure that a thunderbird would fare better in the water than a fake dragon. *He'll more likely drown before I will*, she thought. However, the falsie was wily in his writhing, and was able to get his talons loose from hers before they hit the water. In fact, only one of his wings barely skimmed the surface of the lake before he again rose up.

Still determined, Naya again produced storm clouds to drench the creature with great torrents of rain; and while it might have been her hopeful imagination, she seemed very quickly to be gaining an edge on him this time. *No, it's not my imagination*, her mind soon realized. In fact, his fire seemed nearly extinguished, with barely a sputter of a spark left, more just steam, actually. Suddenly, amidst the pounding rain, a shower of hailstones, some as large as grapefruits, began pummeling the falsie, serving to drive him down into the lake where he quickly disappeared beneath the surface. In order to see better while watching from above, Naya cleared much of the storm with several flaps of her wings.

When the flash dragon didn't resurface after five minutes, she assumed him to be drowned. However, to be sure, she resolved to stay over the lake for another ten minutes. Since Birch hadn't called to her by thought, and she had caught a glimpse of Devin, Penelope, and Kemp hightailing it away, Naya felt that Alex, Jamie, Birch, and Tilg were likely all safe and therefore wouldn't need her immediate assistance.

Back on the shore, Jamie had quickly warmed and dried. However, Alex and Birch were still extremely worried about him, mainly because Devin had grabbed hold of him for an extended period of time when dragging him into the lake and trying to drown him.

"For part of his gift," Birch explained to Jamie, "Devin has the ability to produce a poison grit and inject it into the body of another

person just through skin contact. Then the grit travels to the heart and kills the person.”

As Alex began checking him over for punctures, Jamie shook his head. “That wouldn’t have worked with me because of this,” he said, fishing an item from his pocket, which had also protected him from Martella’s time-stopping magic. The item happened be a smooth stone, bluish in hue and about the width of a half dollar with the approximate thickness of an ordinary pocket-size matchbox.

“A shield stone,” Jamie told his friends. “They’re very rare, and generally better than dimes or even sapphires for protection.” The stone was also the reason Jamie wasn’t more damaged from his encounter with Devin. While he had a few bruises and a cut lip, if not for the shield stone, he likely would have had cracked ribs, two black eyes, a broken jaw, or possibly something worse like massive internal bleeding.

Some sapphires produced by gifted people had healing properties. One of these, Birch happened to have with him, though Jamie politely declined the use of the stone to heal his injuries in deciding that they would heal up well enough by the ordinary means of time and his own body’s natural mending powers.

Telános was in the area to see Alex. Although not assigned to him as protector, the snow gryphon had been spending a good deal of time with him in recent weeks, in being anxious to take him places that were too far for Alex to fly on his own and still get there within a reasonable amount of time. Although Alex had been getting faster in recent years as far as flying, he still couldn’t manage speeds much over sixty-five mph for extended periods of time. Living in a rather isolated cave in the Himalayas, Telános often liked to get out. Plus, he and Alex enjoyed each other’s company, Alex particularly because, in comparison to rookhs who tended to be fairly stoic and businesslike when providing transportation, gryphons were much more sociable.

With Jamie much recovered, the group soon headed to the dugout, with Tilg leading the way along a rugged path that amounted to about a mile trek from the lake. Also walking, Telános brought up the rear. He often enjoyed walking, as a little break from flying.

Naya, in the meantime, was heading toward the U.S. in order to tail Kemp, Devin, and Penelope for a bit. Being much faster than they (even with Penelope producing strong winds to help their journey

along), the thunderbird caught up to them in less than three minutes, after which, she drenched them with rain much as she had the false, adding in a little thunder and lightning intended to spook the trio. It worked, as they were all thoroughly shaken by the experience, and not anxious to head out again on any mischievous dealings anytime soon.

Breaking off tailing the three just outside of Supe-8, Naya decided to briefly check on Birch's family in West Virginia before returning to Scotland. They were fine, and so she soon headed back out over the Atlantic Ocean, taking a leisurely pace, which gave her plenty of time to watch for leviathans (a favored activity), and think. In reflecting on what had happened over Loch Ness, and recalling details, she realized that her storm had produced much more rain than usual. And the hail was odd. Although her thunderstorms sometimes did unexpectedly produce hail, this didn't happen often. And any hail she did produce was generally not of such large sizes. *Was that just from adrenaline?* she wondered. *Or was it something else? But what else could it have been?*

Not only could her mind not come up with an answer, Naya ended up distracted from the issue entirely when she spotted not just one leviathan in the sea below her, but a pod of nine! And four of them were absolutely huge! Huge in this case meant nearly the size of full-grown blue whales; except leviathans were not much like whales in being more like dragons, though having water wings instead of air wings, and mainly producing EMPs instead of fire. However, they did like to sing songs similar to those of whales. Listening closely, Naya could just hear faint singing from two of the smaller creatures. The lovely duet sounded much like enchanting birdsong mixed with whale calls accompanied by sea winds, splashing waves, and watery gurgles.

Meanwhile, back at Jamie's home, Telános couldn't quite fit into the dugout, so he waited outside cloud watching while his friends lunched, after which, he would be taking Alex back to the U.S. While Birch had just accepted Jamie's invitation to stay for a week or so, Alex was scheduled for a TKT trip, which he would be leaving on the next day. After taking his friend home to prepare for his trip, Telános planned to visit a few libraries in the U.S., reading being one of his favorite activities, as it was for many gryphons.

Birch had been anxious to get away from his normal routine for a time, and the August weather in Scotland was perfect for a visit. In addition to the mild temperatures, the days were long with plenty of sunlight, which was a good natural remedy for depression. Birch had had his share of depressive symptoms lately. For him this meant not sleeping well, being distracted a lot, feeling down, and sometimes getting worried or upset over the smallest of things. While there were several reasons for his depression, for the most part, this particular bout had been brought on by two recent experiences. One was the same as Quin's in that Birch too had unknowingly been under hypnoid control by the sorcerers. The second was a mistake he had made while on a TKT trip.

Along with the sunlight, getting lots of exercise while in Scotland would end up helping Birch get his depressive symptoms under control. He would be working with Jamie in his and Tilg's large garden. They would also be cutting and stacking peat blocks; some of this, Jamie and Birch did after lunch as soon as Alex and Telános left, which was around the time Naya returned.

The cutting was actually more like digging because they used shovels. Peat blocks could be dug anytime the ground was not frozen; and whole communities generally participated in this activity because the dried blocks, burned like firewood, were used by all for heating and cooking purposes. Although his neighbors were distant, Jamie did have a few, all of which cut peat at various times during the year for community use. A tamed orc lived in the area and liked to help with this activity. On this day, Naya ended up doing some of the stacking, which basically amounted to little piles in long rows, with the many of the blocks being more propped than stacked to allow for good air circulation. Also on this day, the orc ended up restacking some of Naya's piles that he felt weren't exactly the way they should be for proper drying. And the rows needed to be straight! The orc almost couldn't believe that a thunderbird couldn't manage to make a straight row. Tamed orcs were never very good-natured, and this one ended up glaring at Naya pretty much the whole time the group was working.

Although Birch had been invited on the TKT trip that Alex was scheduled for, he had been shying away from time travel of late. This was turning out to be something of a low time in his life. Of course, we

all experience these; but figuring out how to dig our way out of them is often tricky and can be puzzling. When he really thought about it, the problem was a big combination of things. He often felt out of control, probably because he hadn't been in control when under hypnoid influence. He had had some counseling right afterwards, which helped; but then he made the time-travel mistake. Since he had felt in control on the trip, this had really shaken him. Now, he was worried about making another mistake, especially since this one had been such a doozy.

So this is sort of like a lack of confidence, Birch decided, *plus, feeling guilty.* And he couldn't help but feel guilty over what had happened. In short, using his gift of being able to calm storms, he had saved a group of boys camping near the banks of a flooding river. While this might have seemed like a good idea, two of the boys were future serial killers and were evidently meant to die in the flood. Since this didn't happen, many lives were changed from that point on.

Although we all make mistakes, Birch's guilt mainly came from the fact that he had totally strayed from the agenda of the TKT trip. Saving the campers was something he had just done on his own, using his own judgement and without taking the time to ask for God's direction. Nor had he paid attention to the uneasy feeling inside him from the Holy Spirit trying to warn him (this being something we should all pay close attention to).

Part of Birch's guilt and worry was coming from the fact that he couldn't go back in time to fix his mistake. In fact, he had been expressly forbidden to do this by the leader of the TKTs, Dell Brinker, who happened to be Quin's father. Blessedly, God always has a plan when we make mistakes; and He always does fix things. In this case, He did so using other groups of time travelers sent to a later time period than the one in which Birch had messed up in. However, because the mistake couldn't be completely erased, and the course of many lives had been changed, Birch was definitely struggling with this. Now, he needed to find a way to get back on the horse he had fallen off of, as the old saying goes; and he hoped the time away from everything in Scotland would help him make progress in that regard, at least help him figure a few things out, like how to feel less guilty and be less afraid of making mistakes.

The dugout had three bedrooms, so there was plenty of room for guests, though one bedroom was dominated by several large storage cupboards filled with quite a few special objects. Jamie was not gifted in an obvious sort of way, though he had good survival skills, which might be considered a gift, except that he probably developed these from being orphaned young. Having escaped at age seven the Supercity that had overtaken Edinburgh, he had decided not to live in any of the established self-sustaining communities in the area, instead choosing to strike out on his own to live by himself in the Scottish Highlands, this decision coming from much prayer and following God's lead. Jamie's love of quilting might have been considered a gift, especially in his unique designs and blending of colors; however, the many quilts he had made over the years were not the special items stored in the cupboards, which were instead filled with various magical objects that Jamie had acquired using a gift that was not overtly noticeable: Starting from a very young age, he had been able to basically sniff out magical objects, the result being that he now had a large collection of them.

"It's like they call to me," Jamie had once explained to Alex.

The shield stone was a good example. This, he had found just sitting atop a trail-marker cairn while out one afternoon gathering heather to spruce up the dugout, and a few wild herbs to spice up dinner. Having the shield stone often made Jamie think of Job 5:23. "For you shall be in league with the stones of the field, and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with you." While he didn't necessarily feel invincible when carrying the stone, he did feel protected and supported, like how he often felt when reading the bible or praying.

Jamie also had a boxical, which was very much like a bagical, but in box form. This one was heavy cardboard, cube in shape, exactly a foot square, had a removable lid, and appeared to be covered in old flowered silk wallpaper, blue and gold in theme. While many people would pass objects such as the shield stone and boxical by as being ordinary, somehow, Jamie knew they were anything but. He had never stolen any magical objects he had come across that were in another person's possession, but had instead bartered for them, this being a common form of commerce to the area. He had traded a large quilt for the boxical. With the quilt being seemingly of much more value than the cardboard box, this greatly surprised the owner of the boxical who had

no idea as to its magical properties, having not had the box very long and having not yet placed anything inside it. Often, the items Jamie traded were of less value than the quilt—a basket of potatoes, a set of spoons, two pairs of socks (Jamie also liked to knit). However, in sensing that the boxical was incredibly special, he felt as though he would be cheating the man in offering less.

Many items he had simply come across out in the wilds (like the shield stone), as though they were just waiting for someone to find them and take them home. Magical objects do seem to have a knack for landing in just the right hands (exactly where God intends them to be). However, Jamie was of the opinion that some have a mind of their own. In fact, he was never quite sure if he was drawn to them, or if they were somehow drawn to him. *Likely a combination of both*, he decided. By his reckoning, some of these items were probably orphans, like he, and were simply seeking a good home, which he was able to provide. In keeping with a cosmic rule applying to most magical objects of the world, they rarely find their way into the hands of anyone likely to either overuse, or otherwise abuse, the great powers and blessings associated with them.

After cleaning up from the peat digging, the boys read for a time before helping Tilg make dinner. The little puck had already started a vegetable stew, so Jamie and Birch focused on popping some risen bread dough into the oven, and getting a cobbler ready to follow the bread and be done in time for dessert. Birch would end up learning a few cooking skills while in Scotland, especially from Tilg who evidently did much of the meal preparing for this household. Since it wasn't common for a thunderbird to stay in one spot for long, Naya would end up spreading her wings over much of Europe for the next week or so, while only occasionally checking on Birch, in case he might need her for anything. He could always call to her by thought if he met with any danger like a flash dragon or more cronies of the sorcerers.

Chapter Five

Dealing with More Monsters

If we take a moment to look in on Vini, Quin, Kiana, and Sal on their time-travel trip, we find them dealing with a monster behind the art building on a college campus in Idaho, the monster being a demon that had possessed a student, a nineteen-year-old girl. Kiana had exposed the demon using a sand dollar, which many people in the time of the TKTs carried precisely because of their ability to expose demons hiding inside of people, doing so by spontaneously breaking when in close proximity to the demon. Kiana had gotten an uneasy feeling when the girl passed by her in the crowd. As she pulled a sand dollar out of her pack and snuck up to within about three feet of the girl, Kiana wasn't at all surprised when the dollar suddenly broke on its own in the palm of her hand, spewing out its little dove-shaped innards—five in all that were actually the teeth of the creature—as it did so.

Calling to the rest of her team by walnut (a common communication device of her time), while keeping the girl in sight, Kiana soon met up with Vini, Quin, and Sal, after which, the four tailed the girl who ended up taking a shortcut behind the art building on her way to her dorm. With no one else behind the building, this was the perfect place to take care of the demon, which Vini did by lighting up, behind the girl so as not to blind her, as her three companions shielded their eyes. Unable to stand even a small amount of unicorn light, even from a distance, the demon swiftly exited the girl's body, streaming out of her nose, ears, and mouth and dissipating almost instantly by simply melting away like fine dust on a stiff breeze while leaving only bits of slimy residue on the grassy ground.

Vini didn't need to use the Mind Key because the girl, having felt nauseas for some time, thought she had merely thrown up, with her ears and nose feeling odd along with her throat because all three were physiologically connected. Quin ended up giving the girl a bottle of water to wash the nasty taste from her mouth, after which, the girl

continued on towards her dorm as the TKTs called to Valo and Dara, soon afterwards leaving the campus.

In addition to targeting students and professors on college campuses, Satan was at this time encouraging his demons to possess people as a means of voter fraud, since a demon could exert a great amount of influence on any person being inhabited. And since voting was no longer taking place in churches, the proximity to bibles and crosses (natural demon repellants) posed no problems. Activism had taken care of the church issue for Satan. Since many unbelievers felt put out at having to vote on church properties, and thought that others might be unduly influenced to vote for conservative or godly people, voting at churches had recently been outlawed across the entire country. In the not-so-distant future, mimics would also become common as a means of voter fraud, with these specialized demons able to imitate just about any human being. While their efforts at this time were focused on assassinations to take over high positions in government in many countries of the world, mimics would soon focus on elections. Plus, an advanced form of a mimic, capable of imitating people right down to their fingerprints, was on the way. In fact, in the near future, print doubles would end up dominating voting venues where fingerprints were required as a means of ID, thus turning many elections to Satan's will and purposes.

On the same night as the demon-slaying behind the art building, Quin was having difficulty getting to sleep. If we consider for a moment that insomnia is a monster in many people's lives, this was definitely true of Quin, even apart from times when depressive symptoms were also attacking her, mainly because she tended to do a lot of thinking after going to bed, this being the same as many other people with super-active minds that are difficult to turn off.

However, blessedly, Quin was about to get some relief for her sleeplessness because Sal had just slipped a flashcard under the door of the room Quin was sharing with Kiana. Noticing the card and picking it up, while trying not to wake her roommate, Quin carried it to the window, slightly drawing back the curtain in order to read by the light of the streetlamp the words written upon it. "As sunset rests, moonlit clouds slip into slumber."

The phrase was lazily scrawled on a gray card that was somewhat dark in color to resemble approaching night, and the word “sunset” was done in orange and gold markers reminiscent of a mesmerizing sunset. Both “clouds” and “slumber” were written in cream pastels with letters fluffy in shape to register on the brain as being like pillows. Her eyes scanning the phrase only once, Quin instantly became heavily drowsy, so much so that she barely made it back to her bed before dropping into a deep and steady sleep.

Quin felt wonderful the next morning from the good night’s sleep, and a hearty breakfast of pecan-topped oatmeal and half a grapefruit.

With no outings scheduled for the morning, after breakfast, the three younger TKTs did some schoolwork while Vini put together lasagna with homemade noodles to bake later, afterwards chopping up fruit for a salad. Turning on the television to get the weather report, she caught the news of a school shooting that had just occurred, one that Anei evidently hadn’t got the eye of his mind upon. Oddly enough, Vini remembered this particular shooting from her college years, in recognizing the name of the high school, along with the numbers of dead and injured, sixteen and twenty-two, respectively.

On many occasions, time travelers were not supposed to interfere with past events. Even if Anei’s eye had spotted this tragedy in progress, Vini likely would have noted the feeling in her core of the Holy Spirit (along with the small voice of caution in the back of her mind) telling her that she should not interfere. Since the TKTs had not been directed to stop this shooting, Vini was not planning to pop backwards in time in order to do so, in knowing that this would not be in accordance with God’s will. For some reason, He had allowed this terrible thing to happen, as He would many others like this over the years, probably, Vini reasoned, because people had turned their backs on Him. God gives people, and even whole countries, ample chances to turn back to Him. Sadly, many societies are not willing to, but are more bent on self-destruction.

It was a sad fact of the times that numerous school shootings occurred each year, and were increasing in numbers year by year, despite more security measures being taken.

A fifteen-year-old student had committed this crime. Most often, school shootings were committed by students, for various reasons, but

mainly because people were letting their children turn into monsters, while blaming others for this problem.

Putting it plainly, people were not raising godly children, and little to no discipline measures were being taken for various types of misbehavior, even violent behavior. In the same way the death penalty had been thrown out the window, though it had been shown in the past to be an excellent deterrent against violent crime, the justice system was doing society a great injustice with regard to juveniles. While many possibly should be given second chances, certainly some real punishment should be given for violence that basically ruins the lives of others.

Sadly, in many cases, wrist slaps only were being given, such as one year in a detention facility for two teen boys convicted of raping and beating a girl who would later commit suicide as a result of the assault. In another instance, a teen girl received only a suspended license and six months' probation for a drunk-driving accident that severely disabled two other people for life. It seemed hiring a good lawyer (and maneuvering to get soft judges) was many parents' idea of addressing their children's misbehavior, even though suffering real consequences (such as significant jail time) would have been the true answer to turning lives around.

In this day and age, because of the privacy laws associated with mental health issues, it had become politically incorrect to point out or take any action against kids who might be dangerous. Evidently, the powers that be would rather have dead children, teachers, and others than violate the privacy of someone likely to commit violent acts. So too were many people ignoring the fact that sociopaths are not mentally ill, they're simply evil. So the psychobabble involved at this time was mainly wrong. In truth, the only experts who had it right were the ones expounding that true morality had been removed from upbringing and teaching.

Feelings instead had been allowed to rule in young people; and no one was ever wrong anymore, no matter what feelings they were having, even those likely to give rise to violence. In many cases, anyone who disagreed with these brats' opinions—or refused to give in to their demands, or satisfy all of their desires—would suffer the

consequences, mainly because there would be no consequences for acting out, no matter how maliciously.

The sad truth was that people were raising sheltered and pampered children without good judgement and who couldn't handle even one minute of disappointment in their lives, much less any true challenges. When meeting with any difficulties, many kids simply threw tantrums, until their parents or grandparents bailed them out, so to speak, rescuing them by removing the difficulties rather than letting them learn lessons that might teach problem-solving or other skills needed to survive in this world, especially to the extent of not causing harm to others when coursing their way through life.

God, for the most part, was completely absent from children's lives, and had been banned even from conversation in many cases, not only by the politically-correct police, but by actual laws on the books that were being enforced. Sadly, these young people innately knew right from wrong, but didn't care when committing ills. Why should they care when doing what "feels" good, all the while knowing they will suffer no real consequences for doing wrong. Also, as the bible describes of the Endtimes, many people had lost natural affection for one another, in being steeped nearly entirely in self-interest.

With regard to school shootings, gun-control legislation didn't work because the guns by themselves weren't causing the problem. Plus, they were easy for criminals, even kid criminals, to get their hands on. Also, endless talking about mental health issues did not address the root cause of sociopathic behavior, which boiled down to ungodly upbringing (including various forms of neglect, indifference, and abuse) that certain malevolent societal influences would then be allowed to nurture.

Vini had just gotten a message from the small voice in the back of her mind directing her to take a stab at addressing the root cause of this problem by introducing a little morality into a few schools. This direction was reinforced when Kiana showed Vini a list of specific grade schools and middle schools in her notebook that an auto-writing session had just produced. Somewhat surprisingly, no high schools were on the list.

"God probably wants us to focus on the younger grades, to make an impression early on," Kiana reckoned.

This made sense, especially because this was a time when a lot of activism targeting younger students was going on in schools, even as young as in kindergarten, in an effort to lead children away from God and toward various unhealthy pursuits, including Satanism.

Starting that very afternoon (once classes had been dismissed), the TKTs visited several schools in order for Sal to write uplifting and godly messages on chalkboards and dry erase boards in about a dozen empty classrooms of each school, while Vini pinned flyers sporting similar quotes to bulletin boards throughout the halls. Though mainly using bible verses, they also threw in a few religious quotes by famous men like Douglas MacArthur and Ronald Reagan.

Kiana and Quin, meanwhile, focused on slipping strips of paper containing bible verses into various lockers. Due to their shroud sapphires, the group wasn't at all noticed by any teachers or janitors working late.

Getting up early the next morning, the TKTs made the round of a few schools before classes started for the day.

Arriving predawn at one elementary school posed a small problem because their shroud sapphires needed to draw on shadows in order to work. Shadows, of course, require at least a small amount of light (such as moonlight or starlight) in order for them to appear. With the morning being both dark and cloudy, the shrouds weren't working very well. Thus, the team was easily spotted in the parking lot by the school's vice principal who had arrived early to work. However, the problem was solved by Vini using the Mind Key on the woman to convince her to forget the odd early-morning visitors. So too did Mrs. Watson have a strong desire to take a nap on the couch in her office for thirty minutes, which was the exact amount of time the TKTs needed to complete their tasks of writing quotes on blackboards, pinning fliers to bulletin boards, and slipping bible quotes into lockers.

The visitors also set bags of foil-wrapped chocolate crosses onto several teachers' desks. Since the teachers could hardly throw away perfectly good chocolate, the crosses would be passed out to the kids. Bible verses were printed inside the colorful foil wrappers, which many of the kids would save to press into scrapbooks.

Before leaving on this time-travel trip, Vini had asked the genies to make up several thousand of these chocolate crosses, in knowing they

might be useful. And here they were, being put to good use. Plus, it had been no trouble at all to keep them stored in a pod pack until they were needed.

They managed to visit six schools in total before classes started for the day, using up most of the bags of chocolate. The two extras were dropped off at a local food bank, where those packing up the food would end up putting the chocolates into the bags and boxes being given out.

While there ended up being a few complaints about the various bible quotes in the schools, most people enjoyed reading them, and even carrying the locker ones around as bookmarks in order to read them again and again for inspiration. And how odd it was that certain verses seemed perfectly tailored for certain individuals. In truth, God was guiding the hands of Kiana and Quin with regard to exactly which lockers to target with specific quotes. This was true of Sal and Vini as well, as God was guiding their hands too.

Busy both mornings and afternoons with visits to elementary and middle schools, the TKTs managed in a single week to visit over a hundred located in Tennessee, New Jersey, Kansas, Kentucky, South Dakota, Alaska, Iowa, Wisconsin, Mississippi, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Georgia, and California.

After this, they made the round of a few tutoring centers as well, specifically ones catering to younger students.

The TKTs were keeping busy aside from visiting schools, as in the case of a trek one evening to South Africa to save eighteen residents of a farm from being slaughtered by a raiding gang. This was at a time when the government of the country was focused on land seizures of property owned by white farmers, often using unfair legal practices that seemed well coordinated with criminal activities in the form of gangs raiding farms to rape, torture, mutilate, and murder residents, before also stealing farm equipment, money, weapons, etc.

Though the government was denying involvement, police under the control of the government were obviously not protecting these citizens; nor were very many arrests happening after the raids, even when the criminals were identified. In fact, many corrupt police seemed to be encouraging the situation, and government officials were seen publically laughing about the violence. After these raids, any survivors

had difficulty regrouping without equipment, and without enough money to buy more, or pay their taxes, wages of workers, etc. Plus, many were struggling to heal from debilitating injuries, and pay medical costs from these horrors. Thus, many farms were easy for the government to seize.

Supposedly, this was all taking place as a means of land redistribution to address past injustices, which were tied to current issues of inequality in South Africa. However, despite many activists' claims that this was all justified, no matter what injustices had occurred in the past, nothing could justify the horrible violence taking place. While it might have been correct to redistribute some of the land and wealth, the government was going about it in very wrong and evil ways.

"Two wrongs don't make a right," Sal remarked, quoting that old saying when later doing some research into the matter.

Due to the time difference, it was not quite four in the morning in South Africa when the TKTs arrived, and the raid had just begun. Kiana and Vini disarmed the criminals of their knives and guns, after which, Quin and Sal, respectively using a mirror and a flute, drove them away. When a couple of the men doubled back, Valo and Dara from their positions in the sky used wind energy to force the pair back across the farm fields and toward one of the getaway trucks being used by the criminals.

Repeating their activities on a couple more evenings, the TKTs managed to thwart attacks on two more farms in the same region from this same gang, saving a total of forty-six people from whatever malice the miscreants had planned for them. The farmers in the meantime had been organizing in the area to establish a network to help protect one another in the case of future raids.

The TKTs were seeing a lot of death on this trip, most of it on the news, but some of it firsthand as well in their travels. Fatal shootings in Chicago were up, yet again, as they had been almost every year for nearly a decade. The annual number of murders in Mexico had skyrocketed in recent years, mainly due to the activities of drug cartels and human traffickers. In fact, a mass grave of murder victims had just been found in Mexico, which the TKTs had caught sight of in their travels.

While many people might have reflected on lives being senselessly cut short, Sal ended up wondering how many of the dead might have been unsaved, their souls senselessly lost forever, along with the unicorns attached to them. He had always wanted to help bring as many of the lost as possible to the Lord Jesus Christ, especially since there was room in heaven for all, and because people with the wordsmith gift were generally more than capable of doing this through their writings. His mentor was a good example, since a good deal of her work over the years—novels, news articles, plays, even poetry—had saved multitudes. However, for as much as Sal wanted to save people, he wanted to save their Soul Shadows too because their loss also seemed senseless to him. And while he probably shouldn't have needed an extra reason to want to save people, this seemed an excellent one. *It's time to make this a personal mission and a priority*, he determined.

Afterwards praying on the matter, Sal recognized that God had placed this mission on his heart; and He fully expected Sal to use the gift he had been given to help bring about successful results. *We should never waste our gifts*, Sal reminded himself.

Meanwhile, Vini was on something of a mission herself, though one smaller in scale than Sal's, as well as highly personal in nature. She was paying a visit to the dorm that was currently home to her younger self. Having consulted her early journals, the older Vini knew this was a semester when her younger self was being plagued by depressive symptoms, including insomnia, which living in a noisy dorm setting didn't particularly help.

The depression was related to many things, not the least of which was the fact that bibles had just been banned from being in plain sight anywhere on campus. So she was basically only allowed to read hers in her room, not anywhere else like sitting under a tree or on a bench outside of the drama building. In two years' time, bibles would be banned entirely from college campuses in most parts of the country. Supposedly, the *Holy Bible* was offensive to certain students, mainly the ones with the loudest voices, but that actually didn't believe in free speech because most were simply jumping on a bandwagon, for various reasons such as attention-seeking or looking for "meaning" in life, though they were looking in the wrong places to find true meaning. Also at this time, the movement to outlaw bibles in hospitals and

nursing homes was in full swing across the U.S., along with a lot of other political malice.

In remembering well how news of these things had depressed her in her college years, the older Vini very much wanted to help her younger self, particularly with the insomnia issue, since it's very difficult to function when suffering from sleep deprivation.

Sal had made a duplicate of the flasher he had given to Quin to help with her sleep troubles. This, Vini was delivering to her younger self, who was wondering if the odd light she had just seen outside her window was the moon revealing itself from behind a cloud that had suddenly moved or dispersed. In checking, and discovering the moon to be only a small sliver, Vini thought, *No it must have been something else, like the headlights from a car.* Turning back to her desk where she had been working on a paper, she discovered the flashcard sitting atop an open reference book. *This was definitely not here before,* her mind told her, though this was but a fleeting thought, departing quickly as her eyes read the sleep-inducing phrase that made her heavily drowsy and sent her tumbling into her bed barely two seconds after she switched off the light on her desk.

The younger version of Em at this time hadn't yet learned to use flashcards. However, the younger Vini would soon show her the card that Sal had written, the power of which was immediately obvious to Em who was quickly starting to recognize her own wordsmith gift, as well as what it might lead to in her life.

If we take a moment to look in on Weyland, early evening the day after Vini delivered the flasher to her younger self, we find him just finishing up work in his garden and heading to his house carrying a wist melon that was nearly three times the size of his head.

A hobgoblin happened to be in the field just below the tree limb that Weyland was striding along; and even though the hob was using his excellent camouflage skills to look just like a rock, Weyland might have seen through the disguise if not for being distracted. He often was these days, mainly in being focused on getting the house ready for his bride-to-be, but also on this evening in thinking about the meal he was preparing for himself and Martella who would be coming over for dinner in exactly one hour. In addition to the wist melon, they were having pink zucchini-peel shavings, dill seeds dusted with parsley

powder, and flott-flue flan for dessert. In fact, the flan was just about ready to come out of the oven.

Oh, and I'll need to get the special flan serving set out of the top cupboard, Weyland's mind told him, just as the wist melon nearly slipped from his grasp.

If Weyland had noticed the hobgoblin, he might have simply turned invisible, this being a skill all boy spreepprites possess, which the girls do not, instead having the ability to stop time, which the boys cannot do. (It seems God wanted to spread things around when it came to giving gifts to spreepprites.) Since the distracted Weyland didn't notice, and didn't turn invisible, he was about to be in some pretty big trouble, especially since the hobgoblin was readying a slingshot with a large pebble.

Blessedly, spreepprites often have other creatures looking out for them, such as the great horned owl perched in the oak tree above Weyland's house, who looked much like a section of tree trunk from having camouflage skills nearly as excellent as those of the hobgoblin, though not the shapeshifting abilities of the creature.

Taking off soundlessly, the owl sped down to the ground to pick the hob up by his shoulders, afterwards easily carrying him off to dump him into a large pond. Busy wrestling the wist melon through his front door, Weyland never noticed the owl.

Chapter Six

Courtrooms, Caverns, and Churches

The morning after the owl saved Weyland, Kiana was out early sitting on a park bench about a mile from the bungalow, which she had left before breakfast in order to take a walk, read the bible, and do some journaling. Having an apple and a homemade oatmeal bar, she scratched out a few notes on the subject of sanctification.

She had remembered reading once, in the third chapter of Second Corinthians, about Moses wearing a veil to cover the brightness of his face. Reviewing this in her bible and then reading to the end of the chapter, 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 caught her eye. “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”

Pondering the words, it occurred to Kiana that every believer is being changed. *To what degree probably depends a lot on us*, she ended up deciding, *based on how much time we spend reading the Word of God, in prayer, in developing strong faith, and in being good members of God’s family*. As she wrote these things out, another idea suddenly struck her. *We’re here to learn to love Him. And we’re here to show what kind of citizens we’ll be in heaven*. She had never quite thought of mankind’s purpose on earth involving these two things. Now, the meaning of life seemed a little clearer to her. After making these notes in her journal as well, she asked God to help her strive every day to love Him earnestly and do her best to become a good future citizen of heaven. *And one way to do that*, she further thought, *is to help and love other people, and try to save as many as possible from the terrible fate of hell*. (It seemed Kiana was setting a personal mission for herself that was much like Sal’s.)

God seemed to be speaking to Kiana the most these days when she was reading the bible. This had been true of Vini in her youth as well.

In truth, Kiana found herself very much wanting to be like Mrs. Dellinger, not idolizing her, but more just wanting to be something of a version of her in order to better please God. *We all need something to aspire to*, Kiana ended up deciding as she recalled a conversation she had had a couple of days' previous with Mrs. Dellinger about the Transfiguration in the Gospel of Mark.

"God wants to transfigure us," Vini had said, "to transform us body and mind, soul and spirit."

Vini had been thinking in recent days about how to better answer Kiana's two questions from their group discussion on sanctification—as to how we can understand God better and learn to please Him better. Seeing this as a good opportunity to bring this up, she ended up quoting Jeremiah 9:24, which has a lot to do with knowing God. "“But let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practice steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, says the LORD.”” As Kiana was reading the passage for herself, Vini went on to say, "From this, we can know that He loves justice, which gives us hope and joy even in troubled times. We mainly just need to read His Word to know Him better. In fact, the bible is a good picture of God in many ways."

Kiana could see this for herself. In fact, she felt closest to God when reading the bible. Before leaving the park, she made the following journal notes, also stemming from her breakfast-time ponderings: "Light, Love, Life—this is a good simple definition of God. Strength, Song, Salvation—this is what God becomes to us when we accept the gift of His Son. The 'strength' is not what we do ourselves, but what we do in Christ, because through Him we can do amazing things that we could never do on our own. The 'song' is one of Hope, Joy, and Peace. The 'salvation' is, of course, our Eternal Life."

On the walk back to the bungalow, Kiana recalled a little more of her conversation with Mrs. Dellinger, who had referred to Isaiah 53 as being a beautiful prophetic description of the Lord, one that was sad, but that was also full of hope, joy, and peace. Referencing Psalm 31 as well, Vini had said, "God wants us to ask for His help and take refuge in Him. That pleases Him."

Reading in the Psalms right after their discussion, Kiana had found many indications as to how we might please God, such as Psalm 100:4, which would end up being one of her favorite bible quotes. “Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him, bless his name!” So too did Psalm 50:23 really seem to speak to her. “He who brings thanksgiving as his sacrifice honors me; to him who orders his way aright I will show the salvation of God!”

So we can please Him, Kiana decided, by being thankful and walking in His will. He wants us to praise Him; and in the way we live our lives, give glory to Him. We are to live godly lives here as His representatives on earth.

Kiana returned to the bungalow to a tremendous surprise in that five additional TKTs had just arrived. This also surprised Sal, Quin, and even Vini who had no idea that Dell had been planning to send more help from their time using the Time Key, this new group leaving from the future basically only moments after Vini’s group took off by unicorn, though they arrived in the past a few weeks later than the first group had.

Alex was there, along with two friends of his from Lion Mountain, sixteen-year-old Trixie Greenspell who was gifted with super hearing, and Jasper Hughes, also sixteen, who had shapeshifting abilities similar to those of demons, which meant he could easily impersonate people, animals, and even inanimate objects. Chevy Longwood, age fifteen, and eleven-year-old Roxanne Franklin both lived at the twin plantations (otherwise known as Netherwind and Laurelstone) where Vini, Quin, and Sal were also from, with Chevy being a combat and weapons phenom, and Roxanne having a speed gift similar to Kiana’s, but applied to her hands instead of her feet, which meant she could perform certain tasks with her hands and fingers very quickly. Kiana might have felt like the odd man out, being from a mothership settlement in Ohio, except for the fact that she tended to spend a lot of time with Sal, including at Doyle Mansion, where he often hung out to be near to his mentor.

They would all be squeezing into the bungalow for the next few weeks, a fact that sent Trixie, Sal, Quin, Jasper, and Alex on a quick trip to a nearby thrift store where they acquired three cots, two roll-away beds, and a supply of bedding. The group looked rather funny, and

drew smiles from onlookers, rolling the two beds and carrying the rest of their bundles along sidewalks and across streets when returning home.

The arrival of this new group fit perfectly with an early-morning visit Vini had made to the top of Anei's church to consult with the gargoyle, whose eye had been wandering into courtrooms in the U.S. of late. Being particularly disgusted with the current state of the justice system in this country, Anei had suggested that the TKTs might visit certain courts that were not doing their jobs very well.

In keeping with people not listening, many judges were not listening, to the voice of reason, that is. Along with giving only slaps on the wrist for serious crimes, quite a few were bent on serving special interest groups and advancing certain political agendas. Impartiality was often thrown out the window, replaced with corruptness that included bribery, threats to jurors, and even physical attacks on witnesses and their families, the corrupt judges being complicit in many of these instances.

Vini hadn't thought to visit any courtrooms of this time, but what a fabulous idea; and she could hear the little voice in the back of her head telling her that this was something God intended for the TKTs to do. Anei would end up directing their steps by sending thought messages to them as to which courthouses to visit, ones in which some of the most severe injustices were taking place.

With such a large group of TKTs, they decided to split into two groups, the first consisting of the original team of four, and the second being made up of the five new arrivals. Of the new team, only Jasper and Trixie had shroud sapphires, so the other three would be using shroud mirrors, which would work just as well; though, in a similar manner as to how the star sapphires needed a small amount of light in order to work (to produce shadows), the mirrors also needed a little light to draw on in order to work properly. All five were carrying shield dimes for protection. Three additional wind horses in the area would be helping with transportation for the new team.

The courtroom interventions were not of any drastic sort, like tying up judges or twisting their arms to get them to do right. Instead, the TKTs simply tried to persuade in a polite and reasonable manner, mainly by use of bible quotes. However, their actions in many cases

had an even more shocking effect than what ordinary physical means might have produced.

Indeed, people couldn't deny that something supernatural was going on, such as a diagram on a dry erase board being erased by an invisible hand that then wrote out Proverbs 17:15. "He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the LORD." The invisible hand was Sal's, while Kiana was busy rolling the judge's chair to a position right in front of the board for easy viewing, and Quin was placing New Testaments into the laps of certain jurors and people watching from the gallery. With their shrouds working perfectly, it seemed to the court participants and observers that ghosts were flitting about and taking these actions. Vini mainly watched the whole time, though she did take the opportunity to sit a court stenographer back into his chair three times in a row as he tried to erase the quote on the judge's orders. Since the quote seemed destined to remain, after only a short delay for the judge to get his chair put back into place, the proceedings went on, though in a much subdued manner. With the bible quote fresh on the judge's mind, and being wary of possible additional oddities, he decided to behave himself and act fairly.

Although courtrooms are most often locked, locked doors never posed a problem for someone with unicorn powers. Plus, even if Vini hadn't been around, Quin had a shapeshifting white feather that could be used like a key in just about any lock.

The group of four made visits to eleven courtrooms all in one day, often choosing quotes from the Book of Proverbs (of which there are many addressing injustices), but also occasionally throwing in Ecclesiastes 3:16. "Moreover I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, even there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness." 2 Chronicles 19:7 was also one of the team's favorites. "Now then, let the fear of the LORD be upon you; take heed what you do, for there is no perversion of justice with the LORD our God, or partiality, or taking bribes."

Meanwhile, the team of five was hard at work in other courtrooms. To gain entry, Jasper simply shapeshifted the end of one finger to use as a key in various doors. Roxanne was able to write on chalk boards and dry erase boards so speedily that the sentences appeared in a mere blink, while the other members of her team were busy invisibly passing out

bookmarks printed with the Beatitudes and the Twenty-Third Psalm, along with leaflets describing God's Gift of Salvation, which is free to all. The TKTs sometimes simply slipped these items into various clothing pockets, other times actually placing them into people's hands, laps, on top of a head or two, etc.

Since Roxanne was able to write so fast, she mainly chose somewhat lengthy quotes from the bible, such as Proverbs 24:23-25. "These also are sayings of the wise. Partiality in judging is not good. He who says to the wicked, 'You are innocent,' will be cursed by peoples, abhorred by nations; but those who rebuke the wicked will have delight, and a good blessing will be upon them." Micah 6:8 was another of her favorites. "He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

Working in the public areas of courthouses as well, the group of five posted fliers, written speedily on courthouse copy paper by Roxanne, on bulletin boards to display bible verses such as Proverbs 18:5. "It is not good to be partial to a wicked man, or to deprive a righteous man of justice." Isaiah 1:17 ended up being Chevy's favorite. "Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow." With Trixie having always loved the story of Job, she favored Job 34:12. "Of a truth, God will not do wickedly, and the Almighty will not pervert justice."

Over the next few weeks, the two teams would end up visiting nearly three hundred courthouses in the U.S., including over a dozen each in Hawaii and Alaska.

With regard to all nine TKTs fitting into the bungalow, Vini already had the smallest room. Quin declined the offer to bunk with her grandmother, instead choosing to stay squeezed in with Kiana, Roxanne, Trixie, and Chevy, all of whom did fit into the room, though it was a little like piecing a jigsaw puzzle to get the three cots to fit. The rollaway beds fit better in the boys' room, where Sal ended up getting used to sharing with Alex and Jasper fairly quickly.

In the evenings, two or three times a week, the group watched classic movies, many of which were banned in their own time and not available through the Underground Network of Distribution (UND for

short), a group specializing in tracking down outlawed items such as books, art, music, etc.

“How could they have banned Doris Day movies?” Trixie wanted to know, after watching *Send Me No Flowers*.

“Or *Jane Eyre*?” Alex chimed in. (The classic book, along with all movie versions, had also been banned.)

Since the TKTs weren’t going to be allowed to take copies of the lost movies back to their own time (because God had not sanctioned this), Vini felt they should at least be able to enjoy some of this type of entertainment while on their trip. However, because important work needed to be done, and because watching too much TV had been proven to turn brains into jelly, television time at the bungalow was definitely limited.

This was Roxanne’s first TKT trip. However, she settled in fairly quickly, just as Kiana had. In fact, both of these newbies were gaining confidence and skills from the successful work they were doing; and by this time, Kiana was fully back to being her normally boisterous self.

On one evening, all of the TKTs were needed to intervene at a large riot on a college campus, in order to make sure an invited conservative speaker would be allowed to give his speech, this being something a group of violent liberal activists were trying to stop.

A girl spreesprite named Keke (often a night owl as far as her activities) happened to be watching the riot. Upon noticing the arrival of the TKTs, she left the back of the dragonfly she had been riding, bidding the creature farewell as she zipped in amongst the crowds where she proceeded to speak into the ears of various of the time travelers, in order to direct them to persons carrying weapons, other than the university police who, sadly, weren’t doing much to stem the violence because they had been directed by their higher-ups not to.

To Chevy, Alex, Kiana, and Jasper, Keke’s voice sounded like a squeaky and super-fast whisper. To Trixie, the voice was more like a shout, and was much different than the softly-spoken Winged Words she had recently started hearing after a trip into the Mystery Realm, a strange and wonderful land accessed by one of the magical doorways on Netherwind’s mezzanine floor. (Another doorway to the Mystery Realm, located in a temple in China, was not as often used.)

While none of the TKTs had ever had a spreesprite speak into their ears before, they all knew this help was divinely inspired because they could feel the Holy Spirit guiding them to follow the directions of the voice.

The violent activists were all wearing masks. This, alone, should have prompted the police to begin making arrests. Sadly, they didn't. It seemed many illegal activities were being tolerated these days, including massive property damage and various types of assault. One of the masked men ended up slapping Kiana in the face when she was relieving him of a short piece of pipe. She was visible because her shroud sapphire hadn't been working well in the cloudy nighttime in which both light and shadows were scarce. And her blue sapphire didn't protect her from the strike due to the slap not being hard enough to really injure her, in conjunction with the stone's built-in factor of not repelling general human contact such as hugs, handshakes, pats, kisses, etc. Although Kiana was fairly tall for her age, the masked man was taller than she by a full six inches. Resisting the urge to slap back, she found she wouldn't need to respond at all because a girl college student, a tennis player of equal height to the man, ended up intervening on Kiana's behalf. "Feel like picking on someone your own size?!" demanded the girl, who had been waiting in line to hear the invited speaker, though she had stepped out of the line to confront, eye-to-eye, the slapping activist. "And for that matter," the tennis player added, "why do you think you can slap anyone, especially a girl? Boys are never supposed to hit girls. Go ahead," she then dared the man, as he glared at her while contemplating if he actually wanted a fight, which he didn't, as evidenced a few seconds later by his backing off, this being followed by a full speedy retreat a second or two after that. By this time, Kiana had already slipped away.

Some of the items brought to the riot by the activists were incredibly ugly, such as bricks and pieces of one-by-two wood from hardware stores that had the sharp ends of nails sticking out of them. These, of course, could really hurt people, this being what the activists wanted to do: badly hurt people for having different ideals, specifically, conservative and godly ones. Most other liberals, often called "the left" at this time, were not at all speaking out against the violence, though they did still feel compelled to loudly expound their views, which were

largely the same as those committing the vicious acts. In the minds of the TKTs, this made them complicit, if they weren't willing to condemn the evil and despicable violence committed in the name of their various causes. Sadly, the invading liberalism of this time was being forced on others by use of courts and various forms of liberal-dominated media that were now almost entirely being used for spreading lies, bullying, shaming, threats, and as platforms for organizing both physical assaults and vicious character attacks on anyone not holding liberal views. This, of course, was completely unfair, but was a sort of tidal wave taking place at this time against conservatives, and especially against Christians holding to biblical beliefs.

Another tall masked rioter who punched Chevy in the shoulder when she was relieving him of a nail-ridden stick, ended up not so lucky as the man who had slapped Kiana, instead finding himself pinned face down to the ground a mere two seconds after the punch, his hands tied behind his back (with his own bandana mask) just three seconds after that, after which, Chevy bent the nails of the makeshift weapon flat before snapping the piece of wood in two and simply leaving it lying beside the stunned man.

Roxanne, Jasper, and Alex were keeping busy snatching bats and nail sticks out of people's hands, afterwards depositing them into trash bins and dumpsters. Generally, Roxanne was so fast that no one could ever hinder her. For Jasper, on a few occasions when rioters grabbed hold of an arm or a wrist to try to get their weapons back, he simply shapeshifted to get himself relieved of their grasp. At one point when a large group of masked men were crowding in around three people they had knocked down and were kicking, Alex ended up flying over and into the fray to deliver a few kicks of his own and use a flute to drive the attackers back, after which, he helped the three to their feet, staying nearby to protect them as Quin (who had rushed in) healed the cuts and bruises of the victims using her gift. In having observed the flying boy using a musical instrument as a sort of weapon, and now seeing a girl healing people simply by touching them, many onlookers, including some of the attackers, were basically standing stock still in surprise.

Also looking on, Vini decided not to use the Mind Key on these people. *Let them wonder about this for a while*, she decided. However, a short while later, as the TKTs were getting ready to leave for home,

she did decide to use the key to plant the thought into the minds of the crowd that the oddities seen on this night were related to the supernatural powers of God. She also planted a reminder into many brains that God is still in control of everything, and therefore we should all have hope, even in the current state of the world in which evil forces seemed to be gaining an upper hand, and even with despair overtaking many people. Vini felt compelled to do this in knowing that things were about to get even worse in the world, a lot worse, in fact, especially for many of God's children.

After Quin finished healing the three, drawing on light from a nearby lamppost, Alex employed his shroud mirror, which could extend to two persons at once, so that he and Quin could escape unnoticed from the crowd. When they seemed simply to vanish, many befuddled onlookers ended up thinking they had seen angels at work, particularly because many of these people didn't know that all of the angels are boys.

Keke left the area at the same time as the TKTs, deciding to head to Norway next as part of her nighttime wanderings.

Anei, meanwhile, had his eye focused on a college campus halfway across the country where another riot was taking place, this one having to do with a local special election. Shaking his head, Anei was disgusted not only with the violence, but also with the police on certain campuses, who were regularly being told by the people in charge of their paychecks to just stand by and let the aggression play itself out, no matter who got hurt or how badly, or how much property was damaged. At a good many universities at this time, liberals were running the show, and didn't seem to mind that free speech rights were being quashed, or that quite a few people were getting seriously hurt. A man wearing a hat in support of a conservative politician was getting beat up just for wearing the hat. *That's insane*, Anei thought, appalled. So too was he incredibly upset over the baseball bats and boards with nails being wielded by many of the thugs. *They could permanently disable or even kill people with those things. That would be like me taking my stony fist to someone's head.* (In truth, Anei was struggling to resist taking his stony fist to quite a few of these hoodlums' heads.) Instead of alerting Vini and her crew, the gargoyle decided to deal with this riot himself by raising a dust storm, which served to scatter the crowds.

Of course, on the other side of the law-enforcement coin, Anei's roving eye had noticed in recent years that police in many parts of the country were being targeted by certain liberals promoting anarchy and violence over peace and security. Along with the likes of spreerites, gryphons, and certain gifted humans, Anei found himself frequently intervening to protect police from assassination attempts. *Their job is hard enough without this evil being added to it*, he often thought.

All over the place these days, people were being hateful to one another, even in the church below him, which was fraught with many forms of sin and strife like gossip, adultery, greed, and even false teachings. Anei saw all of these things as signs of the approaching Endtimes. *Actually, we're probably just about there already*, he often decided, in noticing certain trends the bible sets forth as being signs of the End. *Family members are being pitted against one another. Affection for fellow man is growing cold, worldwide. People are calling good bad and bad good. And it's not enough that the liberals have gotten the laws changed to allow certain sins to take better hold in the world; they are now demanding that others change their beliefs, and voice the change of beliefs, or else suffer the consequences. This is like a dress rehearsal for the Mark of the Beast*, Anei reasoned. *People have to resist the evil, both now and then.*

With regard to human beings losing affection for each other, Anei often thought, *How can they love one another when they are staring at their phones all day long, and don't even take the time to talk to each other anymore?* The issue of spending too much time on social media platforms, constantly looking at entertainment and news, interacting mainly by texting, and other use of phones, tablets, watches, etc. had become a huge problem in recent years, causing a massive breakdown of communication in society.

When the TKTs weren't engaged in serious matters, they managed to have a little fun, such as the evening after the campus riot when they had a homemade pizza party. Roxanne was so fast with assembling the pizzas (after the dough had risen) that the party was especially fun, since very little work was involved with the cooking, or the cleaning up after, since the dishes also took no time at all for Roxanne, who didn't at all mind doing the chore solo in basically two minutes flat.

After watching an old Godzilla movie, with the exception of Vini who was out running an errand, the group engaged in a pillow fight, boys against girls, which was a little unfair to the boys at first given the speed of both Kiana and Roxanne, until Jasper ended up doing a little shapeshifting to compensate, and Alex decided to fly up out of reach of most of the pillow strikes. Things were further evened out when Sal used a couple of flashers designed to slow the speed of the girls down.

Part of Vini's errand had to do with her college-age self, whom she was visiting in order to use the Mind Key to strengthen the resolve of her young counterpart, to help her stay on God's path, and get past having depressive thoughts over the state of the world, which many people, both young and old, were prone to in this time, especially when watching a little too much news, or spending time on various social media platforms. Based on certain journal notes, the older Vini knew that her younger self was having a particularly bad semester with regard to depression, as well as insomnia. By planting just a few inspiring thoughts related to many of God's promises in the bible that she had relied on for motivation since her teen years, the older Vini managed to have a positive effect on her younger self, this coming about not only from use of the Mind Key, but also because the presence of a unicorn would have an uplifting effect on nearly anyone.

Also based on journal notes of this time, Vini ended up recalling a visit to Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico with her parents and younger brother, Preston, which had occurred over the most recent spring break. As part of her errand, Vini decided to visit Carlsbad Caverns National Park, where the last tour was just finishing up for the evening deep inside the cave. In years' past, people used to sing the hymn, "Rock of Ages," in the caverns. This had, of course, been done away with based on objections by activists, atheists, etc. Now, Vini felt it was time to at least somewhat revive the tradition. Although she was never a fabulous choir singer, she had a decent voice, which she used to sing the hymn acapella after appearing in the darkened cave in a soft flash, an event which startled (but also thrilled) most people on the tour nearly as much as her sudden disappearance after she finished the song. Again, as with Alex and Quin at the college, many people thought they had seen an angel, especially because of Vini's glow, which was especially pronounced in the darkness of the cavern.

Over the next couple of weeks, Vini would end up visiting twenty-three more caverns in order to sing various hymns to startled tour groups. Surprisingly, only one complaint was made, this occurring at Mammoth Cave in Kentucky where a woman was upset about “being forced to listen to a religious song.”

“Well, we can’t control the actions of angels,” the park superintendent responded. “What are we supposed to do, arrest an angel?”

Some people naturally thought the appearance and disappearance of the strange singing woman to be a trick, like one an illusionist might produce. Others were able to discern the divine nature of the situation, with several of these being unbelievers who were subsequently saved as a result of their experience; though none of these people ever guessed unicorn involvement, since the glowing figure held the form of a woman and not anything like a single-horned horse with possible lion-like features that were sometimes associated with unicorns.

To be clear, Vini was allowed to have and exercise unicorn powers because she could be trusted with them, never using them for personal gain or to abuse others. Actually, all of God’s children knew better than to abuse any of their gifts, not only because it was wrong to do so, but also because anything He has bestowed upon us can always be taken away, even in a mere heartbeat. This includes blessings such as health, fortune, fame, a safe home, etc. These things, we should never take for granted, become prideful or arrogant about, or abuse.

As the two groups of TKTs continued their work in courtrooms, Vini decided to borrow Trixie from her team for a week or so in order to visit churches and ministry organizations, not only in the U.S., but also around the world. In recent decades, many Christian institutions had become so steeped in their own philosophies, as well as desirous of being considered tolerant and world-friendly, that many had completely strayed from biblical teachings. Watering down the bible, false teachings, pleasing people instead of God, focusing on profits, delighting in large buildings, and gearing services to entertaining rather than teaching were just some of the unhealthy trends. Some churches were even denouncing the bible altogether, while others were working elements of other religions into their programs. To be clear with regard to Christianity: Any compromise of God’s Word is immoral. Also to be

clear: God hates immorality. If there is any doubt about this, then we should simply look at Sodom and Gomorrah, and what happened in Noah's time. While God is patient with us, there is a limit to His patience.

Since Anei was busy directing the two courtroom teams, Winged Words would end up guiding the duo of Trixie and Vini, who simply dropped into churches and ministry buildings during different functions on assorted days and at various times. They were able to influence in a number of ways, including use of the Mind Key to address unbiblical thinking. As helpful visitors to bible studies, they were often able to guide group discussions into Truth. With Trixie able to listen in on many conversations, when pinpointing ones expressing views contrary to God's Word, she and Vini were able to pop in and have discussions with the startled church officials, parishioners, Sunday School teachers, etc. about things like excusing sin, being greedy, etc. Because the wind horses were busy helping the other TKTs, the duo traveled by linking hands so that Vini's unicorn power could take them where they needed to go, in basically the blink of an eye.

The showmanship at many churches really made Vini upset. In one particular large service, where many people were standing, shouting, and raising their hands to the ceiling, the pastor on stage began calling out people standing in the back by the entrance doors, ones not crowding up to the stage and not raising their hands. "You in the back, by the doors; I can tell you don't really feel it! You're not connecting to God! You don't really *feel* God!"

This was completely absurd. While there is nothing wrong with raising hands in praise of the Lord, this was clearly a spectacle. And it is definitely wrong to call out people worshiping more quietly and reverently. Even Trixie at her young age knew that we're most connected to God when in quiet prayer, not in a public frenzy. In fact, both Vini and Trixie were convinced that God was not here at all, in the midst of this "show." Vini ended up using the Mind Key on the entire crowd of nearly two thousand to make them all sit down into their chairs and simply stare quietly at the speaker, who got even more frenzied for a time when not able to get a reaction (not even one peep) out of anyone in the audience. In fact, he looked perfectly ridiculous, bouncing around on stage, his face turning nearly purple in his efforts to

get a rise out of his ordinarily adoring congregation who had previously totally made him their idol, but who were now simply transfixed in some strange way, like sitting statues. When the immobilizing and quieting effect of the Mind Key wore off an hour later, many people were left with the lingering memory of having been unable to move, while thoughts played through their minds of how insane it was to put on a farce of worshipping God in this way. Thus, three-quarters of the members in attendance ended up quitting the church.

In a large ministry complex, Vini and Trixie were equally appalled at how prayer-request letters, sent with donations, were being handled. Thousands of unread letters were simply piled onto a large table, over which several ministry team members with hands outstretched were praying aloud over the letters. With each person speaking his or her own prayer, and overtop one another, no one could actually concentrate while speaking. Nor did anyone even know what the requests were, since the letters hadn't been read. Although God knew what each person had written, He was not in the vicinity of the table where the "show" of prayer was being put on. How sad for the people who had written the letters, and what a waste of their time and money as far as Vini and Trixie were concerned. While Vini would never steal unless God told her to, she wasn't surprised on this occasion to hear Winged Words directing her to use her unicorn speed to collect all of the donations that had accompanied the letters and place them into a bonfire two states away.

At an enormous church, Vini ended up disabling four dirt bikes that were about to be used for a "show" during a Sunday Service that truly had nothing to do with God. "And what a waste of resources," Trixie remarked, of the massive piles of dirt that had been brought in and piled onto the stage for the planned entertainment. "The manpower at least was a waste, even if the dirt was cheap," she added. (In truth, the dirt had not been cheap, having been purchased from an expensive landscaping company, coincidentally owned by the head pastor's brother-in-law.) Since the dirt bikes wouldn't work, the show didn't go on as planned; though, sadly, the pastor still managed to put on a show by trotting out a mobile kitchen to cook some ham and eggs to demonstrate some or another point relating to a couple of verses plucked haphazardly from the bible.

Trixie and Vini ended up visiting over twenty countries in their church-and-ministry travels, which ended up being great fun for them, particularly in getting to sample the food in some of the more remote parts of the world.

In their spare time back at the bungalow, the TKTs were mainly piecing jigsaw puzzles, doing schoolwork, playing board games, reading, and watching a little television such as reruns of *Bonanza* and a couple of soccer matches. With Alex really taking to TV, Vini was keeping an eye on how much he was watching. He could watch as many nature documentaries as he wished, but she was limiting things like sitcoms, cartoons, sports, and movies of the day. This ended up being fine with Alex, who knew the limits were for his own good, particularly because most of what was airing was totally devoid of any kind of real meaning. Plus, the nature programs were his favorites anyway, so he didn't feel like he was being deprived of anything.

At a riot that all of the TKTs were attending on a particular Friday evening in a large city in Texas, Valo and Dara ended up using some of their skills to push back crowds of miscreants wearing masks who were intent on bashing cars, benches, business windows, and people with pipes, bats, bricks, etc. The "freak windstorm" not only served to quell these people, but also to disperse the rest of the crowds, both protestors and counter-protestors.

Atop Dara, Quin couldn't help but laugh at those scurrying for cover below. She had been feeling a lot better lately. In addition to sleeping better and getting a daily dose of unicorn from being around her grandmother, the help from the extra TKTs made her feel as though they were really accomplishing something on this trip into the past. Spending time with Trixie was perhaps the greatest help because Trixie was the person Quin had killed while under hypnoid influence. Trixie, of course, had forgiven Quin, who hadn't at all known what she was doing and couldn't have stopped herself even if she had been aware of what was happening. "It's not like someone on drugs or alcohol killing someone because you didn't choose to take the hypnoid," Trixie had said. "You weren't in control and you had no choice at the time but to follow the orders you were being given." Since it was obvious that Trixie had forgiven her, Quin could finally let go of the guilt that had plagued her for many weeks. Although talking to God in prayer had

already led her to the conclusion that she must simply learn from her mistake (of not proactively taking the hypnoid counter) and move on, the extra reinforcement from Trixie was a tremendous help in Quin being able to finally forgive herself.

Chapter Seven

The Great Debates

Based on God's instructions, Vini had stopped using the Mind Key to cover any of the TKTs' activities, instead letting people wonder about things such as how a teenage girl could have magically healed a gash to someone's head, or how someone could vanish into thin air, or how a teen boy could fly. People were also talking about ghosts appearing and disappearing in courtrooms, schools, and even some churches. The talk about angels singing in caverns also hadn't died down. In fact, the subject was being hotly debated on talk shows and in various social media circles; though no one actually had any pictures to share, since those present in the caverns at the time of Vini's performances had been too stunned to think of taking pictures until after she disappeared.

The issue of tech stuff being involved was highly debated, though this didn't seem likely since the events were happening so randomly and in such an impromptu manner, with no gadgets or remnants of electronics left at the scenes afterwards. Also, no planning could be traced such as the activities of flash mobs that were organized on various social media platforms. No, it seemed more likely a Heavenly Hand was involved, rather than any human hands manipulating devices.

The fact that the supernatural was being discussed pleased Vini, who hoped this might create more believers, or spark a revival. She couldn't remember a revival in her growing-up years, but the world certainly needed one. Since God was letting the TKTs go back in time to change certain things, she felt a revival could well be on the agenda. It was a nice thought, at least.

Anei's chalk messages were being debated too, as to who might have done them. With such a great amount of chalk needed for the projects, surely someone would have seen a truck or a cart, or the person or persons who had written out the messages.

Sal's ongoing articles were being highly discussed as well, not only the debate as to who he was, but also as to how his articles kept getting published. Being a speedy writer, he had been doubling up lately because Roxanne was now helping Vini with the activities in various newsrooms in order to push through as many articles as possible. As far as these debates, most people never would have imagined Sal to be a boy not quite fourteen. In fact, most news people thought the writer to be a veteran journalist, though no one could quite figure out how a single person could be writing for several large papers. Thus, a conspiracy theory was born that Sal was really an underground network of mole journalists who had finally gotten tired of what they were being told to write (mainly sensationalist and smearing lies) and had decided to do something about it. "Unless it's a hacker," counter theorists shortly put forth. A few people thought Sal's initials might stand for Special Assignment Liturgist, or Sarcastic At Length based on some of the content of his work. Those angry over the articles were labeling him a Seriously Annoying Loser.

Em's college-age self ended up reading several Sal articles that really impressed her. One entitled "Enslavement" was about liberals believing themselves to be liberated free thinkers, when they were, in fact, enslaved to limited thinking, as well as sin and worldly trends. "If we're not serving God, we are serving the world and Satan, as slaves," the article expounded. "God alone can offer us true freedom—from death, sin, and want—along with protection from many of the world's ills." Sal's "Brainwashed Robots" article was about how various teachers, politicians, and even some parents were training up young people to be activists, the young people being vulnerable to these influences because they were trying to find meaning in the world, though no real meaning could ever be found in dashing to and fro in pursuit of various misguided causes, followers, and approval of others. "Sadly, they've found nothing other than a bleak future, particularly in being separated from God," the article mentioned. Sal also wrote candidly about the "Vanishing Hedge" of God's protection. "Why should God protect us if we're disobeying Him, even scorning Him? He has every right to lower His hedge of protection—relating to storms, terrorist attacks, mob violence, disease epidemics, etc.—when we are operating totally out of His Will. This is all part of His getting the

attention of the sinners on earth, all human beings basically, including the saints.” The reminder in the piece that everyone is a sinner was reinforced by Sal quoting Romans 3:23. “...since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God....”

The college that Em was attending at this time was nearly a hundred miles from Doyle Mansion. She tended to come home every other weekend to see her parents, spending the alternate weekends with her Aunt Fiona at Netherwind Manor, which she and her two brothers would eventually inherit. The twin plantations in this time were quite a different place than they would be in the future, mainly in not yet having pockets (magical mini-realms) containing thriving communities where thousands of people would eventually live, and where endeavors such as large horse farms, quarries, poultry operations, fish hatcheries, and huge pecan groves would also flourish.

Em’s gryphon protector, Zapor, was carting her here and there these days, generally getting her from college to home, or vice versa, in just a few minutes. Trips to Netherwind, roughly fifty miles from Doyle Mansion, were also speedy. On a particular Friday afternoon nearing the end of the spring semester, Sal and Kiana aboard Valo and Dara ended up spotting Em atop Zapor on her way to Doyle Mansion for the weekend. The camouflage of the wind horses ended up shrouding them even from Zapor’s keen eyes, and so the TKTs weren’t noticed. Sal was completely fascinated to see this younger version of his mentor, who was, in his view, a very beautiful girl, this being something she definitely carried into womanhood, even to her present state of much gray hair and many wrinkles. Sal and Kiana only knew Zapor from his portrait in the parlor at Doyle Mansion, since the gryphon had died in the massive uprisings that had nearly emptied the Supercities and work camps worldwide, this occurring some eighteen months prior to the time the TKTs left for their trip. Being so flashy and golden, Zapor seemed larger than either Kiana or Sal might have imagined, even in comparison to the life-size bronze statue of him in Doyle Mansion’s back garden.

With Sal’s articles really speaking to her, Em was inspired to write one of her own for her college paper. Like many people, she had lately been troubled over the push by liberals toward socialism and bigger government in the U.S., when every instance of socialist government in

history had proven to be a failure. So too had every kingdom, empire, etc. that had left God out of governing also fallen because mankind cannot be trusted to govern himself without God's help. "Our leaders have already made the huge mistake of ignoring God's Word, His Laws, and His Divine Right to govern us," her article stated. "Now, we are continuing on dangerous paths in trending toward socialism as some sort of an answer to societal ills and unfairness." In reinforcement as to how we ought to be governed—by our omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent God—Em ended up quoting Isaiah 9:6-7. "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called 'Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.' Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David, and over his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and for evermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this." In addition to pushing a socialist agenda, many people wanted to scrap the U.S. Constitution, claiming it to be outdated and also arguing that it was not truly founded on biblical principles, even though the people who designed it were clearly driven by these ideals, a fact which Em also stated in her piece.

There was some reluctance by the senior editor to publish Em's article, particularly because of the bible quote, which supposedly might offend some readers. However, in the end, the editor had to agree that in the fairness of free speech, the paper should allow her voice to be heard. A pushback from the Dean of the School of Journalism, largely over the bible quote, didn't particularly surprise Em; but by this time, the article had already been published, and so couldn't be fully retracted. Plus, many letters to the editor were decrying as "refreshing" the contrarian point of view being expressed. Of course, those in favor of a socialist government didn't like the article. With the paper making sure these voices were also heard, the issues involved ended up hotly debated.

Sal, meanwhile, had been thinking about writing something related to his personal project of trying to save as many souls as possible from hell. He started by remembering that some people believe all of hell can actually fit into a thimble. While some characteristics about the pit are clearly spelled out—the burning, the darkness, the isolation—a lot about

the eternal home of the unsaved was still very mysterious. In the same way that time is largely mysterious, Sal felt size might be too. He specifically thought of the magical pockets. Opened up by the magicians and gifted cartographers of his time, these places of refuge could hold endless acres of land. Pod structures, designed by gifted architects, were the same way, with many being like huge warehouses or malls inside, while their outsides appeared to be no larger than ordinary dog houses or garden sheds. Pod packs were a similar story.

Instead of writing an article, Sal decided to write a poem, which ended up published in several large newspapers, and which, of course, focused on much more than just the possible size of hell. And because hell might be even worse than we can possibly imagine, Sal didn't mince words.

The Eternal Choice

Whether small as a thimble or large as a grand ocean,
Hell cannot be escaped by the human notion
That the place isn't real or that all roads will lead to bliss;
Those who believe this idea will surely not miss
The horribly-intense flames of red, orange, and yellow
That will forever burn and will never mellow.
The pit cannot be escaped by a ladder, bridge, or rope,
But only by faith in Jesus, our One True Hope.
Nor can human reasoning make an argument to sway
The One Who's just, and must the shameless put away.
The pit endlessly alight holds the ones who fight the flames
That, unlike the Maker, know not one of their names.
When the trapped residents into despair and madness fall,
They know not to whom for any help they can call.
Certainly not the devil whom they so faithfully served,
While thinking he'd provide some reward they deserved.
His fate is the same—the flames also do not know his name,
As they hurt and maim those who are themselves to blame
For rejecting the offer God continued to proffer,
Refusing to stop being skeptic and scoffer.
He gives people of all shapes and sizes many a chance
In this rather short life some like to call a dance.
But the stage is too small, made of dust (like us) after all;
And the wages of sin, like the flames, are too tall.
It is not only how we perform, but what we decide;

The stage can truly be endlessly tall and wide.
However, it is only while people are still living
That they can claim this selfless gift that keeps giving.
When our earthly act ends and we look our Lord in the eye,
We'll have no chance to say why we chose to deny
His Son, our Blessed Savior, Who gave His life for our sin.
Please, consider the state the human race is in!
It's of our own making; forget excuses, no debate;
When we die; tragically, it will be much too late.
The angels rejoice when a single soul is saved from hell.
They sing brightly with voices clear as any bell.
To avoid a horror-filled fate, much worse than anything,
We must choose the place where the angels choose to sing.
Across the wide planet, every man, woman, girl, and boy
Must come to Jesus to inherit Endless Joy.
Sadly, and even to the extent of many long years,
The pleas of the prophets tend to fall on deaf ears.
So also do many eyes close and hearts tend to harden
From making with the devil an awful bargain
For temporary and most insignificant pleasure,
Trading inheritance beyond earthly measure.
Each waking moment is a chance for people to repent,
But we must do this before our lives here are spent.
Please, consider and make the best and wise Eternal Choice,
Then, along with heaven's angels, sing and rejoice.

After reading Sal's latest work, Em was inspired to make her next submission to the college paper a poem. Focused on the horrible growing numbers of suicides, "The Tide of Suicide" was hotly debated even before it was published, mainly because parenting and teaching practices were being called into question. As the paper's publisher and editors sat down to discuss whether or not to publish the article, their banter included the following statements.

"This will raise a public outcry, if we publish something religious related to a topic as sensitive as suicide," the publisher argued.

"What if this can really help people?" one of the editors brought up. "I think it can. If we don't publish it, then we're denying people help."

"But part of it basically blames parents and teachers for this mess," a proofreader mentioned, "for kids not being able to handle disappointment, face challenges, work through problems, for some of the things leading up to suicide basically."

“Well, they should bear some blame,” the senior editor stated, “along with a lot of others—politicians, people high up in education systems, counselors....”

“We need more counselors and mental health services, not religious jargon,” the publisher continued to press.

After about an hour of this sort of discussion, the group did decide to publish the poem, mainly because some people still valued having varied views in print. Plus, a couple of the editors were actually interested in being real journalists, not just ones focused on giving select personal opinions.

The Tide of Suicide

The world’s ever-climbing suicide death toll
Often seems much like a massive boulder’s roll
Down a tall mountain steeped fully in despair,
Emptiness, sadness—so difficult to bear.
The numbers are wholly inexplicable;
And the evil involved, so despicable.
From the terrible clutches of suicide,
Even the affluent cannot seem to hide.

Those with freedom, tons of possessions, good health,
Seemingly no worries and fabulous wealth,
Still seem to strive for something most elusive,
Or just more of what is now deemed exclusive.

But they are looking in all the wrong places:
Travel, relationships, large living spaces....
Fulfillment is not found in things or people,
Nor even in a place with a tall steeple.
Only one thing can truly fill mankind’s soul,
That incredibly immense and empty hole.
When we have a relationship with Jesus,
The Lord reveals His Grand Plan for each of us.

It’s only in the Father’s loving embrace
That we can our greatest life challenges face.
For Light and Truth, we each much actively reach,
And not listen to those who might want to preach:

“You deserve every single thing you desire.
So get on out there and light a massive fire!
Take every risk to win, no matter the cost,
Achieve it all, even if your soul gets lost.
Look at others to measure worldly success;
Then tell me you have done your absolute best.
For impressive and rich things you must aspire.
To attain fame, you must go ever higher!”

This is exactly what many have been taught,
And it has led to lives full of utter fraught.
Instead of giving out the Beatitudes,
Mentors oft foster unhealthy attitudes.

From years of listening to all the wrong guides,
People have been taken on dangerous rides.
Many suggestions that have led to bad ends
Have come from parents, teachers, even close friends
Who oft impart poor principles for living,
Like the serving of self instead of giving.
We’re told with others we should ourselves compare,
Though we’re each unique, down to a single hair.

To get out of this current damaging groove,
People must decide to old habits remove,
Like seeking shortcuts and easy paths, scheming,
Being lazy, expectantly pipe dreaming....

From each trouble, we shouldn’t ask for rescue,
Full knowing that for selves we can and must do,
Because letting others too oft bear our weight
Really only leads to a world of self-hate.
Then we’re unable to problem-solve and cope;
And in the midst of this, we tend to lose hope.
But we can take heart. With God as our Sponsor,
There is no addiction we cannot conquer.

And no injury that can’t fully be healed
By His love and promises in which we’re sealed.
No mountain on the planet Earth is too tall
For the Lord Who has already climbed them all.

So don't be part of a hopeless, helpless crowd.
Resist merging in by speaking this aloud:
"I need some help to find meaning in my life
That is currently filled with worry and strife.
Though I'm depressed, I know it is essential
Not to forever destroy my potential.
Please, help me in my struggles to find my way,
And an answer to the Question of the Day."

The reply as to how to find Life's Meaning
Has to do with surrendering, and leaning,
In order to fall into God's open arms,
Capable of shielding from so many harms.

Then, don't resist the Lord's ongoing molding;
All the while, our hand He is firmly holding.
The shaping over the years may involve pain,
But from His teaching we have so much to gain.
When our earthly lives become more than our own,
In our hearts, souls, and minds, His Great Seeds are sown,
To sprout and bloom even in a hostile land,
Where we're ever guided by His Loving Hand.

We will find answers, and in this world our place,
When we learn to trust in His Amazing Grace.
In the Lord Jesus Christ we must learn to hide;
This, alone, can stop the Tide of Suicide.

When published, the suicide numbers on campus over the next six months ended up dropping to near zero. The one suicide was a person who accidentally killed herself. She had many times taken an overdose of pills, but then had most often made a phone call right afterwards and been rescued. Other times, she had taken the pills just before her roommate was due home from work so that the roommate could save her. In this case, when the roommate didn't show up because she was working late, the pill-taker tried to make a call, but discovered that her phone battery was dead. Then, as she was trying to get out of the house to ask a neighbor for help, she passed out and died just inside the front door.

Even before the impact of the poem was noticed, some students at Em's college ended up forming groups to discuss both the poem and the

problem of suicide. Some even found a way to laugh about themselves, in recognizing that much of what Em had expounded was true. They didn't mean to treat the subject of suicide lightly; but since this issue had touched everyone at some point in their lives, whether through family or friends, or their own destructive thoughts and actions, it did help to lighten the atmosphere when talking about the tragedy of suicide, the lives cut horribly short, which is not at all what God intends for people.

"You mean I'm not the center of the universe, and everything can't go my way all the time," one girl said with a smile.

"I'm a snowflake too," another girl responded. "I tend to throw tantrums when I don't get my way. I need to learn better coping skills, and I need to take responsibility for my own actions."

"And we should look into Christianity," a boy offered. "If it claims to hold the answers to many of our problems, we should at least give it a look. What would be the harm of reading what biblical scholars think, like C.S. Lewis?" (Many colleges had recently stopped offering classes studying the works of this great writer and philosopher.)

"Or read the bible itself," another boy suggested, "especially if it's on its way to being banned."

"I have read it," a girl stated, "at least, a good chunk of it. Some of it is pretty intense, like a lot of best-sellers these days, with brutal murders, tortures, betrayals, adultery.... It's magical too, has a lot to do with dragons, witches, miracles, sorcerers...."

"But is E.R. Tremaine right?" another girl asked. "Is God the answer to our problems?"

"We'll only know if we do some research, and keep an open mind," a boy responded.

"A lot of brainy people throughout history have been Christian," another boy ventured to say. "And some of them were agnostics and atheists that turned to Christianity from studying the principles of the bible and the writings of biblical scholars."

"Imagine if it's all true—the magic, miracles, Eternal Life," the girl who had mentioned dragons and witches said. "Imagine how wonderful all of that would be."

From the truth expounded in Em's poem, some kids even ended up scolding their parents.

“Why didn’t you teach me what I needed to know—that life is not fair, and I can’t have everything I want and feel I deserve?!” a senior majoring in economics wanted to know.

“You were so busy trying to be my friend and impress my friends, you didn’t act like a parent,” a sophomore English major said.

“You never let me handle my own problems, you always rescued me,” a freshman math major declared. “Now, anytime anything challenges me, I crumble, and I can’t figure out what to do. You were supposed to give me tough love, not constant pampering love.”

A chemistry major getting ready to graduate asked, “Why didn’t you tell me to get a job, so that I didn’t end up with all this credit card debt and piles of student loans?”

This, of course, was a whole separate issue: the unhealthy trend of many students not working to support themselves while in college. Sadly, this was something many parents were encouraging, in keeping with babying their adult children to the point that many were turning out to be lifelong babies, incapable of handling responsibility or supporting themselves.

Sadly, most of the conversations didn’t even touch on the fact that certain populations were more prone to suicides and attempts. In fact, at this time, the numbers were incredibly high amongst women who had had abortions, as opposed to those who had not. So too was there an explosion in the numbers of transgender persons committing suicide, many of whom had been pushed into this lifestyle by various malevolent influences, including a wave of recruitment by activists.

Martella, in her travels, ended up stopping time in order to save from slitting her wrists a ten-year-old girl who was a victim of both activism and her parents following the latest trend in wanting their daughter to be transgender.

While many people didn’t want to speak out on this issue, for fear of being unpopular, or bullied and harassed, and sometimes even physically attacked by activists, in this case, an aunt did decide to intervene with the parents of the ten-year-old.

“If everything is okay, and nothing’s wrong, then why did she just try to kill herself?” the aunt wanted to know. “And don’t tell me not to call her ‘she’ or ‘her.’ She’s not a ‘they’ and she’s been a girl since she was born; and as far as I’m concerned she always will be because there

is only male and female for people, and nothing in between. And she's a tomboy, not a boy! And as far as using your politically-correct pronouns, with you teaching her incorrect language skills, no wonder she's having problems in school. Why don't you call her 'one'; that's a pronoun too, and it's pretty neutral? One can be whatever one wants to be," the aunt said somewhat mockingly because she didn't believe it to be true with regard to gender. Not giving the parents a chance to interject, the aunt went on. "Instead of going to those support groups, you should be going to church, and reading the bible, and praying, because that would be something that could actually help. All this made-up nonsense stems from boredom and a lack of fulfillment, a lack of anything worthwhile. But you're not creating anything worthwhile for her here, just a lot of misery, and confusion."

"But it's what she—I mean they—wants," the mother finally managed to get a word in.

"Kids don't know what they really want," the aunt snapped. "That's why there are rules to live by, so they have some guidelines while thinking things through, growing, learning, making mistakes. But this is the wrong kind of mistake you are fostering, one that might end up being deadly. And it doesn't take a genius to know that you don't give kids everything they want, especially at young ages. I mean, come on; be a real parent here. And stop talking about hormone treatments and future surgeries, because that's also dangerous. Is this because you had two girls, but you really wanted one of them to be a boy, so you're making the younger one into a boy? Think about it. Is it that, or are you just following a trend? Whatever the reason, it's obviously not good for her!"

Whether or not what she was spouting would have any impact, at least the aunt had had her say. And somebody needed to say it, instead of just fearfully hiding behind the political correctness of the day. Sadly, her niece would end up committing suicide at age fourteen, just after having the first of a series of planned surgeries to change her gender. At that time, no girl spreerites would be around to stop time because they were all busy elsewhere.

Em's writings over the next couple of years would end up tackling the issue of the problems with many journalists—the bias, lies, slander, suppression of free speech, etc.

Anei ended up reading many of her articles and poems, which he greatly admired, especially the fact that she was brave enough to write about these things in a day when many were cowering in fear from the backlash and bullying that often came with expressing the truth.

In questioning the integrity of many journalists, who had become activists in entirety—often publishing only opinions, lies, and twisted truths intended to ruin the lives of others—Em ended up quoting Proverbs 19:9. “A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who utters lies will perish.”

Perish, that’s pretty bad, Anei thought in connecting the bible verse to unsaved people going to hell for all eternity.

In another article, Em quoted Jeremiah 9:3, which Anei also thought apt for the day and age. “They bend their tongue like a bow; falsehood and not truth has grown strong in the land; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they do not know me, says the LORD.”

Many of Em’s pieces would be as hotly debated as her suicide poem. She also ended up earning bad grades from some of her liberal-minded professors who didn’t like the truths she was expounding. This didn’t particularly trouble Em, who had many advocates willing to stand up for her right to free speech. Plus, using her wordsmith gift to write letters to various deans, and even the president of her college on one occasion, she managed to have most of the unfair grades adjusted up to what was actually appropriate, reflecting her studies, exams, and other work.

With regard to the connection between Sal and Em, it’s funny how things can seem out of order sometimes, even reversed, such as how he ended up influencing the person who would eventually be his mentor and end up influencing him before he even made the trip back in time to influence her. But perhaps a circle would be a better way to describe the oddity, instead of a reversal.

Of course, time often isn’t what we think it is, this being a fact many TKTs were discovering during their travels and experiences. However, in many past ages, people weren’t able figure out great mysteries such as those relating to time because God wanted certain things kept secret. He reveals things to us in His own time. And sometimes answers are hidden, or minds are kept shut, for very good reasons.

It was not just Sal's articles and poem that ended up influencing Em because Vini, home from college on a weekend, had just shown Em the insomnia flasher, which would end up being something of a catalyst in hurrying along the development of her wordsmith gift. In truth, she would end up using and loving flashcards for the rest of her life, and she would teach the use of them to Sal.

And speaking of influence, the older Vini ended up paying two clandestine visits to her family, one to use unicorn influence and the Mind Key on Preston, who had been discouraged of late, particularly as related to his weapons training, taking place in Kivetel, a realm accessed by one of the magical doors on Netherwind's mezzanine. At this time, he had been training for several years, but was still not making as much progress with mirrors and ropes as he would have liked. In fact, Em's cousin, Weatherly Dawson, was already far ahead of Preston in this regard. Of course, living at Laurelstone, she ended up spending more time in Kivetel than Preston. But it wasn't just Weatherly, because Em, at this point, had advanced in her stick fighting training far beyond what Preston would achieve even in the next decade. It didn't take much for Vini to give him an encouraging brain nudge as he was heading into Netherwind for a little weekend weapons practice.

The next morning, Vini visited her parents at home, for two reasons, the first of which was to rid the backyard shed of a gremlin, doing so using unicorn light while tossing out the shroud curtain so that the flash of light would be less noticeable. Secondly, she ended up pre-breaking a weak rung on a ladder that her father was about to use to paint the house, so that he would notice it before using the ladder and wouldn't have an accident while painting. Her visit ended up having an unknown effect on her mother, who had felt a little down lately due to a war of words with an uncle on a social media website. The uncle, who had a largely liberal mind, had just unfriended her, in being tired of the "religious jargon" as he called it that Vini's mother tended to post in the form of bible quotes and nudges for people to accept Christ and be saved. The down feeling wasn't necessarily from being unfriended, but more from the fact that God had been speaking very clearly to Vini's mother lately, through prayer and messages in the bible, in telling her to leave her father's house and family behind her to focus only on her own family. Taking this to mean that her uncle would probably never be

saved, Mrs. Aberdeen was truly sad, the sadness extending to a brother who also had yet to accept Christ, and was unlikely to do so anytime soon.

The TKTs were using no social media in this time, even though they were on an extended stay, and it might have been interesting to engage with those of the past in this way; though the issue of social media was being heavily debated at this time, as far as the detriment to society, even contributing to suicide in various ways including from cyber bullying and unhappy people comparing themselves to others. But as far as the TKTs were concerned, they were simply too busy; and television was proving to be enough of a diversion.

One afternoon watching a nature program featuring land creatures that take to the water, Alex was smiling because the swimming elephants and swimming monkeys made him think of Nessie. Next up were a lot of birds that also like to swim such as penguins, gulls, ducks, and geese. For some reason, the birds made him think of Nessie even more than the elephants and monkeys had.

After also watching a *Gilligan's Island* rerun, Alex headed outside to find his friends. With the weather turning warm with the change of spring to summer, the TKTs had been spending much of their free time on the bungalow's back porch, and kicking a soccer ball around the back yard. Chevy, Trixie, and Jasper were just setting up a badminton set they had acquired from the thrift shop.

The TKTs would end up staying four more weeks in the past, doing much of what they had been doing in visiting schools, courtrooms, college campuses, and such, while making full use of their gifts. Once, when Jasper accidentally dropped his shroud sapphire inside an elementary school, he simply shapeshifted to look like a locker for a brief time, afterwards impersonating a teacher to search for and recover the sapphire. Trixie had begun regularly listening in on the conversations of an activist organization fond of committing violent acts; thus, the TKTs were able to provide a series of anonymous tips to the police to help stem some of the extremist activities of this group. Quin ended up stopping time twice at riots, plus healing a broken ankle, two knife cuts, several nail punctures, and one migraine headache. One of Sal's tranquility flashers that he lost in the frenzy of a riot outside of a government building ended up copied and posted all over town, which

served to quiet the area for several months in a row. Attending a few self-defense classes, Chevy ended up helping to train people in hand-to-hand combat, particularly focusing on relieving people of weapons such as bats and knives.

When the wind horses had a little spare time, they used their talents to make cloud sculptures of angels, crosses, churches with tall steeples, and the like. Many were incredibly elaborate such as one by Valo featuring Mary holding baby Jesus, and a trio of angels with trumpets done by Dara. These absolutely fascinated people, who couldn't help but stare, and wonder, and take pictures of the lovely scenes. And, of course, people had to debate how the cloud sculptures might have been made.

On a particular Tuesday morning, Keke was washing her hair, six times, in fact, because a boy spreesprite named Garland had just put bright green dye into her shampoo bottle. The extra hair-washing not only made Keke late for having breakfast with a friend, but also saved her from a dart from the blowpipe of a hobgoblin, the nasty creature having given up lying in wait for her below her little stone and moss house perched in a carved-out niche high on a garden wall.

Garland liked to play pranks on people as much as he did girl spreesprites, as evidenced by a man in Nebraska not being able to find his car keys because Garland had turned them invisible for twenty-four hours. The fact that the man couldn't find his car keys and had to take a bus to work saved his life from a horrible pile-up accident on the interstate. The man became aware of the save when this information was imparted into his brain by unicorn power, the unicorn skipping by his office building unnoticed after having been called by the younger version of Vini to kill sixteen demons that were in the process of attacking her and Preston on the grounds at Netherwind. The unicorn ended up visiting seven states in all on his visit, affecting more than seventy people in various ways, before returning to his home in the Realm of Quintessence.

After playing five pranks on this beautiful morning, Garland had fairly well gotten the mischief out of his system for the day; and so, perched on the very top of a lovely purple zinnia in the garden of an elderly man, he decided to sing for a bit. Hearing the little musical noises while having his coffee on the back porch, the elderly man

decided to record the chirps and squeaks, later in the day playing them back loudly in order to hear the words of Garland's song. "Well, I'll be, the man declared, "I've got fairies living in my garden." Since sprites are a type of fairy, this was a correct guess on the man's part.

Instead of watching TV with his friends, Sal had lately taken to listening to a bible radio program, one designed to teach the whole bible in five years, and one that didn't compromise on the truth of the bible. Since the TKTs weren't going to spend five full years in the past, Sal made himself a note to check with the UND upon returning home, to find out if copies of these broadcasts were still available in the future. Blessedly, they would be due to the vigilance of many people seeing the need to preserve such valuable teachings.

The bible program was from an organization called *Thru the Bible*, and taking part in the series was called being on the "Bible Bus." Enjoying the broadcasts and feeling like he was really learning something, Sal ended up writing a poem in support of the teachings.

The Bible Bus Tour

"May I say" they'd love to have you on board,
No ticket needed to hop on the tour,
To learn in depth about the Two-Edged Sword,
Over five years, a lengthy trip for sure,
But one badly needed in this dark age.
Please, pick up a Bible, savor each page.

The tour is led by a special teacher
Full of personality, wit, and more,
Not simply a most loquacious preacher,
But one with truths and parables galore.
Each new day we learn something to treasure,
From wisdom beyond most earthly measure.

One might ask of this, "What's the great allure?"
The simple answer: "To save everyone,
Calm our angst, learn the power to endure,
And be more like the Father's Blessed Son.
In truth, we need this for our survival,
In the hopes of a world-wide revival."

But, practicality and dreams aside,
Scripture is so pure and enlightening
(Even apart from the greatest tour guide),
More valued than the treasure of a king.
Five years' study, we most certainly need,
In order for roots to spring from the seed.

Just dabbling here and there is absurd.
Get on and off as often as you like,
But it takes time to soak in the full Word.
Much more worthwhile than any nature hike,
The sights abound in the eye of the mind,
Even those of the spiritually blind.

Come on aboard, anytime, anywhere,
A park, the boonies, the center of town,
In a zoo looking at a polar bear.
The tour is safe; the bus never breaks down,
Not in woods, on hills, nor in desert sand,
Being maintained by a Heavenly Hand.

So, come learn from a servant of the Star.
Fasten tight the belt of your reserved seat,
And come aboard exactly as you are.
Bring questions, even feel free to repeat.
Come from far and near; please journey with us.
“May I say” welcome to the Bible Bus.

“May I say” was put in quotes because it was a favored phrase of the late Dr. J. Vernon McGee, the Bible Bus tour guide.

In knowing that many churches had strayed from solid biblical doctrine, Sal enlisted the aid of Vini and Roxanne over a two-week period in helping him get the poem published in hundreds of church bulletins and on numerous websites. Thus, many people started listening to the radio program. In discovering what the bible really says and what it actually means, many were able to refute various false teachings within their churches.

One of the reasons Sal was so taken with the Bible Bus had to do with the fact that the program had originally aired half a century past, yet was still completely relevant to what was going on in this time.

Vini herself remembered hopping aboard the Bible Bus in her younger years. While she hadn't agreed with every biblical interpretation of the tour guide, she did remember learning a great deal from the program.

Chapter Eight

Grapevines and Weddings

Vini's childhood best friend, Charlene Orr, whom everyone called Charlie, was getting married on a Saturday just as the spring semester was ending. She had recently finished culinary school, and her husband-to-be, Frank Wharton, had just graduated from college. They were getting married right away because they were already incredibly busy with their careers: Frank, in managing a farm, and Charlie, in running both a soup kitchen and a catering business; and she was making plans to open a restaurant. Vini was maid of honor, and Em was one of the bridesmaids. (Em had also made Charlie's dress.)

Immediately following the noontime church ceremony, the reception took place at a pavilion behind an inn that had a sizeable vineyard; and those attending enjoyed the outdoor setting, meal, dancing, toasts to the happy couple, etc.

This event, the older Vini would not be looking in on. However, another time traveler would be present, though not one staying at the bungalow. Fourteen-year-old Frees Muldoon from the twin plantations was already a seasoned TKT, and his gift was the ability to make plants grow very quickly. He could also command vegetation of all kinds to do his bidding, this being the case on this day as he arrived to stop six demons intent on attacking the reception party. The six were on the approach to the pavilion through rows of the vineyard, and the two in the lead were mimics disguised as catering staff. Commanding masses of grapevines to bind the demons, Frees then swiftly dispatched them one by one with a blue rope, the sizzling and popping noises of the weapon-at-work going unnoticed by those at the reception due to the merriness of the party and the loudness of the music.

Frees didn't look in on his friends at the bungalow, instead returning home immediately, via a unicorn that had brought him and was waiting for him. It had lately become common for some TKTs

making solo trips to go by unicorn, especially since a sixteen-year-old girl living in a pocket at Laurelstone could call them.

Smiling as he returned home, Frees was thinking about the vineyard. He had always loved grapevines, especially since they were so prominent in the bible, often being used in parables, or simply as metaphors. *Fruitful, unfruitful, even wild grapes*, he recalled from various books of the bible.

Occurring the exact same day as Charlie's, Martella's wedding was absolutely lovely, even ethereal, in taking place high in the clouds above a formal garden in Connecticut. As one of their gifts, spreesprites could walk on clouds, as they were on this day on one shaped much like a puffy lily pad. In addition to Martella and Weyland, fifty-seven spreesprites were attending the ceremony, along with nearly two hundred magical white hummingbirds hovering in a circle above the lily-pad cloud. The bride wore a dress made of snowdrop petals, and the groom was in a suit spun from spiders' silk. The guests were attired in various leaf and flower creations, with many of the girls wearing hats made of hydrangea petals.

After the exchange of vows, and tiny rings made of a mix of emerald and carnelian, the married couple—carried in an airy sling made of woven golden grasses adorned with baby's breath and alyssum—was escorted to their reception, which ended up being a more earthly affair taking place in Weyland's summer garden, filled mostly with flowers that he had planted just for the occasion. Tables made of large acorns were nestled into beds of blossoming red thyme and pink brisky-weed vines surrounded by alternating clusters of blooming purple and yellow hilkenfil bushes.

As the hummingbirds put on a choreographed airshow full of elaborate formations and breathtaking dives, the wedding party and guests enjoyed a luscious meal of cherry blossom nectar, cloudberry salad, rosemary-infused pole pickles, individual wiffle-milk pies, curly green potato crisps, creamed pearly peas, and lemon five-layer cake with pineberry frosting.

Just as the meal was finishing up, a whole host of creatures began stopping by bringing gifts. This included birds, wind horses, squirrels, walking sticks, grimmpts, butterflies, hairy vetches, etc., mainly gifting the couple with useful items such as a sack of thistle seeds, his-and-hers

bean-fuzz slippers, a three-shelf spice rack, bamboo trivets, a set of spoons carved from rowan wood, a box of candles, two copper stew pots, a stack of embroidered bath towels, and so forth. Two genies arrived last of all, the first bringing Martella and Weyland a never-ending tissue box that dispensed slivers of daisy petals. The second gave the couple a mahogany dining set that was magical in that the chairs could change sizes to accommodate all sorts of visitors. Also, any food placed onto the table would keep fresh (and even warm or cold, depending on the dish) for a full forty-eight hours, a handy thing since Martella's travels weren't always predictable. In fact, she would arrive home later than expected on many occasions over the years.

The end of Charlie's reception found Em atop Zapor on her way to Netherwind for the remainder of the weekend. After greeting her Aunt Fiona, and before settling in to write, she decided to take a jog around the twin plantations. A vineyard had just been added to Laurelstone, and Em zigzagged through the rows just for fun, collecting a few grape leaves as she did so to take back to her aunt who was canning pickles. Placing the grape leaves into the jars before the hot brine was poured over the cucumbers and spices evidently helped to keep the pickles crisp.

As Em was delivering the leaves to Aunt Fiona, Tulko was dropping Vini off at a barn behind Laurelstone to work with the horses. Already, she was starting to think seriously about setting up a hippotherapy program at Laurelstone. Talking about the venture with Weatherly in the evening, the pair took a stroll through the rows of the new vineyard. Unknown to the girls, a genie happened to be looking on, though only for a minute or so before heading for his home in Erdém, another of the magical realms accessed by a door on Netherwind's mezzanine. Oddly enough, the genie took a few of the grape leaves with him as well, to add to a batch of pickles he was making.

With regard to the genies' Magical Grapevine running through time, the grapevine was called such even though it was more related to a certain species of magical wisteria. But whatever the relationship to other plants, the Magical Grapevine was able to produce fruit as well as wisteria-like blossoms. The fruit, very like grapes in appearance, was needed to feed the curling and coursing channel through time. The fruit

was also symbolic of what the genies were producing from being able to communicate with their future selves, their actions being vital to making certain things happen in accordance with God's will along various timelines, this being very like the actions of the TKTs.

Unicorns in their travels occasionally crossed paths with the Magical Grapevine, as the older Vini did on her way home from stopping a school shooting in Oregon one afternoon. In pausing to take a peek along the scrolling channel into the future, she was able to see something very interesting relating to Jamie and Birch, an event which would take place five days after the return of the TKTs to their own time, this being something that would end up requiring unicorn intervention.

Two days after the two weddings found the older Vini again looking in on her younger self, though this time traveling back to the summer when she was fourteen and needed to be getting to her first day of work cleaning house at Doyle Mansion. This was a time when the younger Vini was experiencing depressive symptoms; and so the unicorn presence of her older self was an important factor in motivating her to get out of bed, have breakfast, and get going, particularly because working at Doyle Mansion had been the beginning of her life in many ways, at least, the beginning of her true walk with Christ. Continuing to look on as her younger self trudged down the street, the older Vini smiled in seeing Mrs. Doyle with her broken arm answering the door to greet the new housekeeper and welcome her inside. Shortly afterwards, the older Vini headed back to the time of the bungalow.

The next day, while the two TKT teams were busy visiting courtrooms and a couple of college campuses, Vini took a side trip to visit a fifteen-year-old girl engaged in a project similar to one that Vini herself had taken on in her youth. The girl, named Eleanor Lansing, had saved up six months' allowance from doing chores in order to buy fifteen hundred sand dollars, along with cardstock and some pretty red ribbon. Eleanor had already printed twenty bible verses onto each piece of cardstock, then cutting the verses out using her mother's home-office paper cutter. Her next chore would be to punch holes in the cards and tie them to the sand dollars with the red ribbon. However, returning to her bedroom after having breakfast, she discovered all fifteen hundred sand dollars with accompanying cards already assembled, the ribbons

each tied with a double bow, and all of the sand dollars placed into a large handled bag for easy carrying. In truth, it had taken Vini less than three minutes to do all of the hole-punching, threading, ribbon-tying, and bagging.

While Eleanor was surprised, she didn't know why she should be. God had given her the idea to do this, and she had been praying about it. *So He sent an angel to help me put them together*, she decided. Now, giving them out was on the schedule for today, Tuesday, instead of Friday, like she had originally thought.

Eleanor was attending summer school and was planning to hand out the sand dollars to classmates and teachers. Although giving out bible verses at school was forbidden, she was determined. God had placed this project on her heart, and she would obey Him. While many students and teachers wouldn't object, some would, of course, in keeping with the pervasive liberal thinking and the continued quashing of free speech rights. A little nervous as she exited the school bus, Eleanor took a deep breath. However, suddenly, the breath turned into a gasp as the sack simply vanished from her hand, in a snap. A mere sixteen seconds later, every person on the school grounds had a sand dollar clutched in his or hand.

With Vini remembering how much trouble she had gotten in over the issue in high school, she had decided to help Eleanor avoid the problem altogether. And the problem was indeed avoided, since no one knew who had distributed the dollars; or how, for that matter, since it had all seemed completely magical, which served to add weight to the already-supernatural power of the bible verses.

On a whim, Vini decided to pay a visit to Doyle Mansion to deliver one of the sand dollars to Em, who was home for a few days since summer classes at her college didn't begin until the next week.

While Em was having breakfast in the kitchen, Vini simply placed the dollar onto her bedroom pillow, afterwards exiting the room into the hall. However, in order to avoid a possible encounter with Pizzo, the mansion's resident puck troll who was just coming up the main stairs, Vini slipped into the old servants' stairwell. Although she was well shrouded, she also knew that shrouds didn't always work against the astute senses of magical creatures. In the stairwell, she accessed the wall hatch to the dumbwaiter in order to make use of the magical

doorway to Ancora. *Thank goodness it's a Tuesday*, she thought, since Tuesdays and Fridays were the only days this particular doorway was open.

Exiting the dumbwaiter through a door in an oak tree in Ancora, Vini was greeted by a genie named Breccan, who was a sort of governor for this magical land and who led Vini on a tour of several gardens, one of which was a vineyard, a magical one whose vines held multicolored grapes the size of baseballs and leaves each as large as a sombrero. After the tour, Breccan escorted Vini to another passageway leading back to her realm, this one in a boulder in the middle of a meadow.

Vini exited through a shed in California holding lawn equipment used to maintain a park in a mid-sized city in which a protest was currently taking place. She was surprised to see several children with their parents in the park, since a protest wasn't a particularly safe venue for kids. However, she could quickly see why the parents had brought their kids, who were part of a stunt cooked up by the parents. A piñata of the president was hanging from a tree and the children were being encouraged to hit the piñata with baseball bats.

Shaking her head both sadly and in a scolding manner, Vini thought, *You don't make an effigy of anyone and then hit at it, or set it on fire, or stick pins in it, or whatever, because that's just plain wrong. No wonder there's so much disdain for others and violence in the world, with people training kids early on to do things like this.* While this was supposed to be some sort of a joke, Vini felt it was in incredibly poor taste and set a very bad example.

Oddly enough, the kids themselves looked tentative and skeptical while taking swings at the piñata. In truth, we all early on have a sense within us of what's right and what's wrong, though we can become desensitized to this internal guidance over the years, especially when being misled by others.

While Vini thought of taking the piñata away, she decided not to intervene on this occasion. However, because Keke was also looking on, in disapproval, something magical was definitely going to happen. In this case, all of the candy inside the piñata was changed to worms, beetles, centipedes, and the like, which greatly upset the children when the shell was finally broken. Expecting a treat for their efforts, two of

the kids actually threw tantrums over the bugs. Busy dealing with the tantrums, the parents ended up leaving the protest early.

The actions in the park served as a reminder to Vini for the TKTs to visit a few more elementary and middle schools before heading back to their own time.

Even without shrouding, Roxanne didn't look out of place in elementary schools. On a particularly rainy day when recess was being held in a gym, and many students in the summer program were just sitting in the bleachers, Roxanne, using paper from a recycle bin and scissors borrowed from a teacher's desk, super-speedily cut paper dolls, for the younger folks mostly, those in kindergarten and first grade. She also made backdrops of scenes and sets of clothing for the dolls.

As far as covering up supernatural activities, no Mind Key needed to be used because the younger kids' minds were not yet overly skeptical, or at all limited in their imaginations. Since they didn't have preconceived ideas about a lot of things, and hadn't yet been limited by various influences and experiences, their minds were completely open to accepting magical happenings.

Making many of the dolls characters from the bible—like Joseph wearing his coat of many colors, Daniel surrounded by lions, David as a shepherd boy about to slay Goliath, and baby Jesus in a manger surrounded by his family and animals—Roxanne told the children bible stories corresponding to the scenes. The paper dolls and accessories would end up going home with many of the children, who would tell the bible stories to various members of their families.

On a whim before leaving the gym, Roxanne cut a wedding scene, complete with an elaborate church and an entire wedding party, for the kids to play with.

Chapter Nine

The Angel of Poetry

This was the final week of the TKTs being in the past; and even in the first couple of days, they were definitely making the most of their time by stopping a shooting at a mall, dispersing a riot at a government building, and keeping a bus driven by a terrorist from plowing into a crowd of picketers outside of a hospital.

Jasper and Chevy ended up on special assignment to stop a murder by a mimic. This was at a time when demons were often killing in ways so that others would be blamed for their crimes. Thus, the TKTs not only prevented the murder of a pastor's wife, they saved the pastor from going to prison for the crime.

Quin and Sal took on a special assignment of their own in attending a religious poetry reading taking place at a downtown café in a large city in Missouri. Outside the café, Sal chalked on sidewalks and benches phrases such as "Silence is Golden" and "Let Peace Reign," in the hopes that any agitators showing up would respect the free-speech rights of the poetry presenters. Sadly, not only was there a group of agitators, several had brought horrible things to throw, such as rotten fruit and balloons filled with urine. However, the moment the first few of these nasties were launched, Quin stopped time in the café, doing so several times in a row so that she and Sal could take the fruit and balloons from the miscreants, including the ones already thrown that were still hanging in midair. After depositing the yucky items into a dumpster, the pair returned to enjoy the poetry reading. The agitators, in a state of confusion over what had happened to their fruit and balloons, ended up leaving without causing any further trouble.

As Quin listened to the poetry, she fingered the pin-on watch that had been handed down to her by her Grandma Vini, who had seldom used the watch in her youth, mostly out of caution, which is always good to exercise with regard to anything magical. In truth, Vini early on hadn't even known the range of the time-stopping device, her initial

guesses having not been correct. In contemplating the range, Quin thought, *Magical objects definitely have limits, probably so we won't rely too much on them and get lazy. Then we can't think or do for ourselves. Like the tech stuff; we're not supposed to get too dependent.* Sadly, in the time the TKTs had come to, a lot of people couldn't even do math anymore, instead relying on gadgets to calculate for them. *Since God never wanted us to become so lazy,* Quin further reasoned, *maybe that's why technology isn't expected to work in the future.*

When the poetry reading ended, Sal and Quin left the café, passing a bakery and a hotel on their way to meet Valo in a nearby park. Unknown to the TKTs, one of Sal's sidewalk messages had prevented three men from bashing several windows of the hotel with lead pipes. Quin and Sal next passed several row houses, inside one of which Garland had just played a prank by switching the clothes inside two closets with one another. Giggling as he headed to the house next door, the little prankster next switched the salt and pepper inside a set of salt-and-pepper shakers. It seemed his summer pranks would involve a lot of switching of things. Then, when he had gotten that out of his system, he would move on to something else, like maybe making things such as toothbrushes, hats, and shoes levitate for certain periods of time. In the case of the closet prank, in searching for their clothing, a woman and her daughter ended up being late in heading out to an appointment for the day, the delay being a good thing because the pair missed a run-in with someone having a contagious illness. The owner of the salt-and-pepper shakers was a man with high blood pressure who was supposed to be limiting his salt intake. In confusing the shakers for the next couple of weeks (because he was too lazy to correct the prank), he ended up avoiding a stroke. Plus, he decided he liked pepper better than salt on many foods, and thus changed his bad habit of adding salt to too many things that really don't need salting.

Em was just starting the first summer session at her college, and one of the first things she did upon returning to school was submit a poem to the college paper. Strangely enough, some people still seemed to believe certain seriously-flawed theories about mankind's origins, and this had prompted her to write the following poem.

The Modern Caveman

Modern man did not evolve from an ape,
Nor from anything slimy, green, and small
That from the sea did manage to escape
To crawl up a sandy beach and cliff wall.
No, we were shaped by a Heavenly Hand,
Intricately and with the greatest care;
And originally placed on dry land,
In a garden most nurturing and fair.

Early man's home may have been in a cave,
Or on a wide branch high up in the trees,
But he didn't primitively behave,
Like clubbing others or picking off fleas.
True scientists, the ones well worth their salt,
Who examine all of the evidence,
Reject the outlandish theory at fault,
And adopt the notion of Providence.

Modern man is not now an evil brute
From having a caveman hidden within,
Or from other theories flawed deep at root,
But from human nature most fraught with sin.
And from the choice that led to the Great Fall,
Brought about by the one known as Satan;
This affecting young and old, one and all,
Until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again.

A cave was for sure not man's first address;
Though we were definitely made from dust,
Brought forth by the Lord's Word from nothingness,
Our total beings, even our hearts' lust.
Despite the flames of dispute we might fan
Over the mode of evolution's run,
Human beings didn't come from a caveman.
Instead, man decided to become one.

Sal's next published piece ended up being a poem, one clearly related to his personal project of trying to save souls from hell.

A Voice in the Wilderness

A lone voice speaks words we don't want to hear.
Rather than just lightly tickling the ear,
Mankind's sins, the voice does choose to address.
The perilous truth, we should care to know,
Despite the grief this knowledge might bestow,
Or the defiance that from us may flow,
As away from all good we tend to steer,
Standing so stubborn, giving shout and jeer
Against the stout cries in the wilderness.

Our consciences, we ourselves often sear,
While at others directing snide and sneer,
As we ignore certain future distress:
Horrors that lie in wait for us below.
We still put on our fleshly rebel show,
Following like lemmings, row after row,
Knowing these evils God can never bless.

Lives lived strictly for the now and the here,
Enjoying pleasures with many a peer,
All the while most grieving His holiness,
Resisting the warnings that are so clear:
Our Creator and Lord, we must revere,
And to His rules diligently adhere,
While taking the time to pray and confess.

We have absolutely nothing to fear.
God always protects us—side, front, and rear.
He will save us from terrible distress.
At all times of day, wherever we go,
His blessings, He is faithful bestow,
If in His Word, we choose to live and grow.
To His children, God is forever near,
With the promise of love for us most dear,
As heard from a voice in the wilderness.

Em's next poem for the summer paper stemmed from a lot of what she was seeing in the news lately, including what was happening at many colleges, such as campus police standing by and not doing much to stop the violence, vandalism, and other illegal acts taking place.

The Insanity of Our Times

Our society seems entrenched in the new
“Good is bad and bad is good” mentality.
In holding fast to this incredible view,
Even some campus police stand by inert,
Letting many students get violently hurt
Who don’t support insane liberality.

But it’s not just the damage to human life
From being bashed, kicked in the head, and rampaged,
Even the trees become victims of this strife,
Being set upon with gasoline and flame;
With ardent nature lovers (or so they claim)
Not objecting; they are not at all enraged.

No, they just stand by and completely ignore
(While shouting, “Racists! Bigots! You’re horrible!”)
Something they once were said to fully abhor.
They also don’t in the mirror note the face,
As they in their misguided frenzy do race
To call others hypocrites, deplorable.

All the while, they use every breath to shout down
Ones they deem inferior and most uncouth.
They harass and oppress, using chants to drown
Out voices and ideas they can’t stand to hear.
We might just ask, “What exactly do they fear?
Perhaps that they may learn some actual truth?”

Hurling, “Fascist!” at those who dare disagree,
Their targets find absolutely no reliefs
From the twisted ideals these shouters decree;
Their rants and bullying as they try to shame
Ones who bear none whatsoever of the blame,
But who only try to voice their own beliefs.

A man beaten for the hat he chose to wear,
By many joining in with the angry throng.
“Support the president; how does this man dare?!”
For puny notions and what we deem unjust,
We’ll punish him severely; we simply must!”
Do these angry folks even know right from wrong?

Are these monsters even of the human race?
Some even target their sisters and brothers,
While looking down the long noses on their face;
Superior, self-satisfied, and most smug.
Deeming those with different views less than a bug,
They simply enjoy trampling over others.

These bullies claim to strive for a World Ideal,
One written of in many a storybook,
But that can never on this earth become real
Because of the nature of all of mankind:
Selfish, proud, greedy, vain, cruel in total mind.
They should give other philosophies a look.

In another vein of thought, we can be saved
(All of us, to include both forward and meek)
From a world that's now incredibly depraved.
We're saved by Jesus, Who will heal, clothe, and feed;
He can and does meet every physical need;
He even fills our souls with answers we seek.

Tragically, it seems, these prolific shouters
Would rather scream, kick, throw things, and terrorize
Than allow voices to speak truth to doubters.
They'd rather punch a stomach and smash a face,
Than risk losing any of their support base.
Sadly, this is both dangerous and unwise.

They would rather the Christian intimidate,
Than address violent actions against women,
Along with bombings, beheadings, and more hate
Such as child abuse, gang rapes, free-speech squashing,
False imprisonment, torture, and brainwashing,
All in practice by another religion.

All the while claiming to be for women's lib,
Activists and many other loud voices,
In tones that are most condescending and glib,
Accuse, throw massive tantrums, threaten, and yell,
Ignoring the issues of heaven and hell,
Denying these as their only real choices.

No, they'd rather wield signs of paper and wood
Displaying scrawled messages about their rights
Than try in this world to do any real good.
They do not want to fix what is truly wrong;
Instead, they show off, in wanting to belong,
No matter how violent and wrong the fights.

They also promote corrupt courts, most vicious.
To victims, that is, the judges are unfair:
A wrist-slap instead of something judicious,
Given for cruel acts that ruin lives in complete.
So there is nothing to deter a repeat.
This is a burden truly too much to bear.

On another side of the same violence coin,
Some shouters call out, even tearing their hair,
In rallying for many masses to join
In protest against those who protect and serve,
Who rarely receive the rewards they deserve.
God is watching, Men in Blue, so don't despair.

With regard to governments' wasteful spending,
We should hold our lawmakers to full account
For urging much more of the same, unending.
Though many of us do without, scrimp, and save,
They have plenty, so they don't fairly behave.
And activists never fret as to amount.

Not able to examine faulty ideals,
They're never objective, simply craving strife.
With brains holding mere emotional appeals,
Shouters fail to note their flawed, muddled thinking.
Sadly, not even from a ship fast sinking
Would these folks be able to save their own life.

This is but a taste of the insanities,
Of the real trouble we're definitely in,
Ignored by those filled only with vanities.
We could go on and on with a longer list,
But at this time, we need wisely to desist
And present something of a real solution.

In one way only can our futures be built;
There's just one answer, only one way to win.
We must acknowledge to the Father, our guilt.
Only one thing can fix our lost condition
And help us avoid the road to perdition.
Accept Jesus. He paid the price for our sin.

As a definite E.R. Tremaine fan, Anei enjoyed the poem. In truth, he loved to read college newspapers, journals, and even chapbooks. Since he couldn't get out and kick some butt about the issue of the trees, he felt Em's poem was a good way to bring attention to the matter. He especially liked that she subtly added the waste of trees for the wood and paper of picket signs, which were also often littered because, of course, these misguided and often violent mobs were not going to clean up after themselves. That was someone else's job, while the miscreants, feeling perfectly smug and patting one another on the back, headed off to enjoy their cappuccinos and lattes in disposable cups.

Anei was also pleased that Em addressed the police issue in noting the ones doing their jobs who need our support, while calling out those on certain college campuses who were being told to just stand by on many occasions and give a pass to lawbreakers.

Also with regard to "The Insanity of Our Times," oddly enough, Sal had had a small hand in writing it. Specifically, he had helped Em reword three lines in the seventh stanza. She was working on the poem one afternoon while sitting on a picnic blanket under a tree on campus. Taking an interest in what she was writing, a well-shrouded Sal had been looking over her shoulder. When she took a short break to visit a snow-cone cart that was meandering by, Sal scratched out a few notes in the margin of her spiral binder. Upon returning to her blanket and seeing the notes, while shaking her head in amazement, Em voiced a thought that had just popped into her brain. "I've just had a visit from the Angel of Poetry." Then, without speaking aloud, she closed her eyes and thanked God for His help with the poem.

Smiling as he quietly left the scene to meet up with Dara who was waiting for him behind a cluster of blossoming oleanders near the student center, Sal thought, *Well, the angels are all boys, male, that is.* In truth, he was incredibly pleased to be likened to one of God's Heavenly Host. Many people believed angels to be still involved in the

world of today, if not acting as protectors, then perhaps as muses to inspire us, and help us work out lines of poetry, lyrics, or maybe even difficult math or chemistry problems. While Sal knew from reading the bible that many of the angels were militant, he didn't see why they couldn't also be artistic, academic, etc.

With regard to helping poets, spreepprites also did this on occasion, mainly by whispering certain words or lines into the ears of various people. Although the tiny creatures tended to like rhyming poetry best, they did occasionally help with the writing of other types of verse. But, of course, we have to be listening in order to hear what spreepprites are saying. Actually, most people can only be good writers if they are first good listeners.

On the same day Anei was reading Em's "Insanity" poem, Martella happened to be following Vini on a series of errands. Spreepprites often like to follow unicorns; and while they can never manage to keep up with the speed of moving Soul Shadows, they are able to follow the scrolling imprint of light left by the creatures. Following these trails basically lets the spreepprites know where the unicorns have traveled before returning home to the Realm of Quintessence, or, in Vini's case, back to the bungalow.

We might note here that Vini happened to know a thing or two about spreepprites, from her research over the years into magical creatures; though, having never seen one, she had early on thought that they might be able to appear and disappear at will like genies. However, upon learning that only boy spreepprites could become invisible, she realized that it was the sheer speed of the tiny creatures that made it seem as if they could disappear in a mere blink. Now having attained unicorn powers, Vini would on occasion during the remainder of her life catch glimpses of spreepprites in her travels, particularly the ones that liked to follow her trail of light.

In following Vini's imprint on this day, Martella ended up coming across a circle of bioluminescent mushrooms in a shady glen in the mountains of Tennessee. *Well, this is a treat*, Martella thought, sitting down on a mossy stone to gaze at the glowing circle. *Some might call this a fairy ring*, she further mused, though she herself knew that both bioluminescent mushrooms and toadstool rings were actually phenomena not much related to fairies. While in Tennessee, Martella

decided to take a nap inside of a bluebell blossom in a meadow before returning home for the evening.

Returning to the bungalow after her errands, Vini took stock of the money she had brought with them to pay expenses on the time-travel trip. Due to careful planning over many decades, the TKTs always had plenty of money for their travels to different time periods, and even different countries. And, of course, they were careful with the currency, making sure not to bring or spend any that had not yet been printed or minted in a given time. Since they were heading home soon, Vini decided the extra, which would amount to about sixty dollars for each person, could be spent on anything her young charges might want. *Sixty could easily buy a nice pair of jeans and a t-shirt in this time*, Vini thought, *or a decent pair of shoes*.

They decided to take an afternoon to go shopping. While Vini was busy squaring things away with their landlord and going on a final grocery run, the younger TKTs split into pairs to visit a strip mall, a couple of large department stores, and a flea market.

Although everything available was interesting, and a lot of it might have been considered desirable, the time travelers couldn't seem to decide on anything. No matter what they came across—knickknacks, jackets, jewelry, hair barrettes, books, jars of jam, shoes, hats, stuffed animals, keepsake boxes, sweatshirts, bags of candy, and so forth—they couldn't seem to choose. In truth, there didn't seem to be anything much better than what they had available to them in their own time; though there was definitely more of it here, and especially a lot of junky things made of plastic that probably wouldn't last very long. When looking at many of the flashier items (the bling, if you will), all of the TKTs had Colossians 3:2 in the back of their minds. "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth." Sal was also thinking about the famous Wordsworth sonnet, "The World is Too Much with Us," which was perfectly apt, given all that he was seeing. 1 Timothy 6:7 ended up coming into Jasper's mind. "...for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world...."

In the end, without even discussing this with one another, the TKTs all decided to donate their shopping money to various charities, with each discreetly asking the wind horses to take them certain places over

the remaining days of their visit to do so. Quin, Roxanne, and Jasper donated their money to Charlie's soup kitchen, which didn't qualify for any government subsidies because grace was said to thank God for the food before meals. Sal and Alex both gave to an animal shelter. Alex had specifically remembered being hungry a lot as a kid growing up in Supercity Two; but he also remembered that the homeless dogs and cats of the city were often even hungrier than the people. Kiana donated her sixty dollars to a fund for a family recently displaced by a fire. And Chevy and Trixie both decided to give their money to a local Christian church that for sure still taught solidly from the bible.

Kiana had probably thought the longest about giving up the money, as opposed to spending it on herself. This was not due to being selfish, but more because her parents had trouble keeping her in shoes for as much running as she tended to do while using her gift. But her current pair of shoes still had a fair amount of wear left in them, so she didn't fret long over the matter after the money was gone. Plus, she ended up thinking of 2 Corinthians 9:7. "Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

Sal had written a poem on a sheet of notebook paper that he wanted to leave as a gift for Em in this time. In of course wanting to be careful about the possibility of changing timelines, he asked Mrs. Dellinger if this would be okay. After reading the poem, and saying a short prayer to ask for God's guidance, Vini decided it would be okay and gave her permission, after which, Sal asked Dara to take him to Doyle Mansion to leave the poem on Em's bed for her to find on her next visit home from college, which would end up being on the upcoming weekend. In the same way he hadn't signed his name to the lines written in the margin of Em's spiral binder, Sal also didn't use his name with the poem, instead leaving it anonymous.

Flowers in Heaven

No matter how lush or sparse our surrounding scenery,
In our earthly lives, we are very much like greenery.
If we have exactly the right kind of food and leaven,
We'll eventually live in God's garden in heaven.
Our Creator's constant tending, in which He takes great care,

Makes our leaves and branches resistant to bruise, cut, and tear.
However, added to what we have for daily intake,
A significant effort we must each decide to make
As to how much of our spirit we on our own nourish.
In order for inner growth to well and truly flourish,
We must pay keen attention to how we choose to live:
Working without griping and being generous to give.
We must also joyfully and with zeal share the Good News,
Without simply trying to fill up our empty church pews.
We will have the sustenance we need to spread out and thrive,
If in our spiritual walk we strenuously strive
To lend our services to those who might be in great need
Of one to listen and comfort, as well as clothe and feed.
To truly grow, we need to give our souls plenty of room.
Tended properly on earth, we'll eventually bloom;
Then in God's heavenly garden, we will firmly take root.
However, in this case, the flower comes after the fruit.

In again thinking the Angel of Poetry had paid her a visit, Em was practically speechless upon discovering the poem, which she absolutely loved.

On the final day of their trip, the TKTs remembered to say goodbye to Anei and thank him for all of his help. "I'll see you in the future," he told them, though he would be careful when seeing any of them again not to mention that he had met them in the past, at least not until after they had already taken this time-travel trip. Like Dara and Valo, Anei knew to be careful about the possibility of changing timelines.

The TKTs that had come to the past by unicorn returned in the same manner. The group with the Time Key returned home by a standard destination window, arriving through the portal in Laurelstone's study at nearly the same instant they had left, this being within a minute or so of Vini's group arriving by unicorn on the front lawns of Laurelstone.

Sal was so ahead in his school schedule that he decided he could spend a few days simply working with his mentor. Sending Ms. Tremaine a message, and receiving one back right away after she checked her schedule, he arrived bright and early the next morning at Doyle Mansion.

Em's fifteen-year-old daughter, Zinnia Summerhaven, whom most people called Zin, was just finishing breakfast when Sal knocked on the back door to the kitchen, the entrance most visitors to the mansion used.

"Hey, how was the trip? And how did the shroud curtain work?" Zin wanted to know, since she had recently helped Linn design it for her Aunt Vini to use in her travels. (Zin was already a fabulous magician and often helped Linn, a gifted technologist, with projects such as this.)

"As far as I know, fine," Sal answered. "No one was blinded that I know of."

Smiling as she was grabbing an apple to take with her, Zin was quickly off to her classes for the day at the high school at the twin plantations. "See you later," she called as she was just hopping aboard her gryphon protector, Magsen, in the back yard. Magsen's twin sister, Halli, who was Em's protector, was downstairs reading in the mansion's subbasement library. Doyle Mansion's resident puck family—consisting of mama and papa Heike and Pizzo, and their twins, brother and sister Pipac and Kisi, and baby girl Lista—was actually out of town visiting friends for a couple of weeks.

Before they started work for the day, Em wanted to show Sal something, which turned out to be the poem he had left for her younger self in the past. She had kept it all of these years; in fact, it was one of her greatest treasures.

"At first I thought an angel had written this for me," Em said, carefully unfolding the paper that was practically falling apart at the creases for as old as it was by now. "But I eventually recognized your handwriting, and realized you had left it for me on a time-travel trip, specifically, the one you just went on based on the time period Vini told me you guys were going to." Sal was practically speechless as his mentor went on. "This really inspired me over the years, to produce good fruit so that I can eventually become one of the 'Flowers in Heaven.'"

The poem was not the only surprise for Sal on this day. "I figured this out too, based on your style of writing," Em said, handing him a folder containing newspaper clippings of all of the articles and poems he had written and published as "Sal" in the past. She had collected and kept them, but had definitely waited to turn the clippings over to him until the trip during which he had written them had for sure already

taken place. “You could probably find these searching library archives,” Em added, “but I thought you might like to have the paper copies, as a sort of memento from your trip.”

“Thank you,” Sal finally managed to say, as he also accepted a cup of hot cocoa Em had just made for him, along with an English muffin spread with raspberry jam.

“I was one of your fans,” Em related, “though we must be careful to be much more a fan of God than of any human being.” (This was advice Charlie had given to Em when they were both teenagers, and it had really stuck with Em all these years.)

“Agreed,” Sal said, sipping the cocoa and getting whipped cream on the tip of his nose.

As he was settling in to do some writing at the kitchen table, Sal said, “We also have to be careful of comparing ourselves to angels.” This had been on his mind ever since he heard the younger Em mention the Angel of Poetry. Though it was a nice thought to be compared to an angel, man is lower than the angels, so Sal didn’t want to be irreverent in any way.

“Agreed,” Em responded. “However, it might not be bad for us to aspire to be more like the angels, since their entire focus is on serving God in various ways within their hierarchy. If we did this, we might become more the way God intended us to be, creatures of light, instead of being prone to darkness.”

At right around the time Sal was finishing his cocoa and muffin, Vini was paying a visit to Kiana at her home in Ohio in order to bring her a present of a pair of genie-made shoes.

Kiana ended up even more speechless than Sal for a time after Vini explained to her that, not only would the shoes last fifty years, no matter how much running she did in them, they would also grow as her feet grew. *What an amazing treasure, and a blessing.*

Trying on the shoes just after Mrs. Dellinger left, Kiana decided they were the most comfortable pair she had ever owned. Right away, in prayer, she gave thanks and praise to God for the shoes, and for the genies, and their skills, and for people like Mrs. Dellinger.

After praying a little longer, about various things, Kiana sat down to make a few journal notes, specifically about a conversation she had had

with Mrs. Dellinger the day before the TKTs returned home from their trip.

“I have unicorn powers because the doorway in my brain to the Realm of Quintessence is constantly open,” Vini had stated. “And it’s only constantly open because of years and years of practice in holding onto that perfect state of hope, joy, and peace. And I only can hold that state from praying and reading the bible. The bible is a supernatural book capable of unlocking many doorways, including ones in the brain.”

To this, Kiana responded, “Alex told me once that he thinks he has some sort of doorway in his brain relating to mystery, maybe the whole Dimension of Mystery. He said the doorway opens when he reads the bible a lot and talks to God. He asks God questions and then waits for responses.”

“We sometimes have to wait a long time for responses,” Vini said, “because God reveals things to us in His own timing.”

“He expects us to learn patience,” Kiana replied.

“Exactly; it’s a great virtue, and a fruit of the Spirit,” Vini answered referring to Galatians 5:22-23, which Kiana looked up right after their talk. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law.”

Kiana had made the following notes in her journal relating to their conversation.

“All human beings have a doorway to the Realm of Quintessence in their brain, but not all can open it. The magical mezzanine at Netherwind also contains a doorway to Quintessence, but few have access to it. When unbelievers open the door, they simply see a guest room. Believers generally see a cloud expanse, unless God wants them to see something else. But the only people allowed to actually enter the doorway to Quintessence on the mezzanine are ones fully connected to their personal unicorns. A certain temple in China also contains a doorway to Quintessence, and the same principles apply to it. In the Mystery Realm, the granite pyramid, called Chronos, is also somehow connected to the Realm of Quintessence. But the Chronos Pyramid is more related to time travel than to accessing our personal unicorns

because it connects to the four time-travel portals. It's part of what makes them function."

The new shoes got Kiana thinking about her running speed, which was improving. *I wonder how fast I might eventually be*, she speculated. *Of course, I'll never be as fast as a unicorn. But I wonder if I might someday learn to call them.*

This wasn't too far-fetched of an idea, especially since many people had multiple gifts, including Kiana. *I have both foot speed and auto-writing. Mrs. Dellinger has auto-writing as a gift. So maybe it could go hand-in-hand with being able to call unicorns.* Suddenly feeling in her soul an abundance of hope, joy, and peace, Kiana in her brain tried to call a unicorn.

When nothing happened in response to her attempt, she was still hopeful, joyful, and still felt greatly at peace. *It's going to take some brain training, and more reading of the bible, and more prayer*, this thought suddenly coming into her mind as though someone had just dropped it there, this being God, by Kiana's reckoning.

But her brain was also cautioning her. *Quin has the gift of auto-writing too, and she's not able to call unicorns.*

Not yet, but maybe someday she will, this being another idea dropped into her brain.

This was ringing completely true to Kiana, since she knew that gifts develop at different rates in different individuals, and that it often takes some people a long time to discover and make use of their gifts. *I just need to have patience*, she ultimately decided.

Quin was doing much better these days, particularly in getting settled back into her routine at home of attending classes, checking on various dragons (in conjunction with her job as Protector of Dragons), and regularly visiting Linn at his technology lab on Lion Mountain. Four days after returning from the past, she was relaxing in her bedroom while reading a book of poetry by Rudyard Kipling.

Coincidentally, a nineteen-year-old girl in Supercity Ten was reading the exact same book as Quin. Eizel Gibson was newly saved. Taking a break from reading, Eizel said a prayer of thanks to God for saving her, for the gift of His Son to the world, and for letting her be part of His family. God loved her, and had saved her despite the horrors

she had committed practically all of her life, many of which were completely atrocious, including things that people could and would have been put to death for in many societies. Most of these terrible things, she could not in any way make up for, especially because her malicious actions on many occasions had led to people dying. With the gift of being able to plant thoughts and dreams into the minds of others, she had planted nightmares, thoughts of suicide, and even ideas prompting people to hurt others.

The life she had led previously truly horrified Eizel, especially with the Holy Spirit convicting her of specific past wrongs so that she might ask forgiveness for each of her acts of malice, which amounted to quite a long list. In fact, she would be recalling events for many years, this being evidence of God's kindness and mercy—that He was reminding her of what she needed to ask forgiveness for gradually, instead of overwhelming her with a tidal wave of horrors and regrets all at once. However, in moving along in her walk with God, she would regularly find herself asking the Lord's forgiveness for any sins of her past that she was failing to remember.

Despite having regrets and feeling guilty, Eizel was able to see a tremendous opportunity. For the rest of her life, she would use her gift for good. Already she was starting to do this, mainly by planting pleasant thoughts and dreams into people's heads, particularly those who might be troubled, experiencing a crisis, going through grief, etc. So too was she helping the sick and injured with easing their pain. Since pain is linked to the brain, she was often able to plant a sense of calm and comfort, not only to soothe physical symptoms, but also to promote healing.

Christianity was still officially outlawed, so Eizel's worship had to be extremely low-key, like that of most believers in the Supes; though the sorcerers and their Enforcement Services Squads (ESS for short) had been looking the other way a lot lately, from being practical in not wanting more people to leave the cities and work camps than had already done so during the uprisings.

Despite having to be somewhat careful about her activities, Eizel was finding everything she needed for her walk with God in the thriving Christian underground of the Supes. In addition to places where she could attend bible study and worship, she had access to hidden libraries

containing many banned books like the one of Kipling poetry. After saying a prayer of thanks for resources such as this, Eizel continued reading.

Chapter Ten

Lochs, Stalks, and Barrels

Nessie was visiting Loch Monar in Scotland for the morning. While she often liked to hang out at Loch Ness, she definitely wasn't confined to that location; and Loch Monar was certainly pleasant, particularly the large patches of blackberries dotting the shoreline. Stretching out her neck to a great clump of the leafy brambles in order to snuffle out the ripest berries, Nessie was amused by the thought of having long been called a "monster" by various human beings. *People can be so silly*, she decided. *Today, I'm a blackberry-eating monster.* (This thought actually made her giggle.) Seeing a boat carrying two men fly fishing some ways across the lake, Nessie also recalled that people over the years had said she was responsible for various boating accidents. *I've NEVER caused any boating accidents*, she thought indignantly. *That's a silly idea too, and very unfair.*

After about ten minutes of snuffling-out berries—and enjoying their sweet juiciness, which helped her feel better about being accused of causing boating accidents—Nessie retracted herself fully back into the water upon noticing a family approaching the shore and carrying baskets in search of their own blackberries. *I'm okay with sharing*, Nessie thought, as she often did with regard to the red squirrels in the area who also liked to munch on the berries. *It's not like this is my private patch.* In fact, she knew of an even nicer patch with even more ripe berries these days at Loch Ness. And so, she decided to head in that direction for a time.

However, upon reaching the favored patch, Nessie was obliged to wait a bit before beginning snuffling because two humans and a puck troll were in the process of picking berries, this being Jamie, Birch, and Tilg. Keeping out of sight in the water, Nessie simply watched the berry-hunting trio as they searched and filled their baskets. She also noticed a thunderbird landing near the berry patch. *Probably a protector for one of the humans*, she decided.

Tilg was planning to make jelly and two kinds of syrup from the berries, canning some of these goodies for later use. *And I'll make a couple of pies*, he thought, *and a nice fruit salad for lunch, adding apples and black grapes. Then we can have toast, cheese, and hard-boiled eggs on the side.*

The grapes and cheese had been acquired only the day before when a rookh had taken Jamie and Birch to a trading post in the Rubble City that had once been Perth. Before doing any trading, at Tilg's request, the boys had taken the time to harvest grapes in a nearby vineyard.

At the trading post, Jamie acquired spices, cheeses, sausages, and canned goods such as beets and sweet pickles, enough to last at least six months, all of which were stored in pod packs for the journey home, along with nearly a bushel of grapes. Jamie also took the opportunity to pick up some material and thread for quilt making. He had enough yarn for knitting projects for probably the next year, so he skipped the two yarn booths at the post. He mainly traded things he had made himself such as knitwear, two baskets, and a quilt for the items he was purchasing. The exception was a set of six unbreakable glass mugs that he traded for a bushel of sausages, the mugs having come from the boxical.

The boxical over the years had provided Jamie with many things he needed to survive such as tools, seeds, food, candles, a warm blanket, etc. Most often, he only needed to put something incredibly simple inside—such as potato peels, a button, two sewing pins, a short piece of candle wick, a feather, or three twigs—in order for the box to produce whatever he might need at the moment. However, while these ordinary items were useful, the main trick of the boxical (like that of any bagical) was the ability to turn things into magical objects. A spool of thread had become a garden trowel capable of digging in the dirt on its own. Often, two or more objects combined to make another, such as when Jamie put in a left-hand glove and an acorn, which the boxical turned into a pair of boots that grew with his feet, had yet to wear out after four years of nearly constant use, and could lead him on the shortest path home when he was out wandering the highlands. (Obviously, the genies didn't have a corner on making magical footwear.) The unbreakable glass mugs had come from a mere two teaspoons of sand placed into the boxical. Sometimes the box kept what was put into it without

producing anything, the items simply disappearing to be stored away in some invisible place. This, Jamie never fretted over, in knowing that the box was simply waiting for other things from which it would eventually make something wonderful and incredibly useful from a combination of items it had stored up.

This was Birch's sixth day in Scotland, and he was still troubled. He had hoped getting away from home for a bit would help, but he was still often alone with his thoughts, largely ones that seemed to plague him. Plus, he wasn't sleeping well because the moon had been very full the last three nights, the brightness keeping him awake even when he shaded the window with a towel. But it was probably more his thoughts keeping him up. In truth, feeling guilty was going to take a long time for him to get over, perhaps even a lifetime. Though he definitely knew God had forgiven him, like many of us when we make mistakes, Birch had difficulty forgiving himself. He was still reluctant to return to any TKT activities, though he knew he would need to eventually because this was what God had led him to do, and it was a good way to put his gift to good use.

After picking berries, as Tilg and Jamie headed home, Birch decided to take a walk alongside the lake on his own. Naya ended up carrying his two baskets of blackberries back to the dugout for him, since Jamie and Tilg were fairly loaded with their own, with Tilg balancing his on the top of his head. Since her charge seemed to want to be alone a lot these days, Naya often obliged in giving him alone-time, especially because he could always call to her by thought if he needed help, so she felt he was relatively safe. While she was somewhat worried about him, she didn't feel inclined to watch him every moment; though on this day that might have been a good idea because something unexpected was about to happen.

As Birch climbed to the top of a steep cliff overlook, he suddenly found himself overcome by dark thoughts, almost as though ominous clouds were hanging overhead, pressing on him, and showering him with certain ideas.

It would be better to end it all than risk making another gigantic mistake. I should just get myself out of the way, since I obviously can't be trusted to make good decisions. What I did really hurt a lot of people, and I can't fix what I did. I can't change anything. He was

starting to feel like he couldn't live with what he had done, and he didn't think he particularly wanted to anymore. *What would be the point of a lifetime of torture over this, because I'm never going to forget it? And I'm always going to feel guilty. Why not meet Jesus sooner rather than later? Why not just end it all?* This was starting to sound like a good idea. And, for some reason, Birch's mind couldn't seem to tell him that it wasn't yet his time to meet Jesus, or that we all have to live with our mistakes and learn from them, or that suicide is never an answer to anything.

In keeping with the feeling of ominous clouds pressing on him, actual dark clouds were gathering over the lake, accompanied by rumbling thunder and cold stiff breezes, as though a rainstorm might be about to strike the area at any moment. With the weight of the ugly thoughts on his mind, Birch couldn't seem to think clearly enough to use his gift to calm the impending storm, or stop himself from doing something incredibly stupid and impulsive.

Nessie, looking on from a distance, was fairly shocked to see the boy all of a sudden topple onto a stretch of rocks far below the cliff top. *Did he fall, or did he jump?* she wondered, since it was a little hard to see clearly in the deepening gloom descending over the lake.

The storm cleared almost instantly as a gryphix suddenly landed amongst the rocks next to Birch, causing Nessie to halt her approach to the shore. (In case we might be wondering, a gryphix is something of a cross between a gryphon and a phoenix.) Dallam was the name of this gryphix whom Nessie had seen in the area once before, though many years past now. Plucking a feather from his neck that combusted in his palm when he lightly pinched and blew on it in a certain way, Dallam swiftly raised Birch from the dead using ashes from the combusted feather that brought him back to life at the very moment they touched the skin on his neck.

Nessie knew a little something about gryphixes, including that they had the power to raise the dead; and since there were very few of these creatures in the world, she knew it was no accident that this one had shown up when he did. *Sent by the Creator, no doubt*, she reasoned. *Dragon tears would have also done the trick to revive him*, Nessie further thought, *but since people administer the tears using their little measuring thimbles, maybe God didn't want other humans involved.*

This is probably something just between Himself and the boy, she ended up deciding. In truth, a lot of things are meant to be just between God and His children individually.

Dallam didn't stay, nor did he speak to Birch who had sat up, but who was in something of a state of shock, perhaps more at having jumped than at being revived by a gryphix, though he had never seen a gryphix before. If he hadn't been so stunned (his brain and body both feeling rather numb and slightly disconnected from each other), Birch might well have admired the lovely reddish-gold glistening feathers and fur of the creature, along with the piercingly-intelligent amber eyes giving him a look of both scolding and sympathy just before taking to the skies in a flashing red streak of departure.

After collecting himself for a few moments, Birch rose and rather sheepishly made his way along the shore, shortly veering off on a path leading to the dugout. Not only was he regretful at having done something so incredibly foolish, he was stunned by the gryphix showing up. With his brain now a little more focused, it was pretty obvious to him, as it had been to Nessie, that God had sent the save. And at this point, he felt truly blessed to be alive, especially because not many people are saved from serious suicide attempts, or sometimes even less-serious ones, since there is never a guarantee that a roommate will arrive home just in time, or that a phone, even a handy one, will work in a moment of crisis.

In truth, God had not just sent the gryphix for Birch's sake, but for a special reason related to the future. Although Dallam was currently acting as protector for a woman in Scotland, he would eventually be assigned to the future daughter of Birch. So for sure Birch needed to stay alive at least long enough for the girl to be conceived. Marianne would be gifted in a manner similar to her father; but in keeping with human gifts getting stronger with each new generation, she would not only have the ability to calm storms, but also produce them.

With regard to the suicide attempt, the ideas leading to this had not been entirely Birch's own. Rather, a demon had planted the ugly thoughts, which acted as the equivalent of a mind shove in getting him to jump. Demons often plant suicidal thoughts, along with other destructive ideas such as those encouraging us to take advantage of or hurt others. In nurturing our natural tendencies to be selfish, angry,

petty, jealous, etc., these monsters can often very easily lead us into destroying whole lives, both ours and others. By way of mind manipulation, demons are also masters of getting us to shy away from certain challenges, or even relationships, for fear that we might fail or end up getting hurt. But if we never take any risks, we often don't manage to accomplish anything. The demon that had targeted Birch was only one of many in the area these days. However, blessedly, this problem would shortly be dealt with.

Meanwhile, at around the same time Birch was heading to the dugout, Chevy and Roxanne were getting started on a very busy day. It was just coming up on dawn at the twin plantations as the girls made their way to Laurelstone's study to take a TKT trip together back to roughly the same time the two larger teams had visited previously. They ended up stopping a school shooting. Returning through the portal, the duo then took two more trips, each about two years apart about forty years back in time, in order to stop two suicides by guns. For the second one, Chevy actually brought the gun back with her, in not having a good place in the past to stow it, away from folks who might put it to ill use. The 9mm pistol, Dell simply later turned over to a private in the Underground Army, who happened to be the grandson of the original owner of the gun, the man who had been attempting to commit suicide and who never would have had a grandson if he had managed to succeed in murdering himself.

Following their three time-travel trips, the girls had breakfast together at one of the plantation cafeterias before heading off to school for the day. On her way to her first class, Roxanne helped a bigfoot with weeding a quarter-acre garden. The task took her only about five minutes and saved the bigfoot nearly two hours of work. She also filled four watering cans from a rain barrel for him before waving goodbye and trotting off to her American History class.

Speaking of rain barrels, in taking another peek into the past, a few weeks after the wedding of Charlie and Frank, we find Charlie peering into one. She had long had the gift of being able to see future events in reflective surfaces such as the water in ponds, fountains, rain barrels, and such. On this day, she was being shown the winning numbers for an upcoming lottery. She had won nearly two hundred lotteries to date from God showing her the numbers beforehand. Always afterwards she

had donated the winning tickets to various charities such as churches and homeless shelters. Just lately, she and Frank had been experiencing something of a money crunch, despite having had an economical small wedding and simply going on a short camping trip for their honeymoon. Since she had been running the soup kitchen for a while now, funding it from her catering earnings and private donations, Charlie was tempted to use the winnings from this particular lottery to fund that endeavor in an ongoing manner. In the process of starting a café, she definitely needed all the resources she could get. However, she could feel the Holy Spirit inside her—in the unsettled feeling in her stomach, as well the worry and distraction in her brain—telling her that this was not what God intended. Still, it was tempting, especially since the soup kitchen was, of course, totally non-profit. Plus, she had been feeling a little full of the cares of the world lately, especially the financial cares.

The temptation was completely quelled when a definitive thought was placed into Charlie's mind. *God will always provide.*

The older Vini was nearby—concealed by both star sapphire and shroud curtain—and using the Mind Key to help her young friend resist going against what God intended. We all need help sometimes. While God will often help us in a direct manner to resist temptation, He sometimes sends others to intervene, such as this time.

As Charlie was reading the bible at home later, God led her to Proverbs 3:5-6. “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.” Flipping pages, a quote from Hosea 14:9 jumped out at her next. “...for the ways of the LORD are right, and the upright walk in them...”

Upon returning from her trip into the past (at just after midnight because she often worked nights), Vini immediately headed to Scotland, where dawn was just breaking. This was the morning after Birch jumped from the cliff, and the seventh day of his stay so far with Jamie.

Vini was there to take care of the demon problem, which was much worse than anyone in the area might have realized because a powerful sorcerer had just unlocked a doorway to a Demon Pocket, a mini-realm similar to the magical pockets opened up by gifted cartographers and magicians, but acting as a depository of evil, instead of a place of refuge for God's children. And this particular depository didn't just contain

demons, but megahobs, fire slugs, and gremlins as well, all in all nearly six hundred of the nasty creatures.

Due to the quantities, instead of engaging these evil forces using magical weapons, Vini simply entered the Demon Pocket, unshrouding and lighting up as she did so. Within only a few seconds, the entire realm was filled with unicorn light, this serving to kill all of the nasty creatures inside. And the light was destined to linger, which meant the pocket could never again be used by anything steeped in evil because any creatures like hobgoblins and demons entering would be overcome by searing pain followed by quick dissipation.

The sorcerer who had opened the doorway happened to be nearby observing Vini, and he was absolutely furious. However, he definitely knew not to tangle directly with any person having unicorn powers. The man went unnoticed by Vini because he had turned himself into a rock in order to spy on her. When she left in a flash a few moments after exiting the Demon Pocket, he transformed himself back into his normal man-form self before proceeding on a stealthy path toward Jamie's dugout.

What Vini had seen along the Magical Grapevine into the future was an attack on the dugout by over a hundred of the nasty creatures inhabiting the Demon Pocket. With the attack set to occur late on this day, she felt arriving early morning was plenty of time to deal with the problem. Thus, the occupants of the dugout were spared a horrible fate, since this would have been too many foes for Jamie, Birch, and Tilg to have dealt with on their own. However, when initially watching the scene taking place along the grapevine, Vini was fairly amazed to see Tilg throwing peat blocks at demons way faster than she thought any puck troll could ever throw things, at least, faster than she had ever observed, and she had been around pucks since her teen years. *So maybe they would have done okay in the fight*, she pondered, though this wasn't something she would have wanted to risk. In truth, Tilg was so accomplished at peat tossing from eighty-seven years of practice, even including going to puck gatherings featuring this skill as a competition.

The sorcerer's name was Holt Overstreet; and although he was based in the Supercity that had been formed from London and its suburbs, he often spent time in Edinburgh. Being a much smaller Supe

than that of London, Holt enjoyed a higher status, which he felt he deserved based on certain notable skills. A conjurer by specialty, he was particularly accomplished at making poisons.

Holt had been watching the dugout for the past couple of weeks, basically stalking its human occupants in an effort to learn a few things about them, especially since it was obvious that those visiting from abroad were gifted. Since Jamie had several barrels in his storage shed, the sorcerer had taken to impersonating one, a fact not even Tilg noticed when entering the shed at various times in search of tools, a bucket, etc. Holt had wisely taken note of the puck, along with the thunderbird in recent days, though the man was probably most wary of Tilg in well knowing that these small creatures weren't at all afraid of sorcerers. So too did pucks hold more power than most people would have ever realized.

Using an amplifying device fitted to his ear, Holt had been able to listen in on conversations from which he learned many things related to the lives of Alex and Birch at home. Both boys had connections to those infamous twin plantations in Alabama, and Alex actually lived on that mysterious Lion Mountain in Tennessee, mysterious to many people but especially to sorcerers who weren't allowed to step even one toe onto the Mountain unless they were converted to Christianity, a fact the nature spirits and rookhs guarding the borders of Lion Mountain could easily discern. However, from listening to Alex, Holt had gleaned much useful information about the goings on at Lion Mountain, such as what Chase Linn (a notorious sorcerer adversary based on things he often designed to thwart them) had been up to in his lab of late. From both Birch and Alex, Holt had learned of the latest efforts being made to combat hypnoids. In addition to the counter, a detector had just been developed. Although largely a failed project in the U.S., sorcerers in other parts of the world were using the hypnoids to control people and gain information on adversaries; though use was extremely limited. Taking a lesson from what had happened in the U.S., the sorcerers in other parts of the world were being careful not to incite a bunch of proactive people to take the counter pill as a precaution, or employ the newly-developed detectors.

A new kind of hypnoid, one involving control of the subject largely through manipulation of memories, was being tested in various places in

Europe. In many ways, this was an even nastier product than the original hypnoid, the main idea being to make people forget certain aspects of their lives (family, moral principles, education, etc.) so they could be reprogrammed, as anything—assassins, factory workers, thieves, spies, and so forth. While the sorcerers had long been adept at various forms of mind manipulation—such as through use of drugs, transfixing techniques, and a device called a Ring of Truth that could force others to divulge information—the hypnoids had actually been designed by a gifted fifteen-year-old biochemist. With the sorcerers having learned a lesson about acting too quickly and too aggressively with the original hypnoid, they were being more cautious this time by waiting until a certain amount of discreet testing was complete before employing this new weapon in a more widespread manner.

The Memory Hypnoid, in mist form inside a missile-like ampule no larger than a fat grain of rice, was launched for delivery from a device like a blowpipe, but that the sorcerers were calling a propel-tube. The ampule was designed to break near the face of the subject, triggered by body temperature.

Holt was involved in this project, and he had chosen Jamie as one of the first subjects. He had taken his opportunity early morning on the day Birch and Jamie went to the trading post. As Jamie was passing by the shed, the sorcerer sent an ampule his way with one easy puff on the propel-tube. However, while the hypnoid mist caused Jamie to give one sneeze and a short cough, it obviously didn't work on him (due to the protection of his shield stone), as discovered by Holt late that afternoon when the sorcerer attempted to activate the hypnoid using a communication device linked to a miniscule receiver inhaled by Jamie that was supposed to have worked its way to the memory center of his brain.

When the hypnoid didn't work, in not knowing about Jamie's shield stone, Holt simply assumed the formula needed fine-tuning, being still, after all, in the testing stages. Therefore, he didn't try to use an ampule on Birch, whom it might have worked on since the counter pill he had taken after being infected the first time (that would prevent reinfection) was only intended to work on the original hypnoid. Holt also didn't see any point in trying to use ampules on either the puck or the thunderbird,

since the Memory Hypnoid was only designed to work on human brains.

Despite the failure of the hypnoid, Holt still resolved to continue to spy on the occupants of the dugout. In truth, he had been hoping to learn something about infidel sorcerers, ones that had converted to Christianity and who were now working with the godly and against sorcerers such as himself who were still in the service of Satan. While some of these traitors were known, many had yet to be exposed.

Chapter Eleven

One Day Closer to Heaven

Meanwhile, back in the U.S. on the same day Vini cleaned out the Demon Pocket, Eizel was struggling somewhat. It was early morning, and she had a headache from a nearly sleepless night and the brightness of the sunlight streaming in through her apartment's east-facing windows. Reading the bible was helping; but in addition to the headache and feeling tired, she was unsettled, like an incredibly anxious feeling in her stomach, coupled with a strange sense of fear, mainly strange because Eizel had rarely felt fearful in her life. *What am I afraid of?* her mind questioned.

The unknown maybe, she eventually reasoned, though the whole thing seemed very odd to her because she had assumed that her new life as a Christian would include a clear sense of direction and be fairly smooth; not necessarily a bed of roses, as the saying goes, but at least full of hope, things to look forward to, greater understanding, new relationships, a feeling of comfort and security in the future, and so forth; not being fearful and anxious, or feeling guilty over having been such a horrible person in the past. This was certainly not something she had expected upon being born again into God's family.

The last worship service Eizel attended had included a message about the various kinds of baptism, which had helped her understand what was happening to her. When she was saved, she was baptized by the Holy Spirit. "I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you." (The pastor had quoted Jesus' promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit from John 14:18.) *The Holy Spirit will guide me, Eizel recalled from the message, and give me strength, and help me understand things, like certain passages in the bible or a pastor's words. The Spirit will also tell me when I'm doing things wrong.* This was especially important since human nature and old habits are often hard to overcome, even for Christians who try very hard to walk the walk of faith and service to God. Eizel had been baptized by water, as a symbol of accepting Christ

and committing her life to walking with God. Now, baptism by fire had officially begun for her.

She was actually surprised at how hard being a Christian was sometimes, particularly in dealing with guilt. So too was it often hard to resist temptation and make right choices. Also, she was struggling with the normal trials and testing that we all experience at various times in our lives, like when friends say hurtful things, or when we have financial troubles, or when a loved one gets sick. So too are the consequences of making wrong choices hard to deal with, in all sorts of areas such as choosing the wrong friends, overeating, overspending, impulsively saying things without thinking then afterwards regretting our words. Like many of us, Eizel was finding it hard to make sense of the ups and downs of Christian life, and why it couldn't be at least a somewhat unhindered path, if God truly wants us to succeed. *We become stronger when we're tested*, she ended up deciding. *And since we can never know what might be around the next corner*, she thought, *we need practice in how to bear burdens and deal with problems*.

When feeling overwhelmed, Eizel forced herself to remember that she wasn't meant to deal with these things on her own, but to lean on God. *He wants us to rely totally on Him, to submit, and let Him handle things*, this idea suddenly coming to her as if someone had just dropped it into her brain. When flipping through the bible, she came across 1 Peter 4:12-13. "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed."

So it's not supposed to be a smooth path, she reflected. Like that of many believers, Eizel's baptism by fire would last all her life; but she would eventually come to understand that the trials didn't only make her stronger, but helped her to grow—in trust of God, in humility, in character, and in producing wonderful fruits of the Spirit.

After praying and having a bowl of cereal, Eizel felt a great deal more settled, and well able to face the rest of her day, which would include meeting a friend for lunch. Before heading out for the day, she recorded the following entry in her journal.

“We must thank the Lord even in times of adversity. If nothing ever grates on us, we never get polished. If we never have scars from hurt, we don’t develop any true individual character. If we never struggle, we don’t develop strength, and we also don’t learn to rely on Him, which we have to because our human strength alone isn’t enough to carry us through this world and into eternity. And if we never venture into unfamiliar territory, we never truly learn and grow, which we’re meant to in this life, all our life unto Eternal Life.”

In truth, Eizel’s guilt over past wrongs was already plaguing her way more than what Birch was going through; and she had actually contemplated suicide on two occasions. However, not being an impulsive person (but more of a planner), she had decided that there must be a reason she was still alive. For as much mischief and mayhem as she had been involved in over the years, she could very well have been killed, especially in fighting against other gifted individuals, including ones adept at use of magical weapons. But God had spared her. With regard to suicide, in not following through, but instead living her life to the fullest over many upcoming decades, Eizel would come to discover quite a few of the reasons God intended her to live, not the least of which was her incredibly positive impact on many thousands of other lives.

Putting aside her journal, Eizel found herself wondering if this was how the Apostle Paul might have felt sometimes, since he actually described himself in First Timothy as the “foremost of sinners.” *Did he feel guilty too, or did he just use his past as a way to move forward and do good, based on what God had called him to do? God uses sinners as much as saints, if not more, she decided. And we’re all sinners, even the saints because no one is perfect. Except Jesus, He was the only perfect Person, the only One who could be, because He was also God.* From reading the Book of Romans, Eizel also knew that Paul had fought against temptation, just like other human beings. While she wouldn’t have wished this on others, it did sometimes make her feel better knowing that she wasn’t alone in her struggles.

Rinsing her cereal bowl, Eizel was surprised when an elderly woman suddenly appeared right in front of her in her kitchen. After getting over the initial shock, and noting the brightness exuding from

the woman, Eizel quickly reasoned that this was the “lady with unicorn powers from those twin plantations” she had heard of in recent months.

This was indeed Vini, who was paying the visit from having heard Winged Words telling her to do so. Smiling and introducing herself, Vini recommended Eizel read Psalms 51 and 91, after which, she simply vanished because this was all she had been instructed to do.

“Okay, thank you, and...goodbye!” Eizel called to the thin air, since Vini was no longer there.

Immediately grabbing her bible and reading the recommended Psalms, Eizel felt completely energized, as though she might have just risen from the best night’s sleep ever to the brightness not only of a super-sunny day, but one also filled with hope and great promises for the future. Both God’s Word and the unicorn light were making her feel this way. Plus, the presence of the unicorn had imparted a revelation to Eizel: Her early experiences in life, particularly the bad ones, were actually a good thing, because they would help strengthen her resolve over the years to improve, stick to the Narrow Path, and really help people. Considering the two psalms, Eizel realized that Psalm 51 was what she might have wanted to say to God while asking forgiveness for her sins; and Psalm 91 was something of an answer from God, specifically of His reassurance of protection and help for her.

So it can be like we’re having a conversation with God when we’re reading the bible, Eizel realized. (In fact, the Lord often communicates with His children in this way; but instead of a unicorn showing up, the Holy Spirit often leads us to read certain things in the bible.)

After rereading Psalm 51, Eizel was led to various passages throughout the bible reassuring her that God does forgive all of our sins when we’re truly repentant.

Reading Psalm 91 a second time helped Eizel realize that her fear was not just related to the unknown, but to persecution. Christians were still heavily persecuted all over the world, though the situation was slightly better now than it had been a couple of years ago. While Eizel could protect herself better than most people because of her gift, still, persecution was nothing to look forward to. And the bible says that all people truly walking the Christian walk will suffer at least some persecution. But as Psalm 91 expounds, God is our refuge and He will protect us.

Coincidentally, two days prior to Vini showing up in her kitchen, Eizel had had a visit by another godly creature, one she was totally unaware of flitting about her apartment. The sorcerers definitely didn't have a corner on stalking people because sylphs (air spirits) liked to too, but for very different reasons, including that of planting wonderful thoughts into people's brains to inspire them, dispel negativity, and impart a sort of freshness into their lives, much like fragrant spring breezes, though the thoughts were mainly fragrant to the brain and not as much to the nose. However, this particular boy sylph, whose name was Egykor, actually did smell a bit like roses because one of his favorite pastimes was visiting gardens and hothouses around the world, mainly ones in which roses were abundant.

During his four-minute stay in her apartment, Egykor showered Eizel with pleasant thoughts such as that of her eating an ice cream sundae, then afterwards taking a walk alongside a lake and seeing a rainbow while listening to lilting birdsong and playing fetch-a-stick with a puppy, all before heading off to have dinner with a friend and laugh at silly jokes. Although Eizel's mind was not usually susceptible to this type of influence because of her gift, sylphs are very powerful, especially newer ones, which Egykor definitely was, less than a year old, in fact. And in the same way the gifts of humans were growing stronger with each new generation, so too were the powers of magical creatures, which meant Egykor's skills were definitely stronger than those of most grandfather and grandmother sylphs.

Looking in on Em and Sal at Doyle Mansion at around the same time Vini was returning home from visiting Eizel, we find them just having finished breakfast and starting some of their wordsmith work for the day. As Em was pouring herself a cup of coffee, Sal was reviewing the last article he had written as "Sal" in the past. This was a piece criticizing the recent renaming of the Laura Ingalls Wilder Award for literature based on the political correctness of the day. Supposedly, the books of that most beloved author didn't represent modern values.

"So which modern values are we talking about?" Sal's article had questioned, after which, he listed many ideals that had carried through into the modern day. "Women worked alongside men to farm the fields, build houses, run stores, teach in classrooms, and in many other venues. So too were the people caring and industrious such as in

working extra jobs to further the education of a young blind woman. Families and communities came together in hardships to help one another. The stories taught lessons of fairness, frugality, resourcefulness, even to the extent of being useful and specific in showing us how to grow our own food, how to make our own clothes, even how to deal with bullies—by standing up to them and not letting them continue to abuse and torment others. So which of these are not of value today? Independence Day was celebrated, as it should be by patriots; and the wisdom of Native Americans was applauded, along with stressing that we should live peacefully and helpfully alongside all of our neighbors.”

Sal had read all of the *Little House Books*, and he never saw anything in them that was disrespectful or exclusive of certain individuals or groups of people. True, some of the customs and even some of the language of that past generation were different, but not to such an extent as to shun the quality of the storytelling by removing the author’s name from the award. Plus, Laura Ingalls Wilder was something of an entrepreneur in her day, as evidenced by a series of articles she wrote on how to run a successful egg-laying business. So she was basically an expert on self-employment, and the advertising of her endeavor.

On the subject of awards, Em certainly had a few things to say. “I didn’t like it either when the Laura Ingalls Wilder Award was renamed, but I’m not sure it really mattered because I never thought awards were all that fair. It always seemed to me to be an issue of ‘inner circles’ and who people managed to rub elbows with. The real Poet Laureate is some high school kid in rural Nebraska who will never be famous because his parents and teachers don’t know the right people. Plus, I never wanted to be famous, because that brings on a whole host of problems.”

While Sal never particularly wanted to be famous either, he was somewhat surprised by what his mentor was saying. “But you won awards,” he stated, “even the really big one—the Nobel Prize.”

“I’m pretty sure God made that happen, not any forces of the world like nominators or award committees,” she responded. “God can, of course, make anything happen; but He only gave me the win to further His agenda, so that *Graham Rumpole* (the novel that had won the

literature prize) could get noticed and end up saving more souls.” In truth, Em winning the prize was not only an example of God being able to do anything, like have a conservative writer win a prize in a liberal-dominated world, but also evidence that God has a terrific sense of humor, because the win actually came about by the actions of a sorcerer, in fact, a man who had fought against the godly for much of his life.

“But none of it matters now anyway,” Em added, “since there aren’t many awards left in the world.” (This was true, as it definitely wasn’t something people in recent years had focused on.) “And even if there were still awards, I’m too old these days to win any, even though I still plan to ‘bring forth fruit in old age.’” (She was referring to Psalm 92:14.) Em also ended up quoting Job 12:12. ““Wisdom is with the aged, and understanding in length of days.””

“You don’t seem to mind getting older,” Sal remarked, in having always noticed Em to be good-natured about things like her gray hair and an occasional aching back.

“No, I don’t mind,” she said, afterwards quoting Proverbs 16:31. “A hoary head is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life.”

Sal responded to this with Psalm 90:12. ““So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.””

To this, Em replied, “Each day we age puts us one day closer to heaven.” In truth, she was looking forward to heaven, to once again seeing her parents, and her husband, who had died very young of cancer only seven years after they were married.

As Em was just heading upstairs to do some sewing, Sal called after her, “Can I use that in a poem?” (He was specifically referring to the “one day closer to heaven” part.)

“Fine by me,” Em answered over her shoulder.

By lunchtime, Sal had finished the poem, which he shared with his mentor as they were having turkey sandwiches and apples.

One Day Closer to Heaven

In glancing at the clock, we might ask,
“What on earth has happened to the day?”
Time moves on so incredibly fast;
The years, like clouds, roll swiftly away,
As we try to fit everything in:

Schoolwork, gardening, cooking, cleaning,
Raking, rolling out the rubbish bin;
From the hedge, a bit of nut gleaning.
Though a month can go by like a week,
In our busyness, it's oft worthwhile
To truly listen, instead of speak,
With cheerful thoughts and sporting a smile,
While keeping what's important in mind,
Like taking the time to kneel and pray,
And to others be helpful and kind;
Toss seeds to the sparrow and blue jay.
In the shortness of our numbered days,
And in the quickness of the hours,
We should slow down to observe time's ways,
Her strange and mysterious powers,
Like how new age spots we tend to find,
And how, overnight, gray hair appears,
Even when we are still of sound mind,
And despite still feeling young in years.
Our ankles and knees begin to creak;
Fingers tend to be stiff in mornings;
Our arms and legs become somewhat weak;
These serve as not-so-subtle warnings
Of our rapidly advancing age,
The natural progression of things.
As time turns every calendar's page,
Our ears hear less of what the lark sings.
But we shouldn't fret when getting old;
We were always meant to change and grow,
In wisdom's greatness (often untold).
Also, we take on a divine glow
In becoming more like our Savior.
Even if we lose some endurance,
Our faith and hope should never waver
Because we have Blessed Assurance.
Though on earthly bodies, time holds sway,
As our lives draw to rather swift ends,
And the clock ticks the hours away,
Through prayer, to each, a message God sends:
"I am with you as the end draws near.
Though each week's days number but seven,
My Faithful and Chosen, never fear
To be One Day Closer to Heaven."

As Sal was rinsing their lunch plates, Em remarked as to how the days and years were fairly racing by. Despite having expressed something of that theme in the poem he had just written, this declaration seemed very strange to Sal, as he had always felt like things were happening way too slowly in his life. It seemed to be taking forever for him to finish school; and while his voice was finally changing, he didn't yet have any whiskers on his chin. Not that he would have wanted to grow a beard at a young age, but he thought he might someday like to have one, or maybe just a moustache like his dad. Or maybe some super-long sideburns, a look that he felt might suit a writer.

It's funny how people can have two totally different perspectives on the exact same thing, in this case, time, Sal thought a short while later. *But, then, time isn't exactly what we think it is,* his mind added, in keeping with the philosophy that many people held these days, especially when contemplating how short our lives are on earth compared to spending an eternity in heaven.

Keke happened to be hovering behind Sal and looking over his shoulder to read his "One Day Closer to Heaven" poem, which he was reading again before moving on to work on an essay for the afternoon. Spreesprites, many of whom took an interest in certain individuals, were often like little stalkers, especially because their wings didn't make any noise. Keke actually loved reading Sal's poetry, and occasionally contributing to it by way of whispering in his ear. Though the changes weren't overly large ones, because he was after all a gifted wordsmith, they did tend to add a little something magical to certain of his works.

Martella on this day was tailing a group of TKTs, whom God had told her to hitch a ride with as they were stepping through Laurelstone's portal window. She helped the group, headed by Chevy, by stopping time so that the TKTs could stop a demon attack on a church picnic taking place roughly forty-five years into the past. Traveling home with the party of humans, Martella shortly headed to her little walnut-shell house from which her husband was currently absent, but not for long.

Weyland was helping tend the genie's Magical Grapevine. Boy spreesprites took turns doing this because they were very skilled in magical gardening. Plus, they were just the right size to traverse the tendrils of the vine, which were pruned and trained in curls using tools

from a little pruning satchel. The vines needed to curl in just the right ways to capture snatches of unicorn light, which the plant needed in order to grow, in the same way that earthly plants need sunlight in order to grow. (While some plants can survive without sunlight, they don't usually grow very much without this important ingredient.) The Magical Grapevine actually needed to be actively growing in order to continue to function properly as a communication device; thus, the careful tending to capture unicorn light was crucial.

It seemed to Weyland that he spent pretty much a full month pruning and training the vines. However, because time passes much differently inside the grapevine than outside, he was really only gone from home for three minutes, which was perfect timing for him to give a kiss to Martella (who had herself just arrived home) before checking on the dinner he had started before leaving to take his turn at Genie Gardening (as most spreesprites liked to call it).

They were having pellyfour soup as a starter, alongside a shimmer-shoots salad. The soup was simmering away on the stove, and the shoots for the salad that he had rinsed were drying nicely on towels, alongside a dozen foxglove petals to be served on toast for their main course. A dandelion-seed pie for dessert was hidden away in the pie safe as a surprise for Martella, who absolutely adored everything dandelion, especially pies, but also dandelion-green salads, and bedsheets made from the brightest of the petals and upon which a spell was placed to keep them fresh for three years, and through four hundred washings, at least.

As he finished making dinner, Weyland, while shaking his head slightly, recalled some of the genie conversations he had overheard while working inside the grapevine. *For being such powerful creatures, why on earth would they want to talk about things like buttons, feathers, socks, and book tape?* he thought.

Although Weyland knew that the genies often made powerful magical objects out of incredibly simple things, he was still properly amazed that this was mainly what they were talking to their future selves about. *If I had a chance to talk to my future self, I certainly wouldn't pick a subject like how to gloss a pebble, or put a notch in a button.* Of course, using the grapevine himself wasn't a possibility, as it was only designed for genie communications.

In the end, Weyland simply chalked up the mystery of the genies' preferred subject matter to the nature of the genies, who often held the motto "Simplicity Reigns" and who seemed to be doing just fine by it. *So who am I to criticize*, Weyland decided as he was setting out the dinner plates.

Chapter Twelve

Deep Mysteries Revealed

Speaking of mysteries, Alex had just returned to Scotland the day before Birch was set to go home. While having lunch, the boys got to talking about the mystery as to why papyrus reeds had disappeared from along the Nile, having once grown there in great quantities and having been used for paper in biblical times. The subject had come up when discussing that most journals these days were made of paper from bamboo, which grew prolifically in many places of the world including in several magical pockets at the twin plantations.

Alex was smiling as he answered the question because this was an easy mystery to solve, at least in his mind. “Some things are better recorded on parchment or tablets for longevity. So papyrus probably went extinct along the Nile because God wanted people to use something other than paper as a means of recording important events, making maps, writing letters, and so forth.”

Surprised by this answer, Birch countered, “Oh, I would have thought people messed up then with the environment like they have in recent centuries, and that humans somehow caused it to disappear.”

“Even if they did, God still allowed it to happen,” Alex replied. “Nothing happens in the world without God allowing it. So it must have been time to use something else for writing on.”

Although Holt was not near the dugout on this day, two demons were. These were stragglers from the Demon Pocket that had not been inside when Vini cleaned it out. One had taken the form of an old ladder propped against an inside wall of the storage shed, and the other was posing as a wheelbarrow sitting in Jamie’s garden between two rows of cabbages. After finishing lunch and wandering outside, Birch could actually sense the ladder demon (from a chill across his shoulders, the hair on his neck standing up, and an ugly feeling in the pit of his stomach). Using a sand dollar, which spontaneously broke when he neared the door of the shed, Birch swiftly drew a mirror, calling to his

friends inside the dugout as he did so. And it was a good thing that he did because another demon was on a fast approach from the lake, having been called telepathically by the wheelbarrow demon who had just sprung up into action, and into his normal winged and fanged form, to attack. The one from the lake, flying low but very fast on a path toward the dugout, was raising a storm of wind, ominous clouds, and rain to add confusion so that he and his friends might have a better chance against their foes.

Naya was not in the area at this time. In truth, the wheelbarrow demon had watched her leave a short while earlier, and felt this would be a good time to attack the humans and puck. The ladder demon had just transformed into standard demon form, and was lunging forth from the shed snarling and clawing as he did so, also giving a war cry that swiftly turned into a sniveling whimper as Tilg just about knocked him silly in the head with a heavy flower pot, which made it easy for Birch to then take him out with a fairly lazy blast of his mirror. Jamie killed the wheelbarrow demon with three strikes of a sparking blue rope, while Alex took out the lake demon with his flute. Birch, by this time, had already settled the storm to a fairly calm state, to match the boys' and Tilg's demeanor, since these types of encounters were pretty much old hat for them, as they were for many folks around the world these days.

Birch left after lunch the next day, waving goodbye to Jamie, Alex, and Tilg who were setting off to the garden to weed rows of potatoes and cabbages. Flying high over the Atlantic on Naya, Birch felt better than he had in weeks, even to the point of thinking he might be up for going on a TKT mission in the near future.

Based on the time difference between Scotland and West Virginia, the pair arrived home early morning to their mothership community, where Birch's father was just getting a yummy and hearty breakfast of pancakes, sausages, and scrambled eggs on the table.

Although Birch had left, Tilg and Jamie were certainly not going to be lonely because Alex was planning to stay for a couple of weeks, mainly to try to get to the bottom of the Nessie mystery. With the weather having turned noticeably cooler with the start of September, and because it was a windy day, Alex borrowed a sweater from Jamie for under his jacket.

After helping with the weeding for half an hour, Alex set off on his own to the lakeshore on foot because he felt more like walking than flying or riding an airbike. Although Telános had brought him to Scotland, he hadn't stayed. Being busy with other things these days, the snow gryphon would only occasionally be checking in with his young friend, who didn't particularly need help getting around the area. Plus, Alex was pretty safe with Tilg and Jamie, and even on his own for the most part in having some skill with magical weapons, so Telános didn't feel he needed to provide protection.

The stiff breezes Alex faced on his walk to the lake helped to blow a few cobwebs from his brain. On the shore and facing the water, for some reason, he started thinking about some of the nature programs he had watched while visiting the past; and he smiled in recalling the swimming elephants, monkeys, and birds.

Swimming birds, his mind suddenly said to him, very clearly, as though this were somehow incredibly important. *But not particularly geese, ducks, swans, and so forth*, his brain went on to tell him. *No, it's more like swimming clouds*. This was a thought that stemmed from remembering how he had so admired the reflection of the clouds in the water on his last visit to Loch Ness.

In putting the concept of swimming birds together with swimming clouds, it suddenly hit him—the answer to the mystery of the Loch Ness Monster, which was as clear now as the shallow waters along the shore. Immediately looking up at the sky, Alex saw not only puffy gray and white clouds, but a puffy head very much resembling clouds, as he stared directly into Nessie's smiling face. She was smiling not only because she liked human beings, but also because this boy (whom she knew had been searching for her) had finally figured out to look up, instead of in the water. Although she loved swimming, like most cloudbirds, Nessie spent more of her time in the air than in the water.

Alex was at first speechless; plus, his brain was more than a little startled, mainly from this being such an easy answer to the mystery. When his brain did finally start working properly a few seconds later, just as the still-smiling Nessie was drifting a bit closer to his position, Alex's first thought was how God speaks to us through all sorts of things, like the bible, television programs, music lyrics, magazine articles, the words of other people, things we see in nature, stumbling

blocks designed to slow us down and make us think, and so on. In the case of Nessie, the reflection of the clouds in the water on his previous visit to the lake should have prompted him to look up. Then the nature programs featuring swimming creatures should have given him a further clue.

Well, better late than never in getting the message, Alex thought, just as Nessie was bumping noses with him, which was her way of saying hello, with a wet nose bump, the wetness smelling much like refreshing summer rain.

“Hi there,” Alex said.

While not able to speak aloud like gryphons, cloudbirds were able to communicate telepathically with other creatures. *Hi back to you,* Nessie replied.

In keeping with focusing on the things above and not on the things of the earth, Alex should have thought to look up. If he had, he would have easily figured out that Nessie was not specifically a water creature. Though, according to what he had learned in his Magical Creatures class (a course all students on Lion Mountain were required to take), cloudbirds were made of water; plus magic too, in being something of a three-way mix of a cloud wisp (a nature spirit), a leviathan, and a thunderbird, with shapeshifting powers like the wisp, water skills like those of the leviathan, and control over the weather like the thunderbird. Early on in his research, Alex had considered that Nessie might be a shapeshifter, maybe most of the time just looking like a rock or a drifting log. But he hadn't thought to look among the clouds. *And just like how thunderbirds are connected to the earth, cloudbirds are connected to the water, either in the clouds or on the earth like in lakes or rivers.*

No, we don't much like rivers, Nessie told Alex, from reading his last thought, which he had projected rather than keeping it to himself. *Rivers are too fast, plus they're usually not as deep as cloudbirds like to swim in.*

From only a short conversation, Alex learned a few more things from his new friend that had not been presented in his class, such as that cloudbirds can be any color that clouds can be. *And any shape,* Nessie went on to say, *which makes us very good at camouflage.*

In addition to being puffy and stretched out to over a hundred feet on this day, Nessie had taken on the color of pale stormcloud gray with a pinkish tinge. And her current chosen shape was something like that of a dragon, but also of a snake with thick coils, with maybe a little dinosaur mixed in based on the super-long neck. *No wings*, Alex thought.

I can do wings, Nessie enthusiastically replied, immediately sprouting a pair that looked much like those of a dragon, but more smooth in appearance than spikey.

Early on when working on this mystery Alex had known that Nessie was a girl from talking things over with Kiana who had gotten the information from an auto-writing session, though she hadn't gotten anything else at that time. Now, Nessie herself ended up revealing more on the issue of being a girl, as related to hanging out in the water. *Girl cloudbirds do*, she told Alex, *while boys generally don't*.

"Why is that?" Alex asked, intrigued.

It's a yin-yang thing, Nessie replied. *You know, water and earth are female, while air and fire are male. Male cloudbirds rarely visit the earth, not even bodies of water. But we girls like the water, and especially lakes. In fact, there's a girl cloudbird living in the area of Plitvice Lakes National Park in Croatia, and another in the Great Lakes area of the U.S. For me, I mostly hang out around the Scottish Lochs.*

Evidently, Nessie never minded having the adopted name of "Nessie" because her real name would have been practically impossible for humans to pronounce, being in cloud language, which, like tree language, was very difficult to decipher, let alone speak.

This was all incredibly interesting to Alex, who was thoroughly enjoying getting to know a cloudbird.

Where's your snow gryphon friend? Nessie suddenly thought to ask. She happened to like snow gryphons very much, especially the lovely frost flowers they sometimes created in the Scottish Highlands.

"I'm not sure; probably off doing important things," Alex replied.

Nessie was nodding as she answered. *Yes, magical creatures often have important things to do, even me.* She was specifically thinking about hunting for blackberries, rather than anything grander like saving humans from the likes of megahobs and demons.

While Nessie's thoughts weren't particularly of being a protector, she had been the one to drag Devin down to the bottom of the lake. And during the same battle, she made Naya's cloudburst larger to take on the flash dragon, with more rain, and hail, with hail being a specialty of cloudbirds. So too had Nessie wrestled with and drowned the false once he hit the water. Naya hadn't noticed the cloudbird, who was an excellent hider both in the sky and in the water, particularly because she could take on smaller sizes if she wished, though not much smaller than a standard rectangle bale of hay. Nessie had also calmed the demon-produced storm over the lake at the time Birch had jumped.

"Do you mind if I take a snapshot of you?" Alex asked, fishing for his camera in his pod belt pack.

Not at all, Nessie answered.

"Thanks, I don't think any of my friends have ever seen a cloudbird. At least, none of them have ever mentioned it if they have."

Drifting backwards so Alex could get her whole form in the snap, Nessie suddenly thought to tell Alex about the nasty sorcerer she had seen lurking about in recent days hiding in the shed, in the fields, and other places. *He's good at camouflage too*, she added, drifting closer again after Alex got his shot. *He can turn himself into other things*.

Alex had known this of sorcerers—that many of them possessed this skill. "Thanks for the warning," he replied.

Speaking of skills, one thing Alex figured out without his brain even puzzling very much was that cloudbirds could produce rainbows.

It's not just the light filtering through our bodies, Nessie stated when Alex mentioned this. *It's a sort of God-given magic. I like to think of it as being able to blow rainbow kisses from heaven*.

Craving blackberries, and feeling as though she had visited enough with her new friend for the time being, Nessie was soon off in search of the treat. However, before beginning to look for berries, she zoomed high into the sky to produce a rainbow as a parting gift for Alex, who managed to get a picture of Nessie actually making the lovely bow. In later viewing the snap, Alex thought it looked more like the cloudbird was spitting up a rainbow, rather than blowing a kiss, though he of course would never have mentioned this to her.

Sitting by the lake for a while before heading back to the dugout, Alex's mind was on rainbows, particularly their prominence in the

bible. Like many things in the bible, rainbows were both scientific and symbolic. Alex also thought about clouds, specifically about how they could be so incredibly full of water, like tons and tons of it, and yet still could float. *A dichotomy*, his mind told him. *There are lots of those in the bible too.*

After saying a quick prayer to thank God for revealing mysteries to him, Alex pulled out his pocket bible in order to look up Jeremiah 33:3, which specifically had to do with mysteries. “Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things which you have not known.” He also looked up Daniel 2:22. “...he reveals deep and mysterious things; he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him.”

In considering the whole bible, particularly the prophetic parts, Alex felt it was basically a book filled with wonders and mysteries just waiting to be discovered.

In wondering why no one had ever solved the mystery of Nessie before now (at least not that the world in general knew of), Alex suddenly thought of Jesus’ parable of the wineskins in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. *New wine gets put into new wineskins*, he realized. *God reveals new answers to new generations, and He has a way of hiding things even from brainy bible scholars until He wants people to know about them.*

Alex also thought of the Book of Ephesians with regard to mysteries. *In Ephesians Chapter 1, the mystery of God’s will is revealed as being that He intends to unite everything in Him, in heaven and on earth. And Ephesians Chapter 3 reveals the mystery of Jesus as being that He is for everyone. He saves everyone. No human being is excluded from God’s Saving Grace because Jesus died for all.*

Flipping pages in his bible, Alex’s eye was drawn to John 5:20. “For the Father loves the Son, and shows him all that he himself is doing; and greater works than these will he show him, that you may marvel.” *So God even revealed unknown things to Jesus*, Alex marveled. *And we are in Jesus and He in us. So God reveals marvelous things to us too. Amazing!*

Mulling over clouds, rainbows, and mysteries on his walk back to the dugout, Alex was suddenly jarred from his thoughts by a call on his walnut, which he most often kept clipped to his belt. A mere fraction of

a second after a small clicking noise indicated the incoming call, Kiana's voice came blaring from the walnut, so loudly that Alex thought she might disturb the wildlife within about a ten-mile radius of his location. She was slightly louder than normal due to the excitement of having just gotten more information about the Loch Ness Monster from an auto-writing session.

"Nessie's a cloudbird!" Kiana said elatedly. "And cloudbirds are formed from the tears of the oppressed throughout the ages. You know how Psalm 56 says God captures our tears in a bottle? Well, He makes cloudbirds from the ones He collects from the oppressed."

"But 'tears in a bottle' is just a metaphor," Alex countered, after telling his friend he had just met Nessie.

"It's bible magic, Alex!" Kiana cried. "Metaphors and magic go hand in hand. And with God, anything is possible. So lighten up, my friend."

"You're right, and thank you," Alex replied, actually laughing at himself a little as they disconnected because he did indeed need to lighten up in his thinking. What Kiana had said was absolute truth. With God, anything is possible. *He made man from dust, so why not cloudbirds from tears*, Alex's mind told him.

Back at the dugout, Jamie and Tilg were excited to hear about Nessie; and Tilg was thinking to himself what a clever hider Nessie must be. Pucks were generally astute about these sorts of things, but he hadn't known there was a cloudbird in the area. Nor had he ever guessed that the Loch Ness Monster might be one.

Alex also passed on Nessie's warning about the sorcerer in the area, which led Jamie to wonder if the stray yellow cat he had seen a few days' previous might have been the sorcerer in disguise.

In perusing Jamie's books after dinner, Alex found one on magical creatures that included a legend about a hopebird that he felt was probably a cloudbird. Since magical creatures did sometimes have multiple names—like how sky serpents and dragons were one and the same (they were also burnished doves), and how unicorns were sometimes called horned lions—the hopebird in the story, a shapeshifting creature living amongst the clouds, was ringing very true to Alex as being a cloudbird.

“It’s perfectly named as a hopebird,” Alex declared to Jamie and Tilg, “because there is always hope amidst oppression, especially amongst God’s children.”

“Plus, clouds, like rainbows, make us look up,” Jamie stated, “and that gives us hope.”

This is a dichotomy too, Alex suddenly thought, how good can sometimes come from bad things, like oppression. We wouldn’t have cloudbirds without oppression.

Reading the bible before bedtime, Alex was amazed when God led him to Ecclesiastes 4:1. “Again I saw all the oppressions that are practiced under the sun. And behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them.”

No sooner had Alex finished reading this passage than an idea was laid onto his brain. *As another of their gifts, cloudbirds can impart comfort, which helps people heal from oppression, and a lot of other things. And rainbows are a part of this because they represent promises, which give people hope.*

In truth, when Birch was brought back by Dallam, Nessie’s presence nearby gave him just the right amount of comfort to act as a small measure of healing toward his injured mental state.

The idea of patience was also placed into Alex’s mind with regard to cloudbirds, who were patiently waiting for the Endtimes, in which they, like the dragons, would have a significant part to play. *And thunderbirds too!* Alex’s mind suddenly told him. *Oh, wow! All magical creatures, the godly ones that is, will have a hand in the events of the Endtimes.*

With regard to people, it occurred to Alex that many of them were already having a hand in the events set for the End of the Age. *In both scientific and symbolic ways, he reckoned. For one thing, human beings are largely made of water, and the tears of the oppressed evidently factor into bible prophecy by way of the cloudbirds.*

Flipping pages in the bible, Alex’s eye was drawn to Revelation 19:6. “Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying, ‘Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.’”

A clue relating to the mystery of the Endtimes, but by no means an answer, Alex decided with regard to the passage. Like the rest of his fellow man, he would simply have to wait to find out exactly what this meant. And like creatures such as dragons and cloudbirds, he would need to be patient.

Mid-afternoon the next day found the trio from the dugout heading to the lake to pick what would turn out to be the last of the blackberries for the season. However, no sooner had they reached the shore than they came under attack; not by the sorcerer Nessie had warned them about, but instead from Devin, Penelope, and Kemp, who had brought Tanner with them this time. The miscreants were all on airbikes today; and they felt pretty good about their chances, especially in outnumbering their foes.

However, the number advantage didn't last for long; in fact, it quickly reversed itself when both Trixie and Chevy showed up on rookhs over the lake. Trixie had heard Winged Words calling her to Scotland; and since Chevy happened to be nearby (the girls were weapons training together), they both decided to make the trip. Coincidentally, only the night before, Trixie had been reading Psalm 104, a poem describing God in various wondrous ways; and she couldn't help smiling at Line 4 in connection to the Winged Words she had been hearing of late. *God makes the winds His messengers*, her mind mused. *What a lovely thought, and so completely true, like all of the words in the bible*. Trixie had never been one to argue with people who claimed the bible was full of errors, mainly because so many theologians over the years had already completely refuted each and every claim of an error, contradiction, or discrepancy. Now having read most of the bible, she felt like it was a book that proved itself. "It doesn't really need defending," she once told a friend, "because it speaks, even shouts, truth. Plus, God is able to defend Himself, and His Word, of course. It would be silly to think otherwise." (Aside from Trixie's philosophy, both fulfilled prophecy and the Dead Sea Scrolls had long proved the bible to be completely true.)

Kemp immediately began shooting fireballs at those on the lakeshore, while Penelope delivered wind blasts to the two rookh riders, whom Tanner was also firing at using energy bursts from his staff. Although the rookhs were doing a good job of dodging Tanner's strikes,

they had some difficulty dealing with Penelope's wind. In the unsteadiness of their seating, Trixie and Chevy never managed to hit their foes with the mirror and flute they were respectively using.

Devin was by no means idle during all of this. In fact, he was raising great waves of crashing water out of the lake, two of which managed to take down the rookhs and their riders. However, since both girls were good swimmers, and the rookhs were too, all four managed to make it to the shore fairly quickly.

Instead of remounting the rookhs, the girls decided to stay grounded for the time being. With Penelope's wind basically rendering her flute ineffective, Chevy drew a sizzling red rope, which she threw like a spear. After hitting Devin's airbike and knocking him into the water, the rope swiftly returned to Chevy, being designed to basically act like a boomerang and come back to its thrower.

Of course, Devin landing in the water was no big deal to him, except for remembering the mysterious thing that had happened to him on his last visit to Loch Ness. In order not to be dragged under again by an unknown force, he swiftly swam to shore, exiting about a quarter of a mile from the position of Chevy and Trixie who were now fully engaging Penelope, Kemp, and Tanner with mirrors.

Jamie, Alex, and Tilg had initially taken cover behind rocks not too far from where Chevy and Trixie had come ashore. Now, the trio emerged to help their friends battle the sky foes, and Devin, who was again raising waves, this time to pound those along the shore. One of the pounding waves managed to catch Trixie, who was swept out into the center of the lake where Devin had also started a fast whirlpool intended to drown those his waves managed to drag into the water.

However, Devin was completely confounded when his whirlpool suddenly ceased swirling, and Trixie was delivered to the shore on the crest of a wave that he hadn't produced (as though sitting on an invisible surfboard). This was, of course, Nessie stilling the whirlpool and producing a wave to help Trixie, who wasn't immediately able to help her friends due to needing to catch her breath from struggling in the water before the wave boosted her up and carried her to shore.

When Tanner, with a lucky strike of his staff, managed to blast Chevy's mirror from her hand, she drew as her next weapon of choice a pair of blue suspenders she had been wearing. Color weapons were, of

course, not limited to ropes. In fact, they could be made from just about any kind of textile—hats, belts, blankets, nets, even scarfs.

Wielding the suspenders as gracefully as a rope, in a series of dance-like leaps along a rocky plateau, Chevy delivered a stream of a hundred bright blue incendiary fireballs to the airborne miscreants, all three of which were forced to back off out of range of the explosive charges.

After delivering another stream of glowing blue fireballs to keep those in the air at a distance, Chevy sped down the shoreline toward the position of Devin, who found it almost funny that a girl younger than he, and about five inches shorter, would dare to attack him.

He barely had time to give a short laugh when he was tackled by Chevy, who knew about Devin's grit gift, but felt the blue sapphire she was carrying would protect her for brief periods of skin contact, as it would from the pounding of his fists. Indeed, as he repeatedly punched her in the face, the blows simply glanced off of her skin. She managed to flip him over, and was on the verge of hogtying him with a rope, when Tanner intervened to help his friend, using sorcery to turn three hundred pebbles alongside the lake into a flock of smallish nyregs, each about four feet in length as far as body size, with roughly a six-foot wingspan.

Devin did manage to get free, and make a run for it, as Chevy came under attack by eight of the nyregs. Drawing her red rope to take out the eight with rapid crackling strikes, she noticed her friends in the distance dodging acid spits, as well as attacks by claws, fangs, and sharp wing points jabbing at them like spears.

The rookhs had already taken to the skies by this time, and had been trying to help by charging, distracting, and crashing into Kemp, Penelope, and Tanner whenever possible. However, in having to dodge fireballs, wind blasts, and staff energy strikes, the blackbirds had not been able to bring down any of the three airbike riders. Now, the rookhs were swooping in to fight the nyregs.

In knowing that the pair would soon be overwhelmed, Chevy swiftly sent a thought message to the blackbirds, to clear out, because she was about to act. In fact, she was already on the run toward her friends, while pulling another color weapon from her pod belt pack. This happened to be a blue gauntlet, which Chevy donned on her left

hand just before coming to a stop, kneeling, and skillfully delivering a chopping-like blow to the rock plateau, which shattered instantly in a massive explosion that threw huge chunks of rocks upwards to take out nearly two hundred of the nyregs in short order.

Chevy was thrown backwards by the blast, but managed to land on her feet, after which, she stowed the gauntlet and drew a mirror to take out more of the flock, which her friends were also doing with magical weapons, and Tilg with rocks, until all were killed.

Those on shore might have found themselves under attack again, if not for Telános showing up and directly confronting Penelope with great flaps of his wings, the energy emanating from them being very similar to what thunderbirds were capable of producing. When Nessie rose up out of the lake to douse Kemp's flames with great torrents of rain, and drench Tanner as well, the little band of hoodlums basically decided they had had enough for one day. Devin had managed by this time to retrieve his airbike that had fallen into the lake. Once again airborne, he was hightailing it away with his friends. All were completely cowed from this experience. Tanner and his crew never seemed to have much luck in their battles against the godly.

"They just have too many magical friends!" Kemp hotly complained on the way home.

Not being believers, this little clique tended to forget that many people have the support of the greatest of all Magical Friends—God Himself.

Though Nessie followed Telános to the shore, she didn't stay. After giving a nose bump to Alex, and a smile to all, she zoomed off, intent on visiting Loch Monar on this day as well.

Trixie and Chevy, after checking in with their families by walnut, stayed for dinner at the dugout, during which, the group talked about Nessie, and mysteries in general.

Over dessert, Trixie thought to ask Alex why so few people see leviathans.

"Oh, that's an easy one," he replied, having figured this mystery out long ago, though he hadn't particularly thought to tell others the answer. "Water dragons are like air dragons in having shapeshifting abilities, and like behemoths. But instead of taking dove form like air dragons, or turning into cottontail rabbits like behemoths, leviathans like to take

on the appearance of rainbow clownfish. So they're often no larger than about the size of a fist, which would make them hard to spot."

As the girls were leaving for home, Alex got to thinking about leviathans in their smaller form. *Another instance of a rainbow*, he mused. *How interesting.*

At the same time Alex was musing, and then helping to clear the table, a unicorn was skipping through North Dakota, Missouri, and Alabama. In total, the creature only stayed for about two minutes before returning to the Realm of Quintessence; but while in our realm, he managed to impart revelations to three individuals.

A man in North Dakota whose house had just burned down and who would shortly be moving to another state because of this tragedy suddenly realized that this would be how he would meet his future wife, to have a happy life, complete with two grandkids later.

In Missouri, a man who had spent twenty years unjustly imprisoned was given the knowledge that he managed to bring sixteen fellow inmates to Christ while incarcerated. *Totally worth the time in prison*, he decided, in being absolutely delighted to know that sixteen people would be saved from the fires of hell.

The final revelation was given to Em. In her sewing room at Doyle Mansion, she actually dropped a pair of pinking shears she was holding when the answer came into her head as to why her husband had been taken so early. "Wow, I never would have thought of that," she said aloud, before dropping to her knees and thanking God in prayer for giving her an answer to that which she had puzzled over for so many years. Shortly picking up the shears and then heading downstairs, Em had a huge smile on her face and more peace in her heart than she had felt at any other time in her entire life.

At around the same time Em was praying, Keke was helping to solve a little mystery in Louisiana by leading a woman (by whispering in her ear) to a stash of shiny items taken by a raccoon, who had then placed the stolen goods into a tree hollow. The woman was much relieved to find her three missing spoons, bracelet, thimble, bottle opener, hair barrette, and four antique coins. If it hadn't been a raccoon taking the things, Keke might have supposed the mischief-maker to be a boy spreesprite; except boy spreesprites didn't actually steal, since they

really only just moved items from one place to another when playing their pranks.

And speaking of pranks, if we take a moment to look in on Weyland, we find him engaged in exactly that. He was giggling as he set a door to lock itself over and over again at three-second intervals for the next twelve hours. This would serve to keep a drunkard from leaving his house while drunk and getting into a fight. Once the man sobered up, he would be less inclined to fight. On his way home, Weyland made a brief stop to enchant a tennis ball to throw itself for a dog, thirty minutes twice a day, so that the dog would get some exercise; though the dog wouldn't look on this as exercise, but more as just having great fun with his wonderful slobbery tennis ball.

Chapter Thirteen

Sorcerers and Dragons

A week after the fight at the lake, Alex was wrapping up his visit to Scotland, having spent the past few days mainly helping to cut peat, make baskets, and dig potatoes. The day before he was set to leave, Nessie paid a visit to the dugout to invite her new friends on an outing. Tilg had a busy day of baking planned and didn't particularly want to go; however, Jamie and Alex were definitely up for an adventure; and Telános too, who would be carrying the boys since a ride on Nessie might prove a little soggy, and it was a rather windy day to be traveling by airbike.

Nessie led Telános roughly a hundred miles to land on a small secluded island off the northern coast of Scotland. She was giggling a bit in knowing that the humans couldn't see the castle on the island that was disguised as a tall rock spire. However, Telános' excellent gryphon vision could make out the castle; and when he pointed it out to Jamie and Alex, the structure shortly came into focus for them as well.

Elves happened to live in this castle, including a very special one named Levegð who came out to greet the visitors. Levegð was a twelf, a twelfth elf born to a family, which meant he had special powers, including the ability to make magical objects.

Levegð had made Jamie's shield stone, from knowing how to interpret the voices of the stones and over the years discovering some of their secrets, such as protection powers, not only in being able to withstand a lot of force, but in their ability to deflect magical spells. While Levegð could sense the stone in Jamie's pocket, he didn't say anything. Working with a genie, the twelf had also made Jamie's boxical. In often keeping track of the magical objects he made, Levegð knew that the box was currently in Jamie's possession.

In having thought that Jamie and Alex might like to meet Levegð, and vice versa, Nessie's main intent on this day had been simply to introduce her friends to one another. Now, the guests would all be

staying to have elven tea in the castle courtyard with Levegð and one of his sisters, Amelia.

While Telános fit through the courtyard gate (though just barely), Nessie attended simply by stretching her head and neck in through a window cut-out in the stone by the gate to enjoy a couple of scones, a crème horn, and a slice of raspberry tart, along with a lovely steaming cup of lemongrass tea.

While enjoying the goodies, Amelia accidentally let it slip that her brother had helped to make Jamie's boxical. This set Jamie loose on describing what an incredible blessing the box had been to him, and Tilg, over the years. After thanking Levegð, what followed was a list of some of the items the box had produced. "It's given us a compass, a jacket that can withstand fire, dinner plates, and a spatula that can hover and turn the food over by itself. I put in a penny, and a new shovel head came out. I had to make the handle for the shovel; but still, the head would have been the hard part. A chunk of pumpkin rind came out as a rhubarb pie—that was odd, I would have thought pumpkin. An old rag came out as a t-shirt. A sock came out as a pair of jeans. An old bathroom tile and a piece of dental floss turned into a rope that untangles itself. Once, nearly six months went by with nothing coming out; everything put into the box just disappeared. But then, all of a sudden, a whole string of things came out: a roasted turkey leg, seeds, a belt, a mortar and pestle, dust cloths, a chair just the right size for Tilg, toothbrushes, and a magic salt cellar that refills itself."

Jamie, Alex, and Telános returned to the dugout to discover that Tilg had had something of an adventure of his own while they were away, in that Holt had been hanging around in order to spy.

From Nessie's warning, and sensing the man, Tilg wasn't fooled by the yellow cat sitting by the stone wall next to the asparagus patch in the garden. When Birch was visiting, he and Jamie had made an inuksuk—basically a sculpture made of stacked rocks and shaped like a man. This one was just over seven feet tall and situated a short distance from the asparagus patch. Meandering casually nearer the site while discreetly eyeing the cat, Tilg gave a little waving wiggle of the fingers of his right hand, which produced magical light sparkles similar to a mini-fireworks display and served to swiftly bring the inuksuk to life. Once awakened, the rock man charged the cat, who took off in a yellow streak, turning

into the sorcerer as he ran because it was hard for sorcerers to hold a changed shape when under stress or when having to run fast. The cat, before taking off, just missed getting squashed by the inuksuk's stony fists. Now, Holt was losing ground because the rock man was really fast; however, concentrating really hard, the sorcerer was able to turn himself into a hawk in order to flee the scene by flight.

After magically settling the inuksuk back into his proper spot, Tilg returned to the dugout to check on a batch of rising pizza dough, and to pull a pan of cornbread out of the oven using oven mitts produced by the boxical that changed size and shape with various wearers' hands.

Except for having had a scare and being out of breath, Holt was actually okay at being driven away, particularly because he hadn't gotten any useful information from those at the dugout lately anyway. Plus, he was anxious to follow up on something involving a hypnoid subject in China. He was scheduled to meet two of his fellow sorcerers later in the day anyway, so he might as well head that way. Since he didn't plan to travel as a hawk all the way to his meeting spot, Holt landed on a large rock to change to sorcerer form and use a special whistle to call a nyreg to take him to a particular cave in the wilds of Mongolia where the sorcerers in this part of the world often held their meetings.

Like Holt, Jared Meeks and Boz Himmel were both based in London; but the pair had lately been working in the area of India, China, and Mongolia, specifically hunting for suitable hypnoid victims to use for gaining information on certain of their adversaries. And the evil men had actually hit the jackpot when infecting a man working as a cook for a group of Christian monks living in a temple in China. Holt was elated when his friends related certain information they had gleaned from the cook.

Sorcerers had long puzzled over this particular temple in China, particularly because it was guarded by two Chinese dragons and numerous foo dogs. What were they guarding? That was the puzzle, since it was likely something other than just the monks inside. Using the cook, Boz and Jared had discovered that the temple contained a hallway very similar to the mezzanine floor at Netherwind Manor, which the sorcerers had never been able to penetrate as far as its secrets because ungodly people trying to access the twelve magical doors on

the mezzanine over the years had only found ordinary rooms behind them. (This was because a magician had designed them this way as a safeguard.) However, a thirteenth doorway was different, in that anyone could enter. Except that the door was hard to locate in being invisible; plus, it had a lock.

The same standards of Netherwind's mezzanine applied to the doors in the hallway of the temple, the thirteenth being a trap door in the floor camouflaged by an invisibility spell. This would be the sorcerers' target, particularly in having discovered that the door led to the Mystery Realm. At least, that was what the godly were calling it, in having not yet figured out anything better to name it.

I could have come up with a better name than that, Holt thought scornfully, *what a bunch of unoriginals*. Whether unoriginal or not, the name was apt, since many mysteries in that realm had yet to even be discovered, let alone solved.

Among other things, the Mystery Realm contained pyramids thought to be connected to much of the magic of the sorcerers' godly adversaries. If the sorcerers themselves could learn the secret of time travel, or something else of magical importance, what great things they might accomplish. So the pyramids were the real target, after entering the trap door. And if the sorcerers couldn't access the pyramids to learn their secrets, they would destroy them, to hinder their foes.

"We can't just head in there willy-nilly," Jared declared, in answer to Holt telling his companions that he wanted to get a move on. "Remember, we only control the cook inside the temple, no one else. And have you ever faced two Chinese dragons, and thirty-two adult foo dogs?" He was correct as far as numbers, because there were sixteen pairs of foo dogs consisting of a male and a female each. Plus, each couple had a cub, though this wouldn't factor into the danger equation since the cubs mainly just like to play, and not defend like their parents.

"No, you're right," Holt replied, "but what about using a sleeping spell?"

"That will work on the dragons, but not the foo dogs," Boz replied, having had some experience in battling these magical lion dogs. "It especially won't work on the ones made of stone; and even the iron and ceramic ones would be pretty hard to hoodoo because of their magic." This was also completely correct. Not only did the powerful brand of

magic of the foo dogs give them great protection abilities, they were largely impervious to various types of sorcery.

“So what do you suggest?” Holt asked.

“A diversion,” Boz answered. “In addition to guarding the temple, the foo dogs protect the people in the nearby village. So, basically, all we have to do is draw them all to the village somehow.”

A few minutes later, the three had solidified their plan, afterwards leaving the cave to call nyregs to fly them to China and drop them off a couple of miles from the temple and village, in order to approach unnoticed on foot.

In the village, the sorcerers set two homes on fire, before also planting ten explosive charges in other structures set to go off at two-minute intervals to keep the foo dogs occupied in racing around helping people get out of burning and crumbling buildings.

Information gleaned from the temple cook had indicated that there weren't many other magical creatures in the vicinity of the temple and village. A few gnomes lived in the area, but they tended to babysit the cubs of the foo dogs whenever the adults were engaged; so they likely wouldn't think to head to the temple and check on it. “Plus, what could a couple of gnomes do to us?” Jared had said, laughing. (He might have been incredibly surprised at what a single gnome could have done to him if he chanced to encounter one.)

The diversion worked, serving to occupy all thirty-two of the foo dogs, while the sorcerers stealthily made their way to the temple where they used a sleeping spell on the two dragons—a female lilac in color and a male of various shades of gold.

After entering the temple, on their way to the hall containing the magical doorways, Boz used a freeze hex on a monk they encountered, afterwards dragging the man into a closet. The spell would leave the monk immobilized for four hours, which the sorcerers felt was more than enough time since they were privy to the information that no matter how much time they spent in the Mystery Realm, only three minutes would end up passing at home.

Boz might have simply killed the monk, but for trying to be discreet. The freeze hex didn't involve light, whereas, a blast from his staff would have given off a green flash. Plus, the hex was nearly silent in sounding merely like a soft *whoosh*.

While the trap door was invisible, Holt found it using his staff as a detector, after which, Jared unlocked it using a shapeshifting key he had recently made.

The doorway on the other side was located in a low cliff overhang, so the men basically only had a short drop to the ground to enter the Mystery Realm.

If they hadn't been in a hurry, the sorcerers might have noticed the lovely setting of hilly plains laced with meandering streams and dotted with patches of dense forest. The temperature felt much like that of the early-fall climate the men had left at home; though the leaves on the trees at home hadn't turned yet, while those in the Mystery Realm were of many wonderful colors including some unusual ones like deep turquoise, dark violet tinged with rose, silvery grays, and golds with bright magenta markings.

The cliff overhead trap door was situated very near the granite Chronos Pyramid. However, the structure was entirely surrounded by an extremely complex maze that the sorcerers were reluctant to enter, particularly because it felt intensely foreboding.

In truth, gnomes had created the maze, steeping it in gnome magic designed to repel anything ungodly trying to enter. Inside, the maze held traps for evil beings such as masses of strangle vines, sleep pods filled with hundred-year gasses, and pits of quick-grabbing quicksand. So the sorcerers were wise to think twice about attempting to traverse the maze.

Using a spyglass, Boz noticed another pyramid not too far in the distance. "Metal, instead of granite," he told his friends, passing the spyglass to Jared.

Thus, the men headed toward the metal structure, which was known as the Moira Pyramid amongst the godly. The word, Moira, meant Destiny, this perfectly corresponding to the Clock of the Universe, which was very much connected to the destiny of all humankind in being an instrument of Providence. The clock, still in its baby stages here in the Mystery Realm, was actually growing inside the pyramid.

Unknown to the sorcerers, two other people were actually privy to what they were doing. Trixie had again heard Winged Words, and she happened to have been having breakfast with Jasper at a cafeteria on Lion Mountain when she heard the message. Jarna, a turquoise-colored

female dragon (of the regular sort, not a Chinese dragon and not a leviathan), was a good friend to Trixie, often taking her places and acting as a sort of unofficial protector. She ended up flying both Trixie and Jasper to the Chinese temple, which was a good idea because dragons are definitely faster than rookhs.

Jarna and her riders arrived at the temple about twenty minutes after the explosions started riddling the village. With Trixie and Jasper fairly confident that they could deal with the sorcerers, Jarna didn't shift down to burnished dove form to accompany them into the Mystery Realm, instead deciding to stay to wake the Chinese dragons (by warm puffs of her breath), and help the foo dogs put out fires (by carrying great buckets of water). She also wanted to stay to help protect the monks in case any more sorcerers, or other evil beings, showed up.

Trixie used magical Reveal Powder (developed by Zin) to expose the invisible door, so that Jasper could shapeshift a finger to fit as a key in the lock.

Inside the Mystery Realm, although she and Jasper couldn't initially see the sorcerers, Trixie could hear their footsteps, which helped in following their path, as did catching snatches of the men's conversation as they made their way toward the Moira Pyramid at a fairly leisurely pace.

Running, Jasper and Trixie quickly caught sight of the sorcerers. However, they ended up breaking off their pursuit; in fact, halting dead in their tracks at what could only be described as a horrendously brutal and gruesome scene playing out before them.

As Holt, Jared, and Boz had approached the Moira Pyramid, they suddenly found themselves under attack by six dragons (of the regular sort), who were now in the process of tearing the men to utter pieces, ripping off heads and limbs, while also pulling out their innards. The largest of the dragons, a female of a deep orange color, ended up giving a terrific screeching war cry a mere moment before crushing Jared's skull to powder and jelly against a rock with a back foot.

Cringing at the sight, as well as somewhat sick to their stomachs, both Trixie and Jasper were very glad that dragons tended to be friendly towards godly people.

"So, there's really not much for us to do here," Jasper remarked, taking a deep breath to try to cure his queasiness.

“Agreed, let’s head back,” Trixie replied, likewise taking a deep breath, and turning her face toward a cooling breeze to help with her own nausea.

On a previous trip into the Mystery Realm with several friends, Jasper and Trixie had noticed dragons in the area of the Moira Pyramid, but had assumed they were mainly there to tend to the Clock of the Universe, as dragons did the full-grown clock in Undecessence, another realm accessed by one of the magical doors on Netherwind’s mezzanine. Obviously, the dragons were not just here to tend to the clock, but also protect it.

Returning to the temple, while they were waiting for Jarna to finish helping in the village, Jasper and Trixie were pleased to meet Jinhai, the gold Chinese dragon, and his lilac friend, Jinjie.

Trixie knew who the hypnoid spy was, again from hearing Winged Words. Jasper helped a monk grapple with the infected man in order to feed him a counter pill, after which, the cook was fine about sixty seconds later, aside from the horrible sour-bitter taste in his mouth that would linger for several hours. Blessedly, this was the original hypnoid used on the cook, not the one designed to affect memories. Since the godly had only recently learned of the Memory Hypnoid, no steps had yet been made toward developing any sort of counter or cure for it.

Finished helping in the village, Jarna had returned to the temple bringing with her one of the girl foo dogs who was able to unfreeze the closeted monk early by clicking two toenails together to produce a small blue puff of magical smoke that instantly released the man from the hex.

Trixie had brought a supply of the counter pills with her, and a couple of hypnoid detectors, which she left at the temple as she and Jasper bid the monks farewell to meet Jarna outside and head home.

Jarna actually took Jasper and Trixie to Doyle Mansion, instead of Lion Mountain, because the pair had been invited to a barbecue picnic in the gardens of the mansion to celebrate the birthdays of Sal and Kiana, which were a couple of weeks apart. With Kiana having just had hers and Sal’s happening the next week, Em thought it would be nice to have a joint celebration.

About twenty-five close friends of Sal and Kiana attended, along with hosts Em and Zin, plus Halli and Magsen, and the puck family who were back from their travels.

Vini was there. As they were all enjoying the food and other festivities, she got to talking to Kiana who related that her running speed had gotten noticeably faster just in the past couple of weeks.

“Kind of like a growth spurt,” Vini replied, “but instead you’re having a gift spurt.”

Kiana was also having a growth spurt, which was one reason why the genie-made shoes were such a blessing.

Vini ended up leaving early, on an errand to visit Eizel, again at her apartment in Supe-10.

Watching Vini disappear in a soft flash got Kiana thinking about wanting to be able to call unicorns, and eventually becoming like one in connecting with her personal Soul Shadow. In a recent conversation with Sal, Kiana had confided in him that she very much wanted to be like Mrs. Dellinger.

“What, you don’t think you’re special enough already?” Sal had voiced. “You’re pretty incredible as is; I don’t think you need anything added. Though, I guess we all do grow and improve as we age. But if it doesn’t happen just the way we hope, sometimes we just need to be satisfied, and trust in God. He has a plan for each of us, and sometimes it doesn’t include everything we wish for.”

Kiana knew Sal was right, especially because God often keeps things from us when He knows those things won’t truly be good for us, including things that might be considered great blessings. Plus, people have to be mature enough for God to trust them with having great power. With her birthday on her mind, Kiana hoped she was maturing as God meant for her to.

With regard to Kiana’s ongoing quest to know God better, she had recently come across Matthew 11:29 in her bible. ““Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.””

When she first read the passage, it was almost hard to comprehend Awesome God being gentle and lowly in heart, basically, humble. But the more she thought about how humans are supposed to be humble, and God wants us to be like His Son, it made perfect sense, as did the part about how we can find rest when we rely on Him, and grow in learning which helps us mature.

Kiana broke off in her musings about unicorns and maturing to focus on the rest of the party, including a slice of wonderful six-layer chocolate cake, along with a bowl of yummy marshmallow fruit salad with pineapple chunks, mandarin orange slices, and pecans. Halli was playing a dulcimer while the puck family danced on the top of a tree stump to the music.

Three dances were evidently enough for the pucks, who were themselves anxious to have a go at the chocolate layer cake, of which four had been made to account for the number of guests and the appetites of Pizzo, Heike, Kisi, Pipac, and Lista, who had been able to toddle around fairly well as far as dancing, since she had recently learned to walk (and run). So too was she able to take full charge of a fairly substantial chunk of cake, one just about three times her own size.

On the subject of puck trolls, like owls, they tended to look out for spreesprites, as one was doing on this day in using a river stone to take out a gremlin in the process of climbing the elm tree where Garland lived in his little acorn house topped with a thatch roof made of sweetgrass. While spreesprites can generally sense invisible creatures sneaking up on them, Garland was distracted in busily packing up a little satchel to take with him into the Magical Grapevine, for it was his turn to do a little Genie Gardening.

Once inside the channel, as Garland started work, he ended up giggling at a joke he heard a girl genie named Glamini exchanging with her older self.

“How many genies does it take to light a lamp?”

“None, because genies don’t often light lamps; they prefer candles,” came the answer.

Garland ended up singing while pruning, between times of nibbling on sunflower seeds, pink carnation petals, and candied orange licorice wheels.

As the party at Doyle Mansion was just wrapping up, Magsen, with her keen gryphon eyesight, ended up spying a huge convoy of flash dragons high in the skies, and heading in the direction of the twin plantations. This prompted Zin, Em, and others to immediately get on their walnuts to warn various people at Netherwind and Laurelstone about an impending attack from what appeared to be at least two hundred of the beasts.

With many at Doyle Mansion heading in that direction on rookhs, on Halli and Magsen, and on Jarna who was taking Jasper and Trixie, Kiana ended up taking off on foot.

While the extra help was much appreciated, those at Netherwind and Laurelstone pretty much had the situation under control, particularly the gargoyles who were knocking out the falsies with huge stones, while trying not to hit several gryphons from the plantations who were also dodging blasts from the magical weapons of members of the Underground Army, who were using mainly drums, horns, and mirror cannons, since these had proven most effective against these horrendous beasts in recent encounters. Chevy, on the ground, was using both a hand mirror and a pair of red suspenders.

Despite the firepower, and help in the air from the arrivals from Doyle Mansion, the troops on the ground ended up suffering nearly thirty casualties from the fire of the flash dragons, along with the slashing claws of several that had managed to descend through the defenses. However, the thirty were not destined to stay dead for long because Dallam had been following the convoy all the way from Scotland, where he had first noticed them flying overhead on a trek from their base at a sorcerer stronghold in China to the U.S. While Dallam couldn't fly quite as fast as the falsies, he had managed to keep on their tail.

Now entering the fray, the gryphix engaged several foes at once using blasts of wind from his wings, as well slashing lunges with razor-sharp beak and talons. Though fighting fiercely, Dallam couldn't avoid getting a sizeable patch of Renewal Feathers on his neck singed by a blast of fire from a particularly large and powerful falsie. This, of course, was meant to be, by divine design because, not only did the feathers immediately grow back, the ashes dropping from the singed ones fell onto the dead people in the battlefield below, instantly rousing them to again join the fight.

Kiana had arrived at around the same time as Dallam. She was currently leading two low-flying falsies away from the pack, to separate them so that the gargoyles could have a better shot at them without risking injury to any godly fighters. At top speed, Kiana was easily outrunning the streams of fire being shot at her by her pursuers, who

ended up quickly dead from boulder strikes, actually by a couple of bigfoots, rather than the gargoyles.

In short order, the entire flock of falsies was dealt with, the final two being killed by Jarna as they tried to flee, the dragon taking out one just by tearing the head off the beast, and the other by a great blast of fire that might have killed Jasper and Trixie too if not for the shield dimes they were carrying, which protected their clothing as well as their persons.

Chapter Fourteen

The Nature of Transformation

Meanwhile, looking in on the goings-on in Eizel's apartment, we find Vini giving a bit of advice to her new young friend as they were having tea. "Look forward, not back, and be as steadfast as possible in doing this. Remember God's promise to us in both Jeremiah 31:34 and in Hebrews 8:12. He will remember our sins no more. When we accept Jesus and repent, He forgives us; and He wants us to forgive ourselves."

Vini also referred to 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." As Eizel was looking up this quote in her bible, Vini went on to say, "Through Jesus, all of our sins are covered—past present and future—though we can't continue to live in sin without suffering consequences. These can be physical, emotional, hurt to others, loss of family connections, and even loss of reward when we reach heaven if we haven't lived according to how God wants us to. So even though our Salvation is eternally guaranteed, we must all do our best to live godly lives in the here and now."

While all of this was helpful, Eizel still felt incredibly guilty; and she was still messing up. While she hadn't slipped back into abusing others, she was angry a lot and lashing out at people verbally, especially those still engaged in shenanigans, like Tanner, whom she had been in league with for years in working against the godly. The two had also been friends. Now, it irked her to see him unsaved, continuing to act out, and still in full alignment with the sorcerers who were still in charge of the Supercities worldwide.

But change takes time, a little voice in the back of her head said to her, as she remembered that Tanner's parents and brother had recently moved to a self-sustaining ranch in order to get away from city life. So maybe he'll eventually come around, especially if his family is on a different path than he is.

In the meantime, she needed to be careful around Tanner. She knew he had probably sensed a change in her when they happened to bump into one another the previous week. But even if Tanner found out she was converted, she felt it unlikely he would try to harm her in knowing full well the power of her gift. However, other sorcerers might be a different matter, so Eizel needed to be careful around all of them.

With regard to her own family, Eizel was torn between wanting to witness to them, and wanting to avoid them. And this made her mad at herself, particularly because she knew Christians were supposed to spread the Good News; and she of course didn't want her parents to end up in hell. It would only be her parents she would be witnessing to as far as family, since she was an only child and her grandparents plus a lone uncle had already passed away.

But how to get through to them... her mind mulled, since they were just about as ungodly as she had ever been.

Her father managed a copper smelting plant. Over the years, he had regularly turned in workers he thought might be engaging in outlawed activities such as Christian worship, having crosses or bibles in their possession, or hiding people from the sorcerers. Even though things had relaxed somewhat since the uprisings, some people were still engaged in persecuting Christians.

Eizel's mother was involved in various organizations such as one that decided which books needed to be added to the banned list that both new and classic literature was constantly being added to. Eizel now thought it funny how she and many of her friends had specifically hunted down books on the list over the years in defiance of their parents, and the sorcerers. *Banning things often makes them more attractive*, she realized, *especially to teenagers*.

In considering witnessing to her parents, Eizel almost thought this to be a hill too steep to climb, so to speak. While sipping tea, she was drawn out of her thoughts by Vini's voice saying, "You don't have to climb this mountain alone. God will be with you, and He will help you."

The mention of the mountain was a little shocking to Eizel, who wondered if Vini had just read her thoughts with regard to the steep hill. *Is reading minds part of her gift?* Eizel asked herself, before her thoughts answered, *No, it's more likely that God just influenced her to*

say that to me. Even as a new Christian, Eizel was already figuring out that God often speaks through other people, even our enemies sometimes.

When Vini left a short while later, Eizel started trying to get herself psyched up to witness to her parents. She could have just used her gift to influence them, but she knew that this was not what God wanted her to do. *Just tell them the Good News, and then let Him work on them in various ways,* she told herself, because this was the strong idea she had gotten after praying over the matter.

She almost backed out in worry that she might lose her entire connection with her parents over this. *And they might even turn me in,* she realized.

But the chance is worth taking, she soon decided.

I also might feel guilty my whole life over my past actions, though hopefully this will lessen as I grow older and transform.

Thinking things through further as she was clearing away the tea, Eizel realized that the nature of transformation is that it's often painful. *But it's also totally worth it.* With regard to the rewards in heaven that Vini had mentioned, Eizel recognized that her impact on earth could be rewarding too, and important.

The nature of transformation is that it also takes time, her mind went on to tell her. *Patience is the key.*

However, since we can never know how much time we still have left on earth, with regard to her parents, Eizel suddenly felt a need to hurry. In fact, she was determined to act sooner rather than later.

So that she wouldn't talk herself out of this, she left the rest of the tea clean-up until later, immediately grabbing her airbike to head across town to see her parents, who were both home, and who also were wary.

However, they listened carefully to what she was saying, and even were happy that she had come to see them on this day. Though they knew little about Christianity, they were actually interested in learning more (perhaps in part because it was banned). In truth, Mr. and Mrs. Gibson had always been afraid of their daughter because of her gift. But something had definitely changed. Just in this short visit with her, they suddenly weren't afraid of her anymore, so they decided there might really be something to what she was telling them.

Giving her parents a bible, Eizel recommended they read all of First Peter. “It’s a letter,” she told them. “I think it’s good for new believers, and for believing in general.”

When Eizel had first read First Peter, which was only five short chapters, she had thought, *It only took me about twenty minutes to read, but I’ll probably think about it for the next twenty years, or more.* She had liked it that much, particularly because it reassured her about many things, including God’s love for her, and the surety of Salvation.

On the way home, Eizel contemplated the goal of Christians to become more like Jesus. *But we never get rid of our old nature while in this life. We’re each always a sinner,* her mind fretted.

Maybe this was what she was ultimately the most worried about—that she might give up the struggle and turn back to her old ways.

Returning to her apartment, Eizel was surprised to discover the tea dishes already washed and put away. Vini had briefly returned to drop off a sand dollar for Eizel, after which, she had swiftly done the rest of the cleaning up, before also leaving Eizel a note of encouragement that stated, “Read Psalm 121, to help with the struggle.”

In doing so, Eizel felt totally comforted, and encouraged, so much so that Psalm 121 became one of her favorites for life, in fact, her go-to psalm whenever she felt discouraged or in need of a boost.

After reading the poem again, Eizel suddenly had a revelation, one she recorded in her journal: “The path ahead won’t be a brightly-lit walkway with signs and markers to tell me the way. In fact, it will probably be full of missteps, and even some darkness. But the missteps will help me learn, and the darkness will keep me searching for the light.”

Eizel had already figured out that a Christian life is often not filled with flashy miracles or other super-clear signals. She hadn’t had an epiphany of any sort when she was saved, though she knew some people did. There hadn’t been any fireworks; instead, she just knew in her heart, like a sure feeling. Since then she had been on something of a seesaw, feeling right with the world one day, then on the next, like it’s all too much to bear. And it is, if we try to make it on our own. So we have to place ourselves into Jesus’ hands, and this means everything about ourselves, especially our burdens. Then, we must simply wait,

patiently. Reading the psalms would end up helping Eizel over the years, since many have a patience theme.

Eizel had also already figured out some of the reasons for suffering. She had even made a list of them in her journal: “testing, teaching, purifying, correcting, and strengthening.” During her ponderings on this day, she added “transforming” to the list, also adding the note, “like how a seed has to break in order to take root and sprout.”

Egykor happened to be passing through Supe-10, and planting a few thoughts. He had recently gone through a transformation of his own that, like many Christians, involved brain training. Egykor had once been a nyreg, until his thoughts transformed him; not all the way to becoming a sylph because genie magic had helped with that, but he had made the start by having good motives and never giving up hope of changing.

As a fragrant and airy breeze suddenly made its way through her window, Eizel’s mind was suddenly filled with a fragrant and airy thought. *Look up, and keep looking up.*

In peering out her window a few moments later in order to do just that, Eizel saw a lovely rainbow.

Em, at home and sitting in her garden, was also looking up, but not at a rainbow. Instead she was bird watching, this being one of her all-time favorite activities. Later, in keeping with the concept of focusing on things above, and with birds fresh on her mind, she wrote the following poem.

The Magic of Birds

Showy and soft, our wondrous bird friends,
These songsters aloft, their magic never ends.
Whether from a wire, cliff, or tree,
A spiraling spire, or just flying free,
They chirp and tweet with great musicality.

In gliding flights, flits, and graceful soars,
Over glacier heights, forests, and marshy moors;
Volcano, sea, river, and crater;
Sailing over lea, bog, pole, and equator,
The birds spend much time close to the Creator.

Oft in tempest most bravely weathered,
Rarely taking rest, our friends brightly feathered
Rise above clouds, mountain peaks, rainbows,
Also land-bound crowds, wheat and corn in neat rows,
Rippling softly gold and green as the wind blows.

Strong wings carry the birds to great heights
Where they oft tarry to enjoy lovely sights,
Like a keen view of a long sandbar,
Seen by very few; same as the shooting star
Sent by the Father, calling us from afar.

While Em was bird watching, Sal was inside journaling at the kitchen table, and making the following entry.

“The saved can learn to connect with their personal unicorns during life on earth, this being something that will carry over into Eternal Life. But for the lost, when they die, it is presumed that their unicorns will go into nothingness. The creature doesn’t lose its light and goodness, but it no longer has the function of waiting to connect with its human counterpart. And so, the light simply gets absorbed into other heavenly light, and thereby, sadly, loses its individuality. Our uniqueness is incredibly important, which is why it’s so important for us to set ourselves apart from the herd. I remember something Mrs. Dellinger said about the past—that she found it important in her youth to avoid the Sea of Sameness, to avoid joining in with trends and going along with the crowd. Joining in can lead to mischief, and can also stifle us, keeping us from growing as God intends. I wonder if this was how so many churches went bad, by having a herd mentality and wanting to be part of the Sea of Sameness, and be liked by the world. The church should be like a light exposing darkness, and like salt acting as an irritant in calling out sin. If the church hadn’t caved in, more unicorns would have been saved.”

Garland was journaling on this day as well. From having heard a bunch of bible quotes while inside the Magical Grapevine, he was making a list of some of them, particularly ones expounding God’s promises to us. One of his favorites was Isaiah 42:16. “And I will lead the blind in a way that they know not, in paths that they have not known

I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I will do, and I will not forsake them.” Another verse Garland recorded, Psalm 103:12, would have suited Eizel well with regard to forgiving herself for past sins. “. . .as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.”

Kiana on this day, sitting on a bench in her back yard, was also making journal notes, an activity which she felt was helping her to transform. On the subject of unicorns, she wrote, “Connecting with our Soul Shadows equals the light shining from within us as part of our path toward sanctification. A flame has no shadow. If our bodies are full of light, we won’t have a shadow, and we’ll have less sin and darkness in us.”

Feeling hopeful with regard to the future, full of joy, and incredibly at peace, Kiana took a deep breath and thought, *How wonderful it would be to see a unicorn on this wonderful day, like the icing on the cake.* No sooner had her mind settled on chocolate buttercream as the type of frosting for her proverbial cake, than a unicorn appeared in front of her.

It took Kiana a few moments to recognize that she had actually called the shimmering creature, who stayed but a mere thirty seconds, gazing into her eyes as she tentatively reached out to touch his warm nose, before disappearing in a soft flash of golden light.

After the unicorn vanished, Kiana was still slightly stunned, though not so much about having called her first unicorn, but more from a revelation the creature had imparted to her, as to the reason she was getting faster, which was not particularly related to eventually gaining unicorn powers, but more to a job she would have on earth, and also to a certain capacity in heaven too.

How wonderful! her mind declared. *And even better than chocolate buttercream frosting.*

Chapter Fifteen

Spreesprite Footprints

The following note was found in one of Vini's journals that were handed down to Quin after her grandmother's death.

“Unicorn imprints are left on the brain, and spreesprite footprints are left on the heart. The brains and hearts of humans tend to rule each other, but I've always thought the heart to be more powerful, though perhaps it's more of a balancing act than any sort of struggle for dominance.”

As September was coming to an end, Birch was pretty much back to being his old self, and back to his normal routine, including taking TKT trips that were going well for him so far. *God has everything under control*, he kept reminding himself. *And He's capable of fixing our mistakes; of course He is. And He reassures us that we are forgiven for mistakes that we are truly sorry for.*

Returning from a solo trip, Birch handed the Time Key off to Alex, Kiana, Sal, and Trixie who were taking a trip back to a time shortly after the time the two teams had gone to on their extended visit. They would be staying just a week this time to take care of a few things such as stopping a murder, planting a few wordsmith messages, and preventing the torching of certain artworks. The teens would be staying on cots in a church basement, as arranged by Anei for them.

Although they knew their history, the TKTs were amazed at the changes that had occurred in just a few years. Already, people were not allowed to listen to bible radio broadcasts or watch Christian television programming. The Single-Birth Law was already being talked about, and would eventually come into effect to limit each family to one child (the exceptions being naturally-occurring twins, triplets, etc.), with additional pregnancies forcibly terminated.

No Christians were allowed to be foster parents, this having been the case for years now. But the numbers had grown low anyway as far as those wanting to do this, due to various forms of abuse dished out to Christian foster parents by various government entities and activists, along with violence perpetrated by some of the kids themselves. In one case, a whole family was murdered by two fosters, boys ages eleven and fifteen. Then the pair got light sentences from a judge who agreed with their lawyer saying they were subject to abuse in being forced to listen to grace said at the dinner table, and from being encouraged to attend church with the family. So too were the two slain children, a boy and a girl, ages seven and nine respectively, responsible for provoking the murderers by asking the two fosters to turn down the television so they could read the bible.

This was the new mentality that had taken over many parts of the U.S.—that people were justified in murdering anyone trying to “push Christian beliefs onto others.” Also, in many parts of the country, certain crimes such as theft, trespassing, and property damage had been decriminalized when deemed justifiable in serving the needs of various liberal activists and those they claimed to represent.

People had been shouted at and driven out of restaurants and other public places for years by gangs for various political reasons. Now, it had gotten worse in centering on people’s homes, to include violence, the gangs largely funded by agitators in league with the sorcerers. Sadly, most activists were complete pawns of the sorcerers acting on Satan’s orders. Even more sadly, they would come to discover their mistake, including the abortionists whole-heartedly supporting the Single-Birth Law that would eventually turn into the Law of Four, forcing women to bear four children each so that most could be taken away from families to be used as slaves by the sorcerers. Earthly laws can definitely be changed. The only laws that don’t change are God’s Laws. And if we were all living by them, the world would be a much better place.

In Sal’s view, many liberals actually did have some good ideas relating to fairness; but forcing those ideas onto others using big government and violence was never the answer, and had never worked in all of human history. God working on the human heart was the true answer. Accepting Jesus is the answer. What Sal was seeing made him

think of a quote he favored by Leo Tolstoy. “Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself.”

Sal’s poem in support of the Bible Bus radio program had been banned even before the program itself was outlawed. But he found solace in knowing the program would still exist in the future; in fact, he had already gotten copies of the broadcasts from the UND and was listening to them at home.

Paying a clandestine visit to the Doyle Mansion of this time, Sal ended up looking over his future mentor’s shoulder as she was writing a bible quote in her journal, Jeremiah 26:3. ““It may be they will listen, and every one turn from his evil way, that I may repent of the evil which I intend to do to them because of their evil doings.””

That’s not a bad thing to hope for, Sal thought. *After all, God had repented about what He intended to do at Nineveh.* However, in this case, in knowing that people hadn’t turned from their evil ways and had definitely suffered because of it, Sal was a little sad. *If only there had only been a revival, a true one, the future might have been much different.* While some people of recent history had been drawn to the Lord, for the most part, their commitment was only shallow, mainly because so few people truly wanted to study God’s Word, instead preferring to be entertained. Even fewer wanted to be convicted of their wrongdoings by the Holy Spirit, which always happens to true believers. *They only wanted a show,* Sal sadly reflected, *and to feel good and to have their ears tickled. How sad.*

Among her other jottings on this day, the younger version of Em had lamented the incivility of the times—the hatred, the name-calling, the tribal attacks, the hard line on political correctness, even to the point of twisting actual truth into lies, and even to the point of violence. It was simply sick, absolute evil; there was no other way to describe it. In considering all of this, Em felt that the Endtimes must surely be near. There seemed no other answer as to how people could treat others this way. “All of this has to be leading up to something,” she wrote in her journal, “like maybe the Great Tribulation and the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ?” Em had also quoted Matthew 24:12-13. ““And because wickedness is multiplied, most men’s love will grow cold. But he who endures to the end will be saved.”” She would, of course, come to find out that the End was not right around the corner, so to speak.

Though, to say that the End of the Age was on the not-so-distant horizon probably wouldn't have been all that inaccurate of an opinion.

In standing against the evil of the times, Em, like many other young people, was on the road to discovering that we have to learn to let God fight our enemies. He tells us in the bible to have faith, trust in Him, and let Him take care of things, because He has everything under control.

Anei was taking care of something in person, instead of calling to the TKTs. He had felt like an outing anyway to stretch his legs and wings; and what better way to take a stretch than in confronting a sorcerer outside of a large nursing home, where the man had already placed a locking spell on the doors and windows to jam them, and where he was planning to set the building on fire with a few well-placed blasts of his staff. In knowing that many of the residents inside were unsaved, well, this would be a good way to condemn them to hell and score a few brownie points with Satan.

Oops, smashed to a pulp while trying to commit mass murder, Anei directed at the dead sorcerer who had indeed been literally pulverized by the gargoyle's stony fists. *Well, then maybe you shouldn't have tried to do this*, he further thought. While godly magical creatures didn't very often kill human beings, they did on God's command, which had been the case on this day. Before leaving the scene, Anei used a gargoyle spell to unlock the nursing home doors and windows.

The next day, the TKTs visited the nursing home to distribute a huge stack of Sal-created pamphlets that were subtle in their content (since religious literature was prohibited in this setting), but that would definitely give people a nudge and a desire to come to know Christ.

In other settings, the TKTs had been handing out genie-made foldable crosses, camouflaged to look like other things, like a tie pin or a bookmark. These would serve people for many years to ward off demonic creatures, especially in the near future when crosses worldwide would be outlawed.

To go along with no Freedom of Speech and no Freedom of Religion, No Freedom of Expression either, Sal thought of the banning of necklace crosses that had already occurred in many places in the U.S., because they were supposedly offensive to some people.

Sal was actually relieved to return home, in knowing that those living in that past time would shortly face much worse persecution (that he didn't particularly want to witness), and in also knowing that he couldn't do any more than what God had directed him to do to help these people.

With regard to Sal's personal project, he felt in a hurry these days. Like many of his friends, he could feel the Endtimes closing in, if they weren't already here in the early stages.

In discussing with his mentor feeling this urgent need to save as many people as possible as quickly as possible, Sal was somewhat surprised when Em told him, "That's a nice sentiment; but don't overwork yourself by writing to the point of exhaustion, or frustration, to keep hammering the Truth home. While it's definitely up to us to get the word out, we're done after that because it's God's Spirit that actually leads people to accept Christ. Being saved is not generally an intellectual thing, but more spiritual."

As Sal was mulling this over, Em added, "Though I have to admit that many of the writings of C.S. Lewis are incredibly intellectual, in that his arguments prove Christianity to be correct by logic. So I guess it is possible that some people might come to Christ just by pure reasoning after reading something. Plus, many of your writings are very inspirational, even soul-reaching. So what do I know; never mind me; just carry on, my friend!"

Taking a writing break later in the garden, Sal saw long strings of birds in the sky that were not in any usual formation for a flock, but that instead spelled out the encouraging words, "Carry on, my friend!"

God is the ultimate wordsmith, Sal decided, in realizing that He had not only commanded the birds to make this formation, but had also spoken these words through Em.

Going back inside to find his mentor in the parlor, Sal noticed something that Heike, standing in the parlor doorway, was also observing. Em, with head bowed and hands folded in prayer as she sat on the divan, was softly glowing. This reminded Sal of the lights on a Christmas tree (or maybe a lit angel topper), while Heike was thinking more along the lines of what a lit candle looks like in a lovely patch of fog, perhaps at twilight.

At the same time Em was praying and glowing, Egykor was breezing through a row house in Supercity Three, the breeze flipping the pages of a bible open to draw a man's attention to John 8:12. "Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'"

The sylph next paid a visit to Eizel in Supe-10 to again breezily flip bible pages to draw her attention to John 7:38. "He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.'"

By the ability to save others in sharing from the heart the Good News of Jesus Christ, Eizel thought, this giving her more hope than ever that her parents might eventually be saved.

And speaking of living water, we might take a moment to look in on Nessie, who was floating about over a great field in Scotland to watch a puck throwing contest. The field had to be "great" in size because of how far many of the puck trolls were able to throw the objects of these games, which included logs, peat blocks, rocks, and even occasionally other pucks who were then caught in the air by several of their owl friends (also looking on at the games like Nessie) to be returned safely to the ground. Currently, Tilg was in third place in the log contest. *Oh please, please, please let him move up to second*, Nessie thought. She ended up getting her wish, as Tilg took home a silver trophy for the log event, along with an honorable-mention ribbon for the peat toss in which he came in fifth.

Also looking in on Levegõ, we find him exercising another of his special powers, this being water manipulation far superior to anything Devin might be capable of. However, on this day, the twelf was not engaged in diverting any great rivers, or stilling any enormous sea twisters. Instead, he was working with a tidal pool in the rocks along the shore of his home island. But the water inside the pool was not from tides, sea spray, or even from rain. Instead, the pool contained a quantity of human tears placed there by some godly means for the twelf to work with. Levegõ speculated that angels had gathered the tears and placed them there, though he wasn't positive about this, since God's ways are mysterious, and often beyond our means of either comprehending or guessing at good answers to questions of curiosity.

Whatever the means the tears got there, Levegõ was now doing what he was supposed to do with them. These were tears of joy, the best of all kinds of tears to work with, in his opinion. While the tears of the oppressed get made into cloudbirds, tears of joy get made into quite another type of creature, one even more wonderful, to Levegõ's mind anyway. Using various magical tools from a little shoulder haversack, the twelf added a small flame of sacrificial fire, several sprinkles of sacred earth, and three breaths of glory to the tears in the pool. After doing this, Levegõ simply stood back to watch the transformation of the tears, which took a mere three minutes, after which, the new creature simply drifted upwards and away, out over the sea, without looking back.

Speaking of tears of joy, Weyland was shedding a few in just having learned that Martella was expecting their first child. Weyland was out watering in his garden, specifically, a row of rainbow cherry peppers and three hills of plumcucs, which were little cucumbers shaped and colored like plums.

At the same time the tearful Weyland was watering in his garden, a unicorn happened to be visiting every lighthouse in the world, a jaunt that took the creature less than two minutes basically. Following the imprint of the unicorn took Keke, and the white hummingbird she was riding on, a couple of hours to complete as far as the entire trail.

Vini, on one of her jaunts, happened to have observed the unicorn visiting two of the lighthouses, one in Maine and the other in New Hampshire. At home later, she entered a few notes in her journal about lighthouses, and why she felt the unicorn might have taken an interest in them.

“Like certain human souls that act as light in this dark world, the lighthouses seem to be standing alone against the darkness, but are not really alone because the light of God is always with us, everywhere. And we are the light, per John 1:4-5. ‘In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.’ So I believe the unicorn was reassuring the lighthouses that they are not alone, and encouraging them to keep giving their warning, in the same way the light of godly humans serves as a warning by exposing evil. We must strive to continue to be the

light, and stand for the light, not only as a witness to the fallen world, but also to help others see clearly.”

At around the same time her grandmother was entering journal notes, Quin was returning home from a visit to Linn at his lab. The next morning, as she was just waking up from a restful night’s sleep, Quin ended up doing a little auto-writing before breakfast, from which she was given a quote in the bible from Jesus, John 12:46. “I have come as light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.” The sun was just coming up as Quin’s hand also automatically wrote, “We need to wake up and be bold in fighting the darkness that pervades our world.”

Alex happened to be journaling at the same time Quin was auto-writing. He was writing about a dream he had just had, in which he had solved what might be the greatest mystery of his life: “The Mystery to Solving Mysteries.” This happened to be the title of his journal entry in which he expounded how it all becomes possible, solving mysteries that is. “We can’t think ourselves too wise or clever,” he wrote. “It’s humbleness that opens the doors in the brain for God’s mysteries to be revealed. This is the way God designed our brains; humbleness is the key.”

Meanwhile, in Scotland, Jamie had just found a new magical object. Well, new to him anyway, though the blessing box, as it would become known to him, was over a hundred years old. In fact, it was just about to celebrate its one-hundred-and-fifth birthday.

Jamie had been out on an airbike for most of the day and had made it all the way to Ireland, where he found the box in the ruins of an old castle. Made of some type of metal that was incredibly light and strong, the box wasn’t at all rusted. He couldn’t imagine what kind of metal it might be, having both coppery and silvery tones, with an inlaid design done in a metal that was gold with purplish accents. The design resembled a string of feathers scrolling their way around the edges of the box that had a hinged lid and was about the size of a smallish loaf of bread.

In keeping with the scrolling design, one of the first things Jamie pulled from the box—that never required anything be put into it to produce blessings, both material and otherwise—was a feather. Being

incredibly magical, the feather could turn into an airy glider that could fly as fast as a thunderbird, complete with a protective aura to shield a rider at these speeds.

After using the glider for the first time, Jamie remarked to Tilg, “It’s like having a pair of angel wings.” The comment was an interesting one, because Jamie would eventually come to find out that the box was connected to the angels.

Jamie had found the box using his gift, which was actually the ability to follow spreepSprite footprints. In the same way spreepSprites follow unicorn imprints, Jamie, for all of his life, had been able to follow spreepSprite footprints, their imprint in the world, that is, aside from the one they leave on many hearts, though his heart was where this particular sensitivity originated from. SpreepSprites often like to visit magical objects in their wanderings, sometimes just to see what they are up to, and other times, to lead humans (ones having a gift like Jamie’s) to them. But, of course, we have to be attentive to follow this trail, not wandering aimlessly, but in tune with the leadings of God, because He leads the spreepSprites, and He leads us.

At around the same time Jamie was taking Tilg for his first ride in the glider, a spreepSprite, hovering on a white hummingbird in the heavens over North America, was whispering into the ear of a unicorn. After the whisper, the unicorn set off to visit every star in the universe, while the spreepSprite set about stopping time worldwide for exactly three minutes.

“But when anything is exposed by the light it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it is said, ‘Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light.’”

—Ephesians 5:13-14

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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