

Chapter 1

C ALEB LOOKED OUT across the San Juan River at the dust thrown up by approaching riders. Manuelito heard the hoof beats and came out of his tent to watch. As they drew closer, Caleb recognized Lieutenant Porter at the head of a squad of soldiers. Porter had become a friend to the Navaho and the Huastecs during their recent troubles with the renegade Kaibito and his band. Porter halted and dismounted near the river. He strode forward while his men watered the horses.

“Howdy,” Porter said, extending a hand to Caleb, and nodding to Manuelito. “Heard you were preparing to continue your journey.”

“We plan to accept Manuelito’s hospitality a few more weeks while we train the Huastec men to use rifles, and Manuelito’s men will teach them hand-to-hand combat skills. When they’re ready, we’ll move on.”

“Ahuh. Well, that’s why I’m here. Being peaceful, the Huastecs aren’t a problem for the military. I’m happy to leave things as they are. But we’ve got a new Indian Agent coming in, and he’s already sent word that he’ll be visiting all the tribes and making a census. If you’re here, he’ll count the Huastecs and you won’t be able to leave.”

Caleb glanced at Manuelito. Porter was being a friend, letting them know, but this was bad news for the Huastecs. They’d have to face the wasteland to the south in haste and unprepared.

“How much time do we have?” Caleb asked.

“He’s due by the end of the week, and sounds like he wants to get started pronto. I’d say he’ll need another week to get settled, and then he’ll be riding out with his escort, which will likely be my troopers.”

“We’re obliged to you for giving us some warning. I’ll have to discuss this with Tonah and the others, and then see what we can do.”

“Least I could do after all we went through together fighting Kaibito.”

Porter turned and walked back to rejoin his troops. With a wave he mounted and they spurred their horses across the river.

Caleb turned to Manuelito. “There are more than two hundred of the Huastecs, and we have less than two weeks. I’d better tell Tonah and the others.”

Manuelito nodded his assent as Caleb hurried across the compound to find Tonah.

Tonah was sitting with Shanni outside her lodge. Shanni was regaining her strength from the attack by Kaibito that had nearly taken her life.

Tonah sensed Caleb’s agitation and rose to meet him.

“I’m afraid I have bad news,” Caleb said. “Lieutenant Porter stopped by to warn us that a new Indian Agent is arriving within a week. He proposes to conduct a census as soon as he arrives. If the Huastecs are still in camp, they will be counted and kept on the reservation. After that, if you leave to complete your journey, you will be hunted down by the soldiers.”

Tonah turned to Shanni. “This is grave news. We have little time to prepare.”

Shanni stood up. Determination burned in her eyes as she spoke. “We must discuss this development with Matal and the others, and find a course of action. We cannot be trapped here. Our journey has just begun!”

Tonah nodded in assent. “Caleb, could I ask you to seek out Matal and give him this news? Ask him to spread the word to the other warriors, and meet tonight in my lodge. We must develop a plan quickly to avoid panic among our people.”

Caleb nodded, rising, to walk among the tents scattered along the river, looking for Matal.

THE FLAMES FROM torches lighted the way for the warriors assembling in Tonah’s lodge. Matal and more than a dozen of the Huastec warriors gathered with Manuelito, Shanni, and Caleb as Tonah opened the meeting.

“You all heard the news about the new Agent. We thought we had time to train in the fighting skills needed to defend ourselves before we left camp and resumed our journey to the Center. Now time is running out. All the Huastecs must leave within the week or we will become prisoners of the Anglo government. This meeting is to develop a plan.”

Matal rose to speak. “We have discussed this among ourselves,” he waved a hand to include the other Huastec warriors. “We have enough silver to buy repeating rifles and revolvers. We must purchase

them soon, and learn how to use them. Manuelito's warriors can teach us all the skills we need to survive the journey, but we must have time to train."

"Time is what we do not have," Tonah replied.

"Unless you can find a temporary refuge," Manuelito broke in quietly.

Matal turned to Manuelito. "Yes, that would buy us the time we need. What do you have in mind?"

"Kaibito's camp."

Caleb looked at Tonah for a reaction, but Tonah remained silent, pondering. The Huastecs had suffered in the desert. They would fear leaving the security of Manuelito's camp and returning to a journey into the unknown. Commitment to the chosen course of action would require the consensus of the people. If the Huastec warriors agreed, maybe the people would follow them.

Matal frowned, reviewing the suggestion. "It's big enough, and has water, but there is no source of food."

"It is isolated," Manuelito continued. "The Indian Agent would have no knowledge of it since there is no permanent settlement there. Wild game, mostly deer, is available two days' ride to the west, near Betatakin. I'd estimate a large group like the Huastecs could live there one, maybe two months before the game was depleted."

"Alternatives?" Tonah interjected.

Shanni spoke up. "We cannot return to Mesa Verde, and now we cannot stay here. We agree we are unprepared to resume our journey. I suggest we pack in supplies to the camp and supplement them with game. This will extend our stay and offset our dependence on hunting for our food."

"I agree," Caleb added. "But the more supplies we try to carry with us, the greater the need for horses and carts. With over two hundred people to move and care for, it will be difficult to travel without discovery."

"My trackers can help," Manuelito said. "They know the route, and can guide your travel. I suggest that the caravan travel at night, and hold up in hidden spots during the day. You should be able to reach the camp in five days."

Matal nodded. "It sounds like we have the beginning of a plan. Now we'll need to work out the details."

"But first we must bring all the others into the discussion," Tonah interjected. "We must get their suggestions and address their

concerns. We will need the commitment of everyone for the hardships ahead."

"Well spoken," Manuelito agreed. "People will resist if they feel you are already committed to this course of action without having their say in it."

"We could divide up the families among us as temporary leaders," Matal suggested, his glance including the Huastecs in the circle. "Each of us could brief his group and start the process of getting everyone's agreement."

Matal was a natural leader, Caleb thought with approval. How quickly Matal had matured during the recent trials of the Huastecs! The other Huastec warriors already followed him willingly, and the challenges were only beginning.

"Is everyone in agreement with this approach?" Tonah asked.

Murmurs and nods of assent went around the assemblage.

"Then we must make haste. We will reconvene tomorrow night. If we have everyone's agreement, we must begin planning for the move to Kaibito's camp."

"What about the supplies; guns, ammunition, horses, carts?" Caleb added. "We have a lot to do to get ready."

"Leave that to us," Manuelito spoke up. "My men can use some of your silver to purchase guns and ammunition in Mexico. We will secure the carts and horses quietly among villages near our reservation."

Caleb frowned to himself. Somehow they must secure supplies and move nearly two hundred people over fifty miles through the desert without being discovered. And they must do it all in little more than a week! It would take a miracle to pull it off.

Shanni stood up and faced the men. "Many changes to our customary ways will be required. Anyone capable of fighting, man or woman, must be trained and equipped. We cannot anticipate all the dangers we will face, so all of the Huastecs must be ready to do their part. Be sure the families understand, for there can be no turning back. We must reach the Center of our ancestors or we will all die."

The men nodded, agreeing with Shanni's words. Their mood was somber as they got up to carry out their duties.

A WEEK LATER, Lieutenant Porter and his soldier escort arrived with the Indian Agent at the edge of the San Juan River. They halted their horses to gaze across at the lodges of the Navaho camp, scattered

peacefully along the bank of the stream. Porter blinked, not believing his eyes. Nearly a hundred Huastec tents had disappeared as if they had never existed. Porter let out his breath and held his peace.

Chapter 2

THE FIRST NIGHT, the caravan traveled swiftly and quietly, the people recognizing the need to put distance between themselves and the Navaho camp. A number of Huastec men walked behind the other travelers with wooden rakes and crude brushes to erase signs of their passage. Cart wheel tracks and hoof prints were carefully eliminated, leaving no marks on the hard, gravelly soil.

Near dawn, the Navaho trackers led the caravan toward the low hills and found a hidden canyon suitable for temporary day camp. The tired travelers ate and then put up temporary shelters from the sun. Soon they settled down to sleep under the watchful eyes of sentries.

Tonah awakened early in the afternoon and ate. He rose and walked to the shade of a boulder to sit quietly, thinking. He sensed Shanni's presence and turned as she walked through the crowded camp toward him.

"I saw that you had awakened," Shanni said as she paused in front of him. "I hope I am not disturbing you. I know sometimes you like to meditate alone."

"No, please join me. I slept deeply, but awakened with a troubled mind. I have not yet determined what is causing it."

"I, too, am troubled, although our travel to Kaibito's camp seems to be going well."

"It is not the physical world which weighs on us; it is the spirit world. I suggest that we travel together in the spirit world to determine what is the cause of our misgivings. The travel should require less strength, since we will seek allies and not have to combat enemies. Do you feel strong enough to try?"

"Yes. I need to eat, and then I will return."

"Please ask Aurel to join us. We will need his support."

Shanni nodded her agreement. "We will return soon."

Aurel stretched a blanket on four poles, creating a shelter in the shade of the canyon wall. Using coals from the camp, he kindled a small fire nestled in a bed of stones. Tonah and Shanni sat

comfortably on a blanket spread under the awning and stared into the flames.

Tonah cast about with his eyes, searching. A pebble caught his eye and he moved to grasp it in his left hand. The stone felt smooth, comfortable in his hand. He peered at it, appreciating the striations of color embedded over millennia. The pebble would anchor him to this “time” and “place” in the manifestation of the physical universe.

Without being told, Shanni gazed with her eyes unfocused, until a glint of light caught her awareness and she looked at the source, a glass-like stone that lay among the gravel. She picked it up and cupped it in her hand as she sat back down beside Tonah.

“Look at the flame, and then close your eyes,” Tonah said. “After a moment, you will continue to see the flame. Follow me up the flame into a higher vibration. On that plane we will seek knowledge.”

Shanni did as he suggested, and felt calmness settle over her as she watched the flame. She felt Tonah’s awareness touch her and then move up the heat from the flame, moving skyward. And then she was floating effortlessly, moving “up” through the darkness, weightless. She felt temporary disorientation and a sensation of falling.

“Steady,” Tonah’s voice reached her. “Soon we will reach a signpost.”

Shanni’s perception detected a glimmering in the distance, a silvery presence that glistened like light on a dewdrop. She felt a sensation of movement toward it, and became aware of Tonah’s hand on her shoulder.

The dewdrop began to expand, and she was looking inside it into a world of snow-capped peaks with green valleys and sparkling rivers. Near the center a low peak rose from the valley floor supporting a white structure of many windows looking out over the surrounding plain.

She saw Tonah out of the corner of her eye as he soared downward, leading her into an open doorway. She perceived the immensity of the building as they stood, dwarfed by the entrance that led into a long hallway. At the end of the hallway the wall was filled with strange statues, lit by innumerable candles set in wooden shelves.

They walked forward, and a solitary figure dressed in a long robe rose from a kneeling position and turned to look at them. Shanni had the distinct feeling that the figure was expecting them. Without a word, he gestured for them to follow and entered a dimly lit room. He bowed and moved behind them out of the doorway, closing it behind him.

Shanni stood beside Tonah as her eyes adjusted to the dim light and she perceived the form of an ancient man, sitting quietly, meditating. A feeling of

kindness and compassion flowed out from the figure to envelop them. Shanni felt her apprehension draining away to be replaced by a feeling of warmth and well-being.

The man opened his eyes and smiled impishly, like a small boy who is delighted in a new toy.

“Greetings, my friends. I am honored by your visit. What brings you to my humble dwelling?”

“We come seeking answers,” Tonah said. “We have discovered unknown enemies in the spirit world. We must learn how to withstand them.”

“Your choice of words is not lost on me,” the man said with approval. “If you sought to meet confrontation with confrontation, I could not help you.”

“We seek only to resist the spirits that seek to do us harm. Already they have threatened our lives in the physical world.”

“Then we must have a look. I will join my perception with yours while you remember your contact with the beings.”

Shanni felt a tickle as the man’s awareness expanded, enveloping them in a sentient bubble. Instantly, like a runaway dream, Tonah’s memory replayed the events he had experienced in the dream-catcher and later in the stone temple. Shanni saw herself trapped in the cocoon and her feelings of fear and dread resurfaced, to be gone as quickly as Tonah’s awareness returned to the room.

“Somehow you have created a disturbance in one of the innumerable spirit worlds. These worlds are far removed from the physical place we call ‘earth’. Each world has its own self-importance. Seldom do beings from one world even acknowledge the existence of other worlds, let alone concern themselves with them. This is most unusual. What could be their motive?”

“Our people, the Huastecs, are forced by circumstances to attempt to journey back to the ancient Center of our civilization,” Tonah said. “We seek to reconnect with our people. The trouble began when we started the journey.”

“Ah, I recall your memory about the disturbance in the node of causality. Without being aware of it, you are threatening something long hidden.”

“How can we find out what it is, and how to address it?”

“The answer is not immediately apparent. You may have to journey to the center of the spirit world, and wrest the answer from the very beings that threaten you.”

“That means a battle of wills. We would have to overcome their resistance to divulging the secrets which we threaten.”

“I’m afraid so. I see no other way. We may be able to provide support at a critical juncture, but we are unable to interfere.”

“The battle is ours to fight,” Tonah replied. “It is our fate and our responsibility. It would help if we knew how to proceed.”

“You must build the strength of your resolve, and train others with you to join in your awareness when you engage the beings. Your collective strength multiplies your power. But you must have a strong leader to focus this energy. You will need a champion.”

“A person of strong stamina in the physical world,” Tonah agreed.

“And of indomitable will,” the man added.

“A person who would die before he would yield,” Tonah replied.

“Precisely.”

Tonah bowed in thanks, and Shanni felt the presence fading into the darkness. Again, a feeling of benevolence and compassion surrounded her as the room disappeared.

She felt Tonah’s hand gently touch her shoulder and they were rising effortlessly into the void. They left the world as it turned into a dewdrop, glistening with the snow-capped mountains and the white structure in its center. It seemed to zoom away at great speed and disappeared completely. Shanni felt disoriented, as if she were falling through space.

“Steady,” she felt Tonah’s voice inside her mind. “Remember the stone.”

Her perception centered on the stone she had picked up from the gravel and it came into view, floating in the darkness like an unlit star. As she focused, it became larger and she again saw the striations that made it unique and pleasurable to hold. As she grasped it, the void shimmered with light. She felt queasiness in her stomach and a sensation of disorientation.

Without volition, her eyes opened and the camp of the Huastecs came into view. Wet with perspiration, she breathed deeply and lifted her hand to gaze at the stone.

Chapter 3

Continuum

How large is large, how small is small?

We may never know.

I’ve spent my lifetime seeking the truth

And I’ve still too far to go.

How insignificant is Man: On a minor planet,

Near a meager sun, in an unimposing galaxy,

in an unbounded universe?

It can be said that Man is small.

Yet Man is made up of organs and cells;

Composed of molecules and atoms as well.

And if smaller we go, to sub-atoms and below

We do not know

What is there.

So one can tell, equally well, that Man is large.

The point of all this is that Man exists

Standing between the outstretched arms of God.

Without ending or beginning

In an eternal ring,

A marvelous thing,

Continuing.

(Tonah’s explanation of the universe to Aurel, the apprentice.)

C ALEB RODE TO the rear of the travelers and nodded with satisfaction. Several of the Huastec men were using their horses to drag brush back and forth across their trail. A careful tracker could find signs of their passage, but sweeping the trail obliterated obvious marks and hid the size of the group. The normal desert winds would remove any remaining indications of their travel in a few days.

He turned and rode to the head of the column. He saw the caravan strung out for nearly a mile as the Huastecs, some leading the horses pulling carts, trekked toward Kaibito's abandoned camp. Hardship awaited the Huastecs at the camp, Caleb knew, but being there would buy them time to prepare.

He saw Walpi, Manuelito's tracker, outlined ahead in the light of the full moon. Walpi had guided him after Kaibito, and Caleb knew Walpi to be a competent tracker of few words. Caleb rode up beside Walpi, who turned and nodded. Walpi was a stocky, barrel-chested Navaho of immense strength and unassuming manner. He was one of Manuelito's most experienced men and Manuelito placed great confidence in his judgment. His knowledge of battle tactics and hand-to-hand combat were key to the training of the Huastec warriors.

"The journey goes well," Caleb noted. "We can expect to reach camp the day after tomorrow."

"It will be good to arrive. The camp can be defended. Out here, in open country, the Huastecs are vulnerable to bandits," Walpi replied.

"Where are the other trackers?"

"I sent them far ahead, an hour or more. If they spot trouble, there will be time for one to ride back and warn us, and for us to prepare."

Caleb nodded his approval. Manuelito had said that Walpi was more than a tracker. He was also a thinker.

"Did Manuelito speak to you of the need to provide combat training for the Huastec warriors?"

"Yes."

Caleb smiled to himself. Sometimes he wished that Walpi were not so reticent. If you found out what Walpi was thinking, you had to drag it out of him.

"And what do you think of that?"

"I will do it." Walpi seemed puzzled at the question.

"The Huastec men are few," Caleb continued. "The Huastecs wish for both women and men to train, to increase their fighting force. Did Manuelito discuss this?"

"Yes."

"Will that be a problem for you and your men?"

"No."

Caleb rode in silence. Maybe he was wrong to ask. Had he insulted Walpi by implying that the Navaho might have a problem with training women fighters?

Walpi pulled his horse to a stop. "I have lived a long time, and survived many battles. A warrior is a warrior. The training is difficult, as it must be to prepare for life or death struggle. I have great respect for anyone who is willing to accept the training. Do not concern yourself with me. Life brings changes. I adapt and I survive, and I enjoy each day."

For Walpi, that amounted to an oration, and Caleb's surprise showed. Walpi could not suppress a smile. Caleb realized Walpi had been toying with him.

Caleb returned the smile. "Guess I underestimated you. That was quite a speech!"

"Before the training is over, I'm afraid your charges will be complaining to you to shut me up!" Walpi laughed.

Caleb waved his thanks and rode back toward the column. He was glad he'd broached the subject with Walpi. Something had passed between them. Now Walpi seemed less distant and more human. With his natural reserve, he had waited for Caleb to break the ice. Caleb looked forward to beginning the training.

THE JOURNEY WENT well and the tired travelers reached Kaibito's abandoned camp near noon of the sixth day. They set about erecting tents and preparing for a long stay. Water was brought from the small stream and food set to cooking on the campfires. Then the people settled down to sleep after the long night's travel. Tomorrow they could look forward to returning to their normal schedule of sleeping, instead of travel, during the night.

The Huastecs took over sentry duty, freeing Walpi and the other trackers to begin preparation for combat training. Matal and the group leaders were responsible for identifying all who were to participate in the training from among the Huastec families.

Walpi asked the Huastecs to bind bundles of straw together into mats and stack them in an open area outside camp. He and the trackers swept the ground, clearing off an area large enough for all the trainees to assemble together. They erected sun screens, and set water containers inside. Posts set into the hard earth were wrapped with padding. The posts would be used, Walpi explained, for the trainees to perfect the striking and kicking techniques essential to hand-to-hand fighting.

Time passed as the camp settled into a routine and the day came for the training to start. Caleb, Matal, and Shanni joined the trainees assembled in the cool of the early morning.

Caleb looked around, surveying the group. Nearly fifty men and women stood conversing quietly, waiting. Not all would complete the training, Caleb knew. Accidents and illness would take their inevitable toll. But it was a good beginning.

Walpi, followed by the other three trackers, walked to the front of the assembly and turned to face the group. An expectant hush fell over the participants. Knowing Walpi's reticence, Caleb wondered what he would find to say.

"You all know why you are here, and I welcome you. This is a serious undertaking. What we will teach has been learned in battle. Much of it was learned at the cost of good warriors' lives. By applying yourselves to train well, we will assure that you can fight effectively and not die needlessly.

"Never forget that combat is a dirty business. It consists of sweat, blood and terror. Combat is not to be sought lightly, but when it is inevitable, you must be prepared. Does anyone have a question?"

Everyone remained silent, watching attentively.

"Very well. There are four key principles you must know and consciously apply. Forget them, and you will lose focus to your peril. First, always remember that the aggressor has the advantage. We will teach you to defend yourself by attacking. Overcoming an opponent before he can get set is critical. Second, you must clear your mind and be focused only on your attack. There is no time for anger, fear, or other distraction. This you will learn. Third, only a body that has trained hard is in physical condition to carry out maximum effort with minimum damage to itself. You must push yourself past what you think are your limits. The body has an amazing depth of reserves, but you must reach deep to find it. Do not expect it to be easy. Fourth, you must continue, despite the temptation to quit. That is how your body learns stamina, and your will is strengthened. Success in battle is as much about mental toughness as physical ability. Only you determine if you fail or succeed, and in battle the penalty for failure is death.

"Now we will begin."

Walpi motioned to the other trackers. "Manteh, Nantan, and Antay will assist me. Manteh, please continue."

Manteh, a tall warrior with piercing eyes and muscular arms, stepped forward and began speaking.

"Note the way we are clad. The hair should be worn long, to the shoulders, for protection from the elements as well as to protect the neck. A broad headband holds the hair in place and helps keep

perspiration out of the eyes. Straps for rifles or water bags should never be worn over the neck. They can entangle you. Wear the strap over the shoulder only and you can drop it with a shrug, or let it pull away. Leather boots with leggings are supple and quiet, yet protect against cactus and snakebite. Now Nantan will lead you in the first exercise."

Nantan was shorter, nearer Walpi's height, and had a slender frame. But he was wiry, with determination on his face, and he could move swiftly. "Sit down cross-legged, in place. Close your eyes and take deep, slow breaths. Concentrate on your breathing in and out. Think of nothing else. This will clear your mind to focus on the training, and prepare you to go into combat."

Following directions, Caleb joined Shanni, Matal and the others in sitting and doing the breathing exercise. Walpi had made an astounding speech, he thought. And Walpi obviously had given thought to what he would say, knowing the importance of getting the group focused. But there was so much to do, and so little time. Even now, they should be planning...

"Quiet!" Nantan's command broke the stillness. "All of you are letting your minds wander. Stop it and concentrate on your breathing!"

How did he know? Caleb thought, and then he realized that Nantan knew what they would do until they learned to quiet their minds. The mind raced along until it became a habit. As a result, one was always thinking of other things, and never centered in the "now". Caleb began to appreciate the real meaning of focus.

Sheepishly, he concentrated on his breathing, in and out, feeling his agitation melt away. He felt his pulse beating, slowly and steadily, and heard his breaths, long and unhurried. He began to relax and a feeling of serenity and well being engulfed him. So this was what it felt like to be centered. He felt alert and ready, unhurried and confident. His total focus was on the training. He was ready to begin.

Tonah watched the training with interest from his vantage point on a ledge overlooking the camp. The sight of the Huastecs doing drills in unison under the direction of Walpi was gratifying. At last they were implementing a plan essential to the success of their quest to travel to the Center, and to their survival as they faced untold dangers.

He watched as individuals stopped to wipe perspiration. Some were already going to the shelter for water. They had never worked out like this, and the test would be how many could continue when

sore muscles and fatigue began to set in. But somehow they must find a way through it. As Walpi had said, this was no game. Failure in games meant second-best, and perhaps loss of face. Failure in combat meant death, there was no second-best, and they would all face many battles before their quest was achieved.

He saw Aurel climbing up the narrow path toward him. Aurel sat down and joined Tonah in watching the men and women working on the training field.

“Tonah, have I failed you?” Aurel opened, a troubled look on his face.

“Why, no. Why do you ask?” Tonah replied, surprised.

“In your battles in the spirit world, you relied on Caleb Stone, Matal and even Shanni. As your apprentice, I do not understand why you did not use me.”

“Put your mind at rest. Those were not training exercises. Even I faced evil I had not met before. To defeat them, I needed the strength developed by experienced adults. In adversity some develop strong wills, and that was what I needed to prevail. You have the skills but not yet the years to develop a strong resolve.”

“What about Matal? He’s only a few years older than me.”

“It is not about years. Matal is blessed with a strong personality and natural leadership. But even his lack of testing was almost our undoing.”

“Then I must get the experience if I am to grow,” Aurel said. “Skill in sorcery is not enough, and yet you forbade me to train with the warriors.”

“You have great natural ability in the arts, and I have invested a great deal of training in you,” Tonah replied. “Your greatest contribution to the Huastecs will be in sorcery. As a warrior, you would be exposed to the danger of a premature death. All your potential would be lost to us.”

“But my full potential as a sorcerer requires me to develop resolve. I can only do that if I am actively engaged in the Huastecs’ struggle. I must ask you to reconsider.”

Tonah pondered before answering. Was he being too cautious and jeopardizing the very talent he sought to protect? Aurel was young, in his early teens, and already he sought to train with the adults.

“Ah, I wish the correct path would show itself,” he said finally. “When I am in doubt, I cast about for a sign.”

“In the meantime, what could it hurt? I could train and build both physical and mental strength. Maybe by then we would both know if that is the path I should follow.”

“I cannot argue with your logic, but so much of life cannot be addressed with logic. Despite my misgivings, if you want to participate so badly, you have my blessing, but it must not interfere with our sorcery training.”

Aurel jumped up, smiling. “It won’t, and thank you, Tonah! This is the right path for me. I know it, and you will come to see it is so!”

“Already I feel better about it,” Tonah replied, responding to Aurel’s enthusiasm. “But for now it is on a trial basis. We will see how things develop before we fully commit to it.”

“I understand. Now please excuse me, I must go. Already they have started without me!”

“But you are young,” Tonah laughed at the retreating figure. “You will catch up!”