

BIRTH OF THE MORTOKAI
THE FIRST CHRONICLE OF DANIEL WELSH

By

D G Palmer

Prologue

The smoke and vapours from the cauldron rose wistfully into the rafters. Shadows danced on the walls, as the fire it rested on crackled and spat. The flames licked the sides of the silver gilt kettle as its contents violently bubbled away.

The bulbous boiler was exquisitely crafted. An intricately designed gold relief depicted a hunt; wondrous creatures being chased by what looked like men on horseback. It had seen countless use over its long lifetime, a fact supported by the telltale marks, the blackening of its underside and the watermark around the rim, suggesting the many concoctions that had been brewed up within its depths.

The pyre beneath the cauldron was the only source of light within the musty, stone-clad room, which had no windows or doors. The organic nature of the flame, which seemed to give life to the inanimate objects around it, moved and swayed, the dark shadows it projected cavorted with it.

Suddenly, the very air began to shimmer and a small hole opened in the void. It widened rapidly until the portal was large enough to allow a man clad in dark clothing to step through. He waved a hand nonchalantly and the portal vanished behind him.

Gydion strode purposefully toward his cauldron. His dark grey robes swung back and forth loosely around his arms and legs. In the darkness its hood hid all but his pointed black beard. He looked into the large pot and breathed the distinctive aroma deep into his lungs. Satisfied with the state of the mixture,

Gydion opened his robe and from a hidden pocket withdrew three bundles: flowers of oak, flowers of broom and flowers of meadowsweet. He tossed these final ingredients into the brew and watched as a large plume of white smoke wafted into the air. The acrid smell that had prevailed was quickly replaced by the sweet fragrant smell of the blossoms, which prompted Gydion to nod his hooded head in approval; it was time.

He pushed the embroidered sleeves of his robes away from his hands, revealing more of his sinewy forearms. Holding his hands out in front of him, his fingers extended as far as they could reach, he began to recite powerful arcane words. Runes appeared, one by one, on the ground around the cauldron and pulsed a brilliant green. His eyes were closed as he concentrated on each word that passed his lips. All he had done before would be for nothing if he made a mistake in casting the spell.

Gydion began to create intricate shapes and patterns with his hands, as the conjuration continued unabated. A light shone from within the cauldron, growing brighter and brighter, as if in tandem with the mage's voice, which became louder and louder, his casting of the spell becoming more insistent.

Without warning, everything stopped. Gydion ceased casting and straightened his sleeves. The runes disappeared. The fire died down and eventually extinguished itself. The only aspect remaining in the room to suggest any sorcery had taken place was the light shining from the cauldron. The light, though dimmer than it had been during the spell cast, was still bright enough to illuminate the chamber.

Suddenly something stirred within the cauldron. Inch-by-inch, what looked to be an auburn-haired teenage girl rose from the depths of the bulbous pot. When she finally stood fully erect, she opened her green eyes for the first time and looked around, taking in her surroundings. When her gaze finally rested on Gydion she gave him a warm smile of daughterly affection. His response was to remove his hood and look at her sternly with his dark eyes. They held an unimaginable amount of wisdom, garnered from hundreds of years of study and from seeing the many realms. The wrinkles at the corner of his eyes and the few speckles of grey hair in his beard did little to betray the true age of the mage.

He scrutinised her with an examining look, almost boring into her very being. When he was satisfied with his investigation, Gydion softened his face and gave her a small smile. 'How do you feel?' he asked gently, as he held out his hand for her to take. She did so happily and stepped out of the cauldron. The solution dripped from her body and she left wet footprints as she padded on the hard stone floor.

'I feel cold,' she replied stoically. 'And wet.'

'Of course,' he stated with a slight chuckle. 'Just a moment.' With that he held out his hands, palms facing upwards, and quietly recited a spell. As he finished speaking, a delicate, red silken gown appeared and he handed it to the appreciative girl.

'Thank you, Father, it's beautiful,' she smiled as she held up the vestments before slipping it on over her head.

'What do you think of Trinity?' Gydion suddenly asked her.

‘What?’

‘For a name,’ he replied. ‘Where we are going you’ll need a name so that you can blend in. I was thinking of Trinity Evergreen.’

She mused over the name. ‘Trinity Evergreen?’ She said it slowly and then quickly, as if trying to get a feel for it. ‘Yes, I like it. Where will we be going?’

‘Lady Rhiannon has tasked me with finding a deserter who is in a vision she has had. I, however, am tasking you with finding someone else, and we will find these people on the Earth realm. Now, we must go to the library as there are many things that you will need to learn while we search for our respective missing persons.’

‘Yes, Father,’ Trinity nodded as she followed Gydion through the portal he had just conjured. Within in seconds they and the portal had vanished.

1

Daniel Welsh was running for his life. That was the feeling he had deep down inside. He could feel his heart pounding rapidly and his blood rushing through his body as it went into survival mode. 'Fight or flight,' that was what it was called; he had seen it on a wildlife programme on *National Geographic*. His mind was a little distracted at that moment, but he was sure it was about the Serengeti, or could it have been the Masai Mara? Either way, it had involved a pride of lions hunting a herd of gazelles. It was how the body reacted to a threat; turn and face it or turn and flee from it. He was more than happy to choose the latter, as he pumped his arms and legs as fast as he could because he knew what the consequence would be if he slowed down. He was not looking to be that gazelle anytime soon.

The 'lion' that was chasing him down right now was Bobby Brinkmeyer, captain of the school rugby team and his two cronies, Jack Thompson and Willis Jeffries. Daniel was astonished at how fast he was for a big guy. If he kept running in a straight line he would be caught in no time. He needed to take some evasive action.

The wind blew into his face as he sprinted down roads, in between people and past shop fronts. Daniel could feel his sunglasses bouncing up and down on his nose, as they threatened to fly off at any moment. The strings on the hood of his jacket were pulled tight; to make sure it was secure during his rigours, just as he always had them when he was out in the sunlight, to protect himself. Doctors had told his parents, when he was younger, that because of his albinism he was

more susceptible to the sun's ultraviolet light. His skin and hair were as white as ivory. Not only could he burn more easily, but the chances of him developing skin cancer were increased. The sunglasses he wore were to protect his yellow eyes from the photosensitivity they had due to the lack of melanin pigments.

He could understand why they called him Ghost Face, but it did not mean that he had to like it. It had just gotten too much for him, all the teasing, the bullying, being the butt of all the jokes. It had been going on for so long. When Daniel told his parents all about it, his mother had told him to just ignore them and they would get bored and eventually move onto their next victim. His father however had told him that bullies did not like to be confronted and that he would have to stand up to them one day. Today had been that day but things had not gone as he had hoped.

Daniel's weekday had begun as it always had done, with him waiting at the corner of the school gates until the last minute, when everyone else had gone to their classes. He stood against the wall trying as hard as he could to be inconspicuous and invisible. Sometimes he felt that it was actually working, especially when two girls walked right past him without even taking a sideways glance. He wished it could be like that always, with nobody taking any notice of him. Where he would be regarded as normal.

He had one last quick look around the grounds before making his way inside. The halls were empty, as he desired, with just the faint sounds of learning coming from rooms as he past them; pupils umming and ahing their way through queries, while tutors droned through text unenthusiastically.

When he reached room 9 he stretched out his hand to open the classroom door, but he hesitated when he heard Bobby's American voice answer a question posed to him by his tutor, Mr Dram. Daniel was about to walk off and head towards the library, his only true refuge at school, when he heard the hurried footsteps of someone running down the hall towards him. He turned just in time to see Trinity Evergreen rush round the corner and come to a panting halt in front of him.

She had transferred from another school only two weeks ago and from the first time he had seen her, Daniel had been taken by her glistening eyes, which were as green as her name suggested. Her floral aroma wafted past his nose and he couldn't help but inhale it. He didn't think she heard him do it as she flicked her auburn-coloured tresses forward and then back, before sliding an Alice band through her hair to keep it out of her oval-shaped, demure face. He noticed that her English rose cheeks were more flushed than usual, which, he reasoned, was probably due to her run just now. Today she had a small gold hoop in the left side of her nose where usually she had a diamond stud. The white floral maxi skirt she wore flowed around her legs, as if she were walking through a meadow on a spring morning, and her gladiator sandals showed off the deep purple, glitzy nail polish she had on her toes.

'Phew!' she exhaled, 'I'm not the only one late.'

Daniel was struck dumb by the fact that she had spoken to him. 'Uh huh,' was all he could reply, his mouth slightly open in a shocked expression.

'Well?' she smiled, as she grabbed his arm. 'Are you going in or not?' She opened the classroom door and literally dragged him stumbling inside.

'Well, well, well,' Mr Dram said. 'So nice of you to join us, Ms Evergreen, and you, too, Mr Welsh. Just because you two are the brightest in the year doesn't mean you can turn up to classes whenever you want.'

Daniel made his way to his usual chair at the back, it's not that I'm brighter than everyone else, he thought to himself, having this photographic memory just means I can retain information indefinitely. Is that true intelligence? The ability to regurgitate facts and figures at will? That's all it takes to pass exams; they're merely a test of how much you can remember throughout the year. Unfortunately for me, I remember everything I've read. Would it be enough in the real world? Probably not, unless I intended to make a career out of participating in general knowledge quizzes.

Trinity took her seat in the front row. She turned and smiled at Daniel just as he took off his shades and pushed his hood off his head. He briefly smiled shyly back at her, before getting down to his work. She shuffled in her chair as she too knuckled down to her assignment.

Time passed and the buzzer finally sounded to signify the end of the lesson. The familiar sound of chairs being pushed back and scraped along the floor could be heard all around the college. It was lunchtime and everyone was rushing to find out what was on the menu and also to get a good seat for them and their friends.

Daniel didn't usually bother with lunch. With all the students in that giant hall at once, any bullying would be under a microscope and, ultimately, intensified. He always compared it with what it must have been like to witness an execution at the Coliseum; bloody, messy and with all the onlookers baying for more. And then there were all the stares. Hundreds of eyes trained on him, watching every move he made, every mouthful he took. That's why, to avoid the unwanted attention, ordinarily at this time Daniel could be found hiding himself away in a corner of the library with a book and eating a chocolate bar. It was his sanctuary. This all too frequent practice of missing meals was the major contribution to his slim physique. He was glad that physical education was no longer on his curriculum; at least he avoided having to hear the skeleton jibes or have boys trying to play his ribs like a xylophone as he changed into his kit.

Daniel broke from his usual routine and ventured into the dinner hall for one reason; Trinity Evergreen. He wouldn't describe what they had shared as 'a moment', but she had spoken to him, and only tutors ever said more than two words to him. She had also spoken with a smile, and the tutors never did that. His expectations weren't high; he just thought it would be a welcome change to actually have a study partner that actually wanted to study *with* him and not study him.

It had been awhile since he had last been in here but things didn't seem to have changed much, including the menu. Daniel picked up a tray and walked along the counter. He took a plate of what looked liked Beef Stroganoff with roasted vegetables but smelled like something completely different. After adding

a carton of drink and a bowl of dessert, Daniel paid at the till and then turned to look for a seat.

The sea of heads was unnerving to Daniel and the cacophony they were making, as they each raised their voice to be heard, was making it hard for him to hear his own thoughts. He inched his way down the aisle, his head bowed down, not wanting to make eye contact with anyone and draw attention to himself. But no one seemed to be taking any notice of him, as if he wasn't even there. Then he had a sense that someone was staring at him and he couldn't help but glance up.

Trinity was smiling at him with an even bigger smile than she had given him in the classroom. He looked back at her and she was all he could see; it was like everything else had faded to grey and she was the only bright spot in the hall. A smile crept across his face.

Slowly Daniel made his way to the table where Trinity sat alone. Thoughts of what he would say to her ran through his mind, but before he had a chance to implement any of his ideas, the New Age girls, who had been walking from the opposite end of the aisle, rushed to fill the empty seats.

The smile that had been on his face vanished and Trinity couldn't hide her look of disappointment as the lonely figure of Daniel walked pass. That look quickly turned to one of concern as she saw Bobby creeping down the aisle. Her misgivings were proved right when he shoved Daniel hard in the back, sending the much lighter boy staggering down the walkway as he tried desperately to keep his balance. He might have been successful, if someone hadn't stuck out their leg and tripped him.

Daniel lay sprawled out on the floor in his Beef Stroganoff. The howls of laughter were deafening. The only person he imagined not laughing was Trinity. He hoped so anyway. He just got up and ran out as fast as he could without bothering to look back to check

It wasn't until he had reached the lavatories that he stopped. He could feel the tears burning in his eyes as he sat down in a cubicle. Tears of anger directed at that American oaf and his goons. Tears of frustration at being taunted and ridiculed about something he couldn't change. Tears of embarrassment at being made to look a fool in front of Trinity.

He pulled off some toilet paper and tried to clean himself up the best he could. He had already decided that there was no way he was going to attend afternoon lectures after this.

'Daniel, are you in here?'

The sound of Trinity's soft voice made him freeze. As much as he wanted to, he was just too embarrassed to speak to her right now, so he kept quiet. He heard the banging of the doors to the other cubicles as Trinity started to check them one by one. Finally, she approached the one Daniel was in and sniffed the air. 'You can try and hide all you want. I know you're in there. I can smell you. I can smell that...that stuff on you.'

He looked down at the brown mess on his shirt. 'Great, just great,' he said under his breath, and then he spoke through the door. 'What are you doing here, Trinity?'

'I just wanted to make sure you're ok,' she replied, full of concern.

‘What would your clique say about that?’

‘I don’t care, besides, they’re not *my* clique,’ Trinity stated as she leant against the door. ‘Look, when I started here they flocked to *me*; it wasn’t the other way around. I guess it’s because I know a bit about crystals and stuff like that.’

‘So you told them you were coming after me then?’ Daniel asked.

She paused as she decided whether to lie or not. ‘No, I didn’t,’ she said truthfully.

‘So much for “I don’t care”, huh? You’re no different to the rest of them.’

Trinity took offence at the remark and let him know exactly how much, by kicking the door in anger. ‘Look, Daniel, I didn’t have to come here! If I were like the others, as you say I am, I wouldn’t have. I’d be sitting in the hall eating my food and having a good laugh at your expense. But here I am, concerned about you, and if you can’t see that I’m different to the rest of them, then I guess I’m wasting my time here!’

Silence reigned supreme as neither of them spoke for what seemed like an age. Eventually, Trinity shook her head and with a disappointed sigh turned and began to make her way back to the dining hall. She really thought she could get through to him. The sound of a cubicle lock being slid open stopped her in her tracks.

‘I’m sorry,’ Daniel said sheepishly.

'It's ok,' she said as she approached him. 'I'm sorry for what happened to you.'

'It's just another day in the life of Daniel Welsh.'

'But it shouldn't have to be. You're special, Daniel.'

'Special needs, you mean?'

'No. I mean special as in *special*.'

Before Trinity could continue, the door behind them opened and a boy stood in the doorway staring at them. He looked at Daniel then Trinity, then at Daniel and back to Trinity again. A grimace came over his face and he started to hop from foot to foot. Then Trinity remembered where they were.

'I think we should go and talk somewhere else,' she said to Daniel, suddenly becoming sympathetic to the boy's needs. They heard a loud groan of relief as they walked away.

2

It wasn't long before they were sitting in the quiet surrounds of the library; a much more appropriate location for them to meet. The library was a well-stocked place of study. It was laid out over two levels; the upper level housed rooms for quiet study and the reference books, the lower level had all the other books against the walls and in tall shelving along the length of the library, on either side of the rows of desks that ran down the centre.

Mrs Berry, the school librarian, greeted Daniel and Trinity as warmly as she always did. She believed in the power of the written word and she kept her library in immaculate condition, even though these two were the only students that ever utilised it.

The two classmates sat down opposite each other at a desk at the back. Sunlight streamed through the large arched windows and the rays warmed the wood of the table.

'So,' Daniel dragged the word out for all it was worth, 'here we are.'

'Yes,' Trinity replied, 'here we are.' She absentmindedly played with the shards of light that streamed through the window, casting shadows across the desk; something weighed heavily on her mind. 'Does it bother you?' she asked all of a sudden. 'Not being able to go out in the sun.'

'*I am* out,' he said whilst throwing his arms out in a wide gesture.

'You *know* what I mean, Daniel. Having to cover up like its winter. Not feeling the sun on your skin, the warmth or its healing energy. Does it get to you?'

He rocked back in his chair and gave some thought to what she was asking. 'It used to,' he replied after a few moments. 'A lot more when I was a kid than now. Now I'm used to it, it's like second nature. I don't even think about it. But back then I'd watch films, mostly Bond, and see Caribbean islands and stuff like that and know that it'd never be me. I thought I'd burst into flames like a vampire nightwalker. No sun, sea and sand for this dude. I've always wanted to go to Antigua or St Barts or the Seychelles and the Maldives. Then there's Natal in Brazil; I've read that the coastal waters around there stay at a constant twenty-eight degrees.'

'What if you could go to all of them?'

'Then I'd be gone in a shot. No need to offer me a second time,' he chuckled sombrelly. 'Some people's dreams can come true, unfortunately, mine never will.'

'But what if one day they could? Hypothetically speaking, of course. What if they could?' She thought a moment as she still tried to gage Daniel's reaction, 'but you had to take on some sort of, I don't know, let's say some sort of *extra* responsibility, would you?'

Daniel sat there and looked at her with a quizzical face. 'What the heck are you on about?'

'Don't worry about it,' she said with a nonchalant wave of her hand. 'I was just trying to get to know you, especially if we're going to be study partners.'

'Study partners?'

'Yes. That is what you want, right?'

'Yeah! Yeah of course! Actually that's what I was going to ask you at lunch.'

'I was hoping you would,' she smiled that winning smile of hers. 'I actually kind of had a feeling.'

'Oh, then you must be *special* too then,' Daniel stated with a sarcastic smile.

'More than you could imagine.' There was a hint of playful mystery to Trinity's reply.

'I don't know, I could imagine quite a lot.'

'*Star Wars*? You're quoting *Star Wars*?'

'Would you prefer I quoted *Pretty Woman*?'

'Only if you want me to start teasing you too!' she exclaimed in a matter-of-fact way. Then they both burst out laughing. The day was fast becoming Daniel's best one at college. He hadn't laughed and smiled this much in ages, and he knew it was all down to Trinity. Usually around people he felt tense and on edge. He was always half expecting people to start whispering and pointing at him. But she seemed to have a calming, relaxing affect on him; around her he found it easy to open up and be himself. It was a feeling he could learn to get used to.

'So, study buddy, tell me about your parents. What do they do?' she asked after they had both composed themselves.

'Well, my dad's a construction foreman and my mum's a doctor. What about yours?'

'It's just my father and me; he's a professor. My mother left when I was still young.'

'I'm sorry.'

'Don't be, you weren't to know.'

'Have you ever thought about trying to find her?'

'No.'

The abruptness of her reply let Daniel know that this subject was a no-go area. 'Your dad being a professor explains your own smarts. You must get lots of home schooling. Do you feel pressure to succeed because of him?'

'I am who I am because of him. He's a great man, you'll see for yourself one day. I'm sure he'll want to meet you.'

'You know, you still haven't told me what you meant by me being special,' stated Daniel suddenly.

Trinity looked down at her hands. 'Yeah, about that, I shouldn't have said anything to you,' she replied looking down at her hands with regret.

'But you did.'

'And it wasn't my place to.'

Daniel gave her a confused look. 'Ok now I'm curious. What's with all the mystery?'

She continued to look at her hands intently, as her eyebrows furrowed and she began biting her lower lip. She gave little nods and slight shakes of her head, plus the occasional shrug of her shoulders. All the while Daniel watched her inquisitively as she had a deep, thoughtful conversation in her head.

'Right!' Trinity shouted as she slammed her hands down on the table, which made Daniel jump in his chair. Mrs Berry shushed them from her desk. She apologised to the librarian and then huddled closer to Daniel and whispered to him conspiratorially. 'Ok, I'll let you know. I think it's only fair that you should have some foreknowledge, because sooner rather than later your life will change.'

'Well, that doesn't sound ominous at all,' he said sarcastically.

'It's supposed to,' she replied with an air of seriousness. 'Magic is not to be trifled with lightly.'

'Wait a minute. You're kidding, right?' Daniel said as he leaned back in his chair with an exasperated look. He was expecting some ground-breaking revelation, not this. 'This is what this is about? David Blaine, Dynamo stuff?'

'Don't be idiotic, Daniel, I'm not talking about card tricks,' she said as she put her hand into her satchel. She brought it back out and held it before her, palm up, so Daniel could see what she held. In her hand lay a multifaceted olive-green rectangular gem. 'I'm talking about *real* magic.'

Trinity stared at the gemstone unblinkingly and Daniel watched her just as intently. Her eyes were mesmerising him once again, and then he noticed that they were beginning to glow brighter. Her lips moved but he could barely hear

the words she was speaking, they sounded almost melodic. Then the stone's core started to throb with an incandescent light. As it did so it began to levitate slightly above her hand. As she spoke he could feel something pulse through his body in time with the light coming from the gem; he likened it to a surge of adrenalin, but this was somehow different.

'You can feel it, cant you, the magic in the air? It's called essence. It's everywhere, within all the dimensional realms and it courses through our bodies also, some more than others.' Trinity briefly looked at Daniel as she said this to gauge his reaction, then she sat back in her chair, leaving the gem floating above the desk. 'It's what is spent when we cast spells. The more powerful the spell, the more essence is used up. It's like physical activity in that respect. The more you do, the more stamina you use, the more you tire; essence works the same way. This spell, for instance, costs practically nothing.'

Daniel looked at the gem in wide-eyed wonder. He couldn't believe what he was seeing. It had to be some sort of trick, he thought, as he edged out a speculative finger towards it, but stopped himself just short of touching it. 'What is it?'

'It's just a peridot crystal. Earth fairies are closely involved in their formation so they have a strong connection to them.'

'I meant the spell,' Daniel corrected, but then paused a moment as he processed what Trinity had actually said. 'Wait! What? Faeries? Are you kidding?'

'Yes, Faeries,' she smiled. 'The Fae, the Fair Folk, the Enchanted People, whatever you want to call them. Dwarfs, Elves, Orcs, Trolls, Ogres. They're all

real, and more besides. If you don't believe me take the gem, put it to your eye and look over there.'

Daniel tentatively plucked the gem out of the air. He treated it as if it were a delicate piece of archaeology. Once he held it in his hand, however, he could feel exactly how solid and sturdy it actually was. He slowly brought it up to his left eye and peered through its centre. Everything appeared in lustrous, iridescent colours.

'Don't look at me, look over there,' Trinity said, pointing to a corner behind Daniel.

He turned in his seat to follow the direction she indicated. There was something huddled in the corner. What it was he couldn't be sure. All the rainbow colours he was seeing obscured his vision and made it difficult to pinpoint anything.

Trinity could see the knot in Daniel's brow as he strained to see what she could. She knew that she was going to be in trouble for what she had already told him, so she thought that she might as well make it worthwhile and show him too. 'What you have to do, Daniel, is rotate the crystal to increase the focus.'

He turned back to face the corner and manipulated the peridot in front of his eye. As the lustrous colours faded into the more visually recognisable colour palette of real life, he was able to make out the sleeping form of what he thought was a small child snoring in the corner. He moved closer to get a better look, however, he still couldn't tell what it was. All he could really see was that the figure had long, black wiry hair and was dressed in a rough green waistcoat and

trousers that may have been white at one time but were now a dirty grey. Then the figure rolled over in its sleep. The face looked liked that of an old, wizened man with a large warty nose.

‘What you staring at, long shanks?’ the creature shouted. ‘Can’t a fella sleep in peace?’

The sight was such a shock to Daniel that he jumped back in his chair with such force that he fell off it and landed on a heap on the floor, which drew another, even more stern shush from Mrs berry and sniggers from Trinity.

Daniel looked at her in confusion as he stood up and dusted himself off. ‘What is that...that thing?’ he asked.

‘It’s not a *thing*, it’s a Hobthrust,’ she corrected.

‘Oh right, of course. How could I be so stupid?’ said Daniel sarcastically.

‘Some call them Hobgoblins, others Kobolds or Brownies. They’re House Elves. They keep homes clean and tidy, it’s what they do. You never thought the college cleaners did this whole building by themselves did you? They’re good, but they’re not that good,’ she smiled.

‘A Hobthrust?’ he mused, as he looked at the apparently empty corner it lay in. ‘Why can’t I see it without the gem?’

‘Why would you?’ she asked. ‘They disappeared from sight when people as a whole stopped believing in Fae. When they preferred to follow a scientific, so-called logical outlook on life, but they didn’t cease to exist. Most returned home but some remained here. Having belief can be a powerful thing, Daniel. It’ll

help with your magic. What you'll need to do is learn the spells and conjurations, as well as the meditative exercises to increase your essence control. Look at me; I've been speaking like you've already made your decision to become an Adept. It's wrong for me to assume, especially when...'

Before she could finish her sentence, the bell sounded, signalling the end of the lunch break. It was the moment that Daniel had been dreading. Whilst he had been talking to Trinity, nothing else had occupied his mind. He had forgotten all about school, the people, even the mess on his shirt. The only thing that had concerned him was the relaxed atmosphere and the normal conversation he had had with her, or as normal as a conversation about Faeries, Hobthrusters and magic could ever be. To be honest, he hadn't believed what she was telling him, not at the beginning anyway. Telling him that he was some sort of mage, or rather had the potential to be one, seemed a bit far-fetched, but the floating gem had fascinated him, and he had to admit that he had felt something when she was supposedly casting a spell. But the clincher had been the creature asleep in the corner. He had no rational explanation for it. Trinity, however, did. The question on his mind now was did he believe it all? And the answer he came to, inevitably, was that she had no reason to lie.

3

Trinity and Daniel bid farewell to Mrs Berry. As they left, the librarian made a comment about being happy at seeing her two favourite students working together. The fact that they were the only students that she saw in any sort of regularity and the only two that she knew well enough to stop and converse with probably helped with her assessment.

The two students headed down the corridor towards their next class. They had talked casually as they walked, covering subjects synonymous with small talk; the weather, new CDs out, latest movie releases. Daniel had even told her about his interest in history and historical items.

As they approached room 101, the location of their next lecture, Daniel determined it was time to make his confession.

'I think this is as far as I go. I've decided not to go to afternoon lectures, Trinity. I've had about all I can take of this muck on me,' he stated.

'You should have said. I wouldn't have dragged you all the way up here otherwise,' she replied a little disappointed.

'I wanted to come. Trust me, if it wasn't for this stuff I'd stay. I...I've enjoyed your company.' He found it difficult to divulge his feelings. He had put up so many barriers and had been so guarded throughout his life that he had become a virtual emotional recluse. But now he felt himself opening once again.

'I've enjoyed spending time with you too,' Trinity smiled. 'Ok, if you're going to go, let me show you one last thing.'

She looked into the classroom through the window and saw that only the lecturer was there. She deduced that she still had a few minutes before the class began, so she took Daniel by the hand, felt his slim fingers interlock with her own, and led him to an empty adjacent room. Once inside she set about rearranging things by pushing two tables together. She persuaded Daniel to lay on them, despite his reluctance.

‘What’s this all about?’

‘Well,’ Trinity began. ‘I’m not being funny, but you’re a little tense and a little stiff too. To make the best use of the meditation exercises that you will be taught you need to be able to relax, both mentally and physically. Tension is a major barrier between magic and us. What I’m going to teach you now will help you to prepare.’

‘Look, Trinity, I still haven’t made a decision, but the way you’re talking it’s almost like I have no real choice in the matter either. I wasn’t even sure I believed you at first, to be honest.’ He saw the despondent look on her face when he said this. ‘But I do now, it’s hard not to when you’re confronted with a grumpy Hobthrust.’

‘I was going to say something to you earlier, before the bell, but didn’t get the chance to. Being a mage is difficult. It brings a lot of responsibility and takes a lot of dedication. It opens your mind to new things, some wondrous, some dangerous. You should understand that it is a big decision, and not one to be taken lightly.’

‘How is it you know so much?’

‘One of the benefits of having a professor for a father, I guess.’ She deliberately avoided Daniel’s sceptical gaze, as she pushed him back down onto the table. ‘Right, let’s begin. Close your eyes and focus on your breathing. Now, you should be getting a feeling of warmth growing at the top of your head. This is your essence. Allow it to flow down your face and neck, taking away all tension as it moves. Feel it pass over your shoulders, arms, hands and fingers. Now it flows through your torso and finally travels down your legs and feet. How do you feel?’

‘I feel totally relaxed and serene. And a sensation of wellbeing and I’m kind of floaty, I guess,’ Daniel replied, still laying on the table with his eyes closed.

Suddenly, a purple haze became visible around Daniel. It silently flickered and flared about him like it was made of flames, but it gave off no heat. Trinity stared at it in open-mouthed wonder. She had only seen someone’s essence projected so strongly once before, and her father was hundreds of years old. Just as swiftly as it had appeared, the vapour abruptly vanished. She helped him to sit up and he looked at her with the biggest beaming smile she had ever seen on his face.

‘I think we may have over done the relaxation a little bit. Though that technique is used to relieve, tension it can also be used to replenish your essence,’ Trinity said.

‘You smell like oak, broom and meadowsweet. Like blossoms in a field on a spring day,’ Daniel exuded in a euphoric tone.

'Ok, we've definitely over done it,' she stated with a nervous grin. One of the side effects of having too much essence than a new adept can handle is heightened senses and also a feeling of literally being drunk on power. Luckily for Trinity, this second effect stopped Daniel from divining her true nature.

'I could smell you all day,' he said as he inhaled deeply with pleasure. Then, without warning, he placed his ear to Trinity's chest, making her gasp with surprise. 'And your heartbeat is funny, too.'

'Well, well, well, isn't this cosy,' Bobby Brinkmeyer exclaimed, as he burst through the door followed by his two cronies, Jack and Willis. 'Is this a freaks only party, or can anyone join in?'

'What do you want, Bobby?' His sudden appearance had angered Trinity.

'It's just so nice to see that two people like you, with your obvious afflictions, can find each other in this day and age. I mean who's going to want to be with a ghost-faced skinny wretch like him except a crazy, hippy, tree hugging freak like you?' he laughed.

'Shut up, Bobby,' Daniel said.

'You're kind of cute,' Bobby stated to Trinity, as he ignored the sobering Daniel. 'If it wasn't for all your nature and crystals madness, I might have been interested in you myself.'

'Shut up, Bobby!'

'I'd let you tag along and cheer me on at my games.' The American again ignored Daniel. 'And if you were a good girl, I'd even let you kiss the captain.' He

puckered up his lips and made kissing sounds towards a disgusted Trinity whilst his associates laughed. The laughing suddenly stopped, however, as an angered, frustrated and slightly woozy Daniel connected a punch on Bobby's outstretched lips, sending him crashing over some desk chairs.

'I think you should run,' Trinity stated turning to Daniel.

'Run?' he questioned.

She nodded. 'Run.'

He didn't need to be told again and he pushed past the two astonished lackeys and sprinted out of the room.

'What are you two jokers waiting for?' Bobby said as he got to his feet and rubbed his lips. 'Get him!'

The three boys rushed out after Daniel, leaving Trinity alone. She closed the door, so as not to be disturbed, and then went to the window and waited. Within moments she saw the distinctive form of Daniel running across the college grounds, shortly followed by Bobby and his boys. She couldn't help but express a wistful smile as she watched her friend running away. Trinity didn't feel like she was being premature in calling him that. She liked him and she was sure that he felt the same. Daniel wasn't the first adept that she had found, but he was the first one that she had connected with; she and her father had been searching all over the world for a special adept since they first arrived in this realm. Now she was sure she had found him.

Trinity turned from the window and went back to the tables she had joined together. She climbed onto them, sat cross-legged and opened her bag. Two crystals were taken out and she held one in each hand upon her knees. Her eyes closed and she began to fall into a trance, just as she had taught Daniel. The gems began to glow, an indicator that Trinity had tapped into her essence as she sent out a telepathic call.

'Father, I have found him,' she spoke out in a quiet, dreamy voice. She knew that Gydion wouldn't need to perform the meditation exercises, as she had done, such was his magical ability, and within moments he replied, his voice resounding in her thoughts.

'Are you positive he is the one?'

'Yes. I have seen his essence. His levels are far higher than anyone his age should be, especially since it is without any training.'

'You have seen it?' Gydion questioned. ***'Then that would mean you taught him the technique of Replenishment.'***

'I did, Father,' admitted Trinity reluctantly. She was only supposed to identify a boy of potential mage ability and report it to Gydion, so she prepared herself for the angry backlash, but was surprised when it didn't come.

'Very good. I had intended you to be a part of training the child once we had found them and if this is the one, as you say, then he must have some trust in you already. Bring him here so I may speak to him.'

'He has already left, but he does have one of my crystals. We should be able to track him easily enough. He seems close to his parents, so he will no doubt be home sooner rather than later.'

'Good. I wish to have words with the boy's father. If my suspicions are correct, it would seem that our work here is almost at an end, Trinity. Soon we will be on our way home.'

Their communication ended and Trinity uncrossed her legs and hopped off the table. As she put her stones away and made her way out of the room she thought about what her father had just said about going home. *This* was her home; it had been since she was 'born' fifty years ago. She wondered if Otherworld could really be called her home, even though she had never been there, just because she was Fae. If she were to go there, being there with Daniel would help; she just hoped that he was willing. She may have told him that he was a mage but she didn't tell him that in order to fulfil his potential, he would have to leave this realm and his family behind him.