

LINKED, ON THE LAKE OF SOULS

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FAR in the northern reaches of Anglas Herad, an eagle perched high in a tower of pine watched as a boat drifted on the lake below. He had seen plenty of boats before on other lakes where the humans engaged in fishing, an activity to which he could relate.

Never before, however, had he seen a boat on *this* lake, a lake even waterfowl had its wits to shun. The eagle cocked his head and blinked his golden eyes, his curiosity piqued.

The pair, he decided, were unlike the fishers he was accustomed to seeing. They dropped no netting over the side of the boat, and carried no bait. Nor did they dip paddles into the water to propel themselves along, for they had none.

Curiouser, and curiouser, the eagle thought.

The gleam of metal caught his eye and he dropped down a few branches to get a better look. One of the females was clad in a shirt of metal, but that was not all. They sat in the bottom of the boat, bound back-to-back by heavy chains, while individual sets of manacles clasped their ankles and wrists.

If all of this was not odd enough, one of the boat's occupants appeared intent on capsizing it, which would surely bring about undesired results for both.

The eagle ruffled his feathers and preened. He despaired of humankind ever using the intelligence it was gifted with at birth. The antics of the two in the boat only seemed to confirm his low opinion of the species.

Then one of the humans cried out. The eagle paused in his preening and refocused his gaze on the boat. The cry had been a warning tinged with panic.

"Myrene!"

The boat lurched as the warrior shifted to peer over its side. Of course, any move Myrene made, Tiphane was forced to make as well.

"What? I just want to see how deep the water is."

"Trust me," Tiphane said, "it is quite deep. Deep and icy cold."

Myrene grunted, unconvinced.

Had they not been chained together back-to-back in the bottom of the boat, Tiphane would have seen Myrene's scowl. But Tiphane did not need to see it to know it was there, for the two had been working together for nearly three years now and had grown to know one another well. Too well, it sometimes seemed.

Myrene leaned even farther over the boat's edge, hauling her chain-bound partner with her. The boat listed at an alarming angle.

"You'll capsize us!" Tiphane cried.

"I just want to find out if I can see the bottom."

"You'll see it when we overturn and that lovely mail shirt you're so fond of, along with these chains, drag us under."

Their boat, a tiny, unstable coracle, floated on silken, calm water that reflected the brilliant autumnal colors cloaking the rounded mountains that ringed the lake. The lake was vast, and Tiphane said, icy cold, for it had once been a part of the great ice sheet that still lingered in the wastes beyond the mountains. And there was more waiting in the lake's depths than Myrene

could ever imagine.

"I don't intend to sink us," Myrene said. "If we aren't deep, maybe we can—"

When the coracle heeled enough for icy water to leak over its rim, Tiphane said, "Believe me, you don't want to see what's in the lake. There are—"

Myrene uttered a sudden, strangled cry and jerked away from the edge with such force the flat bottom of the coracle slapped the surface of the lake. She slumped against Tiphane, breathing ragged.

Tiphane was rather rattled herself from being wrenched around by her larger and stronger companion, and by a nightmarish vision that had flashed through her mind of the coracle capsizing and the two of them sinking inexorably downward into the lake's depths where phantom arms were outstretched to receive them. . . . Perspiration glided down her temple.

"Damnation, Tiph," Myrene whispered, when finally she caught hold of her. "Why didn't you tell me?"

Tiphane could feel Myrene trembling against her back. "I was about to tell you. I was going to tell you there is a reason it's called Lake of Souls."

The lake was crystal clear, though in the very middle, where it was said to be hundred feet deep, the sun penetrated only so far before it gave way to the dark. Even there, however, *they* could be seen; pale hair swirling around bloodless, cadaverous faces; dark eyes staring up, mouths gaping, arms of white flesh always reaching, reaching as if to haul the unwary into the depths with them. There were thousands of them.

"What are they?" Myrene asked.

"No one knows exactly," Tiphane said. "Perhaps they lived here before the ice. Perhaps they are lost souls seeking the company of the living. I do not know."

Myrene, not one to spook easily, shivered. She had seen more than her share of carnage on battlefields, Tiphane knew, but what this deceptively beautiful lake concealed beneath its dappled surface was another thing entirely.

A silence fell between them as the coracle, really nothing more than an oversized basket woven willow boughs with a hide stretched over it, bobbed down the middle of the lake tracking southward with the current.

"Are you sure you can't get the manacles off?" Myrene asked.

"I'm no lockpick," Tiphane said. "I'm a weaver of light and wind and rain. Besides, you've heard what Sedir said, and you've the runny nose to prove it."

"You've no idea how I long to wipe it." Myrene rattled her chains in frustration.

Their captor, the wizard Veidan Sedir of the Drakdorn Order, cursed be his name, had gone to great extent to ensure their torment. The coracle was held together not with the craft of an ancient boat

building craft of fishermen who netted salmon on the rivers, but with magic. The moment Tiphane attempted to touch her own gifts, even for the slightest of breezes to skim their shore, the coracle would unravel and they would sink into the waiting arms of the shadows beneath the water. A cold finger of fear slithered down her spine.

They knew Sedir had not lied about the nature of the magic that held the coracle together, for Myrene reacted to the casting of magical spells with sneezing fits. Her nose had started running the moment they were forced into the little boat.

It was a rather odd affliction Myrene suffered from, considering her constant companion Tiphane, was a priestess who used magic as a matter of course. But it was also useful in its own way, warning them when magic other than Tiphane's was afoot. Or, it could be a liability, as in this instance, for Myrene's sneeze had given them away to Sedir as they spied upon him in his hideout.

"We're drifting to the south end," Myrene said. "I wonder what awaits us there."

"A waterfall."

"A ..." Myrene was clearly too stunned to go on.

"It's the outlet of the lake. It's not a particularly big waterfall."

Myrene groaned. "That's just fine and good—a *small* waterfall."

Myrene was not known for her subtlety, and Tiphane knew her comrade blamed her for their current predicament. It was Tiphane who had insisted they follow the trail of deer tracks made by Veidan Sedir, leading to his hideout in the mountains.

Sedir and his adherents practiced magic that went against the laws of nature and Giv itself. He was no favorite of Myrene's either, but she had preferred the option of lying in wait in the valley until winter forced Sedir from the mountains. It was safer, she argued, tracking him into his own territory.

And here we are, Tiphane thought, *because I couldn't wait.* She supposed Myrene had been right of it, but she just couldn't have lived with herself if she'd allowed Sedir to run amok among the innocents who sheltered in tiny villages in the shadow of the mountains.

"We can't let Sedir wander the countryside doing blood magic at his leisure," Tiphane murmured more to herself than to her partner. "It goes against all our precepts." "*Your* precepts. You're the Givean priestess." "And you are my sworn Shield. Therefore you must uphold the same principles as I."

Myrene grumbled something unintelligible and sneezed, sending rings rippling outward from their coracle. Had they not been bound in chains, and had they not been floating on the Lake of Souls, it might have been an enjoyable excursion, for the scenery was breathtaking. The air, with the bite of oncoming winter in it, was exhilarating. An eagle soared through the clear sky above and screeched. Tiphane ached for its freedom. Myrene abruptly straightened, rocking the boat. "Can't you sit still?" Tiphane asked. Myrene tended to be all action and little thought, and it grated on more than her nerves, especially considering they were currently attached. "I thought I saw something moving along the shore." Tiphane craned her neck and scanned the shoreline. It was jumbled with talus from some long ago rockslide and thick with low-growing shrubbery. Some spindly evergreens grew up between the rocks.

"I don't see anything."

"By the big boulder."

Tiphane rolled her eyes. There were hundreds of huge rocks, some the size of a shepherd's cot. "*Which* big boulder?"

"The one . . . The one . . . Damnation. I've lost it now."

Tiphane sighed in irritation, and as they drifted, she thought about how many tight spots she and Myrene had gotten themselves into over the years, ever since her mentor Radm had brought them together. They'd met the night she had taken the Oath of Givean, which

occurred after ten years of study and prayer. She had relinquished her family, friends, and worldly goods to serve Givean.

The world was a dangerous place, and every priestess who chose the path of wand was paired with a protector. When Tiphane was in her last year of study, Myrene, a warrior who had been sold by her family to a mercenary company at a tender age, had been found among the dead after a terrible battle. Broken, bloody, and unconscious, she had been mistaken for a corpse until one of the gravediggers noticed her shallow breathing. She was brought to the Order for healing, a healing that almost failed because of her odd response to the use of magic. The priestesses had to depend mostly on conventional methods to save her.

While Myrene healed, she learned much about the good works of Givean. That, coupled with her brush with death, moved something deep within her mercenary spirit, and she changed her course in life to help others as she herself had been helped. By swearing to protect Tiphane, she swore herself to Givean.

It was understandable their tempers flared from time to time. Myrene, a woman of action, was helpless in her fetters. There was no constructive way to direct her rage, no way to lift sword and cut down the bastard who had put them in this position; the same bastard who had left the broken and shriveled bodies of people—men, women, children; the young and old alike—in his wake to foster his own powers and pay homage to Drakdorn, the god of unraveling and chaos.

Tiphane was likewise fettered, unable to touch her own magic for fear of drowning them. Of course, sooner or later, the water would take them, either in the clear, cold depths of the lake, or in the churning, whirling water pounding at the base of the waterfall.

"There it is again," Myrene said, chains clinking as she leaned forward. Water sloshed about the coracle at her sudden movement.

Tiphane scanned the distant shore, and this time she, too, saw something—someone—moving about the gigantic boulders.

"No doubt it's Sedir coming to watch us die," she muttered. "It is his kind of entertainment for us becoming one of his sacrifices."

"I would like to sacrifice *him*," Myrene said.

"You do have truly violent urges, don't you?"

"Yes," Myrene said, her voice filled with conviction.

Tiphane kept her eyes to the shore, watching for more movement. "That is not a very Givean attitude. Perhaps you should meditate on it, for Givean is the force of life, not death. Which was what made Sedir's depredations all the more loathsome to her and her Order.

Myrene snorted. "Since when has meditation saved you from bandits wielding clubs and swords on the road, hmm? I don't think meditation is going to unlock these manacles either. She rattled the chains for emphasis.

"It has occurred to me that violent urges are not helping—"

"Look," Myrene said, cutting her off. "There are three of them."

Tiphane saw them then, a flash of bright white, which could only be Sedir's robe, followed by two darker figures, one of which seemed to be struggling.

"One of the others must be Cha'korth," Myrene said. Cha'-korth was her own counterpart—Sedir's Shield.

"How much would you wager the third is another sacrifice?" Tiphane said. "It would be a good day for Sedir, you know, tormenting us by holding the sacrifice in front of us, before we die ourselves. He wants us to feel as helpless as possible."

As if to affirm their suspicions, Veidan Sedir called to them, his voice carrying easily across the water.

"Greetings, ladies! Such a lovely afternoon for boating, is it not? I thought, perhaps I might offer you a diversion from your own forthcoming deaths."

There was scuffling along the shore and the flash of a blade, and a scream that resounded off the mountains. When it faded, Sedir continued, "A first offering of blood to give Drako a taste of what is to follow."

Myrene snarled.

"The victim looks small to me," Tiphane said, narrowing her eyes against the glare of the sun on the water. "A young boy." The boy was putting up quite a fight despite whatever injury Cha'korth had inflicted upon him. "I can't simply sit here while they commit blood magic in front of me, and we drift to our deaths."

"Have you a plan?"

"No," Tiphane admitted. "You?"

"Maybe, and maybe not." Myrene fell into a long spell of silence before she spoke again. "We are drifting in a current which is taking us to the waterfall, correct?"

"Correct."

"What if we got out of the current, or at least tried to get out of the direct path of the waterfall?"

Tiphane watched as Sedir, his Shield, and his victim picked their way toward the lake's outlet. Preventing their own dive over its edge would solve one problem.

"What do you propose we do?" Tiphane asked.

"If we seesaw the coracle—"

"We'll swamp it."

"Not if we're careful."

"All right," Tiphane said, "and what happens if we make it to shore?"

"You're the one with the magic."

"Hmm. I was afraid you'd say that."

She sighed, noting that their current moved more swiftly now. Sedir paused by the lip of the waterfall, looking over the area as if to decide which rock would best serve as a sacrificial altar. Myrene's idea, she decided, was better than doing nothing and helplessly awaiting their fate.

"Let's try it," she said.

Myrene and Tiphane started rocking back and forth, slowly building up momentum. Tiphane sweated with the effort, and Myrene's mail shirt abraded her back. They barked at each other's heads more than once, but they kept at it. They succeeded in splashing a lot of water about, but very nearly did swamp the boat. They gave up after that, realizing their course remained unchanged.

Tiphane grimaced as cold water soaked into the seat of her trousers.

Sedir's laughter bounced off the mountains. "Good try, ladies."

It appeared he had found his altar—a big, flat rock. Cha'korth was securing the victim to the rock and Sedir was unrolling the cloth in which he stored his ritual knives. He glanced up at Tiphane and now Tiphane could clearly see his sharp features as they drew closer.

"My robes shall be dyed in blood before I'm done," he yelled to them. Then he set about laying out his knives. Different knives for different parts of the body.

The bile roiled in Tiphane's throat. She growled in memory of the lives of the innocents Cha'korth and Sedir had cut short, and at the cruel wound the Shield had given Myrene that almost took her life a year ago.

"We need to try something else," Myrene said.

Tiphane envied Myrene her seemingly boundless determination. Maybe it was all the years she served in the mercenary company, where there was no choice but to fight or die. Tiphane, in contrast, knew they were doomed, doomed to ride over the edge of the waterfall only to be dashed on the rocks below.

Then the boat jolted and lurched without warning, and Tiphane jammed into Myrene's back with a cry, her end of the coracle rising skyward.

"What . . . ?" A hundred impolite words rushed through her mind, but she couldn't sputter one for the fear that enveloped her.

"I'm using my feet," Myrene explained matter-of-factly. "Don't move or we'll both end up in the water." There was a loud splash, and Tiphane pictured Myrene's feet, ankle manacles and all, plunging into the lake. She whimpered, feeling certain the boat would flip over.

There was a lot of splashing as Myrene kicked, her efforts to move the boat far more effective than their previous attempt.

"Ick!" Myrene cried. "My feet! Help me get in—they're grabbing my feet!"

Tiphane didn't need to ask *who* was doing the grabbing. She knew. They scooped and wriggled until Myrene's feet were safely in the boat.

"You did it," Tiphane said, both amazed and grateful they weren't on the lake's bottom.

Thanks to Myrene's efforts, the little coracle slipped away from the main current and sailed into the eddies along its edge. By now they could hear the roar of the waterfall, but the lake had grown considerably shallower. Just yards away, grasses and boulders poked up through the lake's glassy surface.

A glimpse toward shore revealed Sedir blessing his knives one by one, now focused on his ritual. Cha'korth stood over the victim with his arms folded, his ugly, scarred face even more contorted with a grin as he watched them.

The coracle bumped into a rock, impeding further progress.

"What now?" Tiphane asked. "Water's still over our heads."

"Do some magic."

"Do— Are you mad? The boat will—"

The wizard was immersed in inscribing fire runes into the air, and a glassy cloak of magic shimmered about him. He closed his eyes, falling into a deep magic weaver's trance.

"I can't," Tiphane said. "He's wrapped in a cloak and it will deflect anything I do."

"Then inflict something on Cha'korth, and hurry."

Cha'korth's amusement at their plight had changed to suspicion, and now he drew his sword.

"Hurry," Myrene said, "do something to him. Hurt him if you can."

"I can't use Givean magic to hurt someone," Tiphane said. Doing so, even to Cha'korth, would pervert all she believed in.

"Well, do something—anything." Myrene's voice was pitched a note higher with urgency. Cha'korth stalked to the water's edge. He glared menacingly at them.

Tiphane searched her scattered thoughts for an idea. A rainstorm would just drown everyone, and it would take too much energy besides. She could focus the sun on him, but he would simply walk away with an impressive tan. No, it had to be something else, and she thought of the more spiritual side of her Order, and the words she and Myrene had exchanged after a long meditation.

She closed her eyes and blocked out the sound of Sedir chanting his blasphemous incantations to Drakdorn. She did not think about the glinting blade he held aloft as he stood enraptured by the dark ecstasy of his magic. Tiphane drifted deeper into her trance, feeling her own sense of joy as she sought her gift.

She delved into the deepest part of herself, to the wellspring of her spirit. It was a secluded place—deep and mysterious and tranquil. She felt no shackles about her, nor did she even feel Myrene against her back, at least not in a physical sense. Instead she found Myrene's partner's energy and life within her, like a bright burning flame. This was the link that had been forged between them when they were brought together before Givean, the night she had taken her oath.

Myrene is a part of me, she thought, as I am a part of her.

From this peaceful place, she wove together positive strands of fire, life, energy, balance, and love until they formed a net, which she could see only in her mind's eye, shimmering and glowing. She mentally "tossed" it at Cha'korth.

Tiphane opened her eyes. It had all taken mere seconds. Cha'korth stood stock-still, his mouth gaping, his eyes wide. His sword slipped from his hand and clattered to the ground. A burnished golden glow shone about him, and one could almost hear the harmonious flourishes of harp strings. . . .

And even as the glow surrounded him, Myrene sneezed lustily. "Damnation, Tiph, you cast a spell of ecstasy on him?"

Tiphane had no time to reply for the coracle disintegrated beneath them and they plunged into the freezing lake. She was unprepared and inhaled lungfuls of water. She fought to break the water's surface, but they kept sinking. Myrene struggled, too, twisting, writhing, jerking as she sank.

The water-pale faces of the lake's souls turned up to them. As they sank into a tangled mass of soft, pale limbs, dead fingers groped at them. A scream welled up within Tiphane and she emerged as a cloud of bubbles. She was drowning, suffocating, and the souls of the lake would have them. She kicked their hands away.

Their feet met the lake bottom and they came face-to-face with the horrors. Tiphane closed her eyes and turned her face away. She felt Myrene gather herself, then launch them upward. They broke the surface sputtering and coughing, only to sink again.

When they touched bottom this time, Myrene lunged upward at an angle toward the shallows. When Tiphane realized what Myrene intended, she added her ebbing strength to her comrade's. Sink, push off, and sink again, all the while fighting the grasp of the lake's souls.

Soon they no longer submerged after each lunge, and stood in water only up to their waists.

Tiphane, miserable and weak, coughed up what seemed to her to be half the lake.

"Next time you tell me to trust you," she croaked, wheezing and shivering, "remind me to." A pale hand grabbed at her ankle. She stomped on it, almost retching again at how squishy it felt beneath her foot.

Myrene did not hear her comment. "Look," she said, "I think Sedir is starting to come out of his trance."

Tiphane's back was to the shore. "I can't see."

Myrene twisted around, almost knocking Tiphane off her feet.

"Myrene!"

"Hush, now look."

Sedir was murmuring more incantations, but his eyes were losing their glazed appearance. His magical cloak shimmered about him, and he kissed the sacrificial knife. The boy bounding from the rock beneath him sobbed in fear.

"We've got to keep going," Myrene said, sniffing. "We can't let him kill that boy."

"I'm afraid I won't be much help." The use of magic exhausted Tiphane, as if she had used up much of her life force. Being half-drowned did *not* help.

"You did your part with Cha'korth," Myrene said, "now let me do mine."

Before Tiphane could utter a single word, Myrene used their chains for leverage and hoisted her onto her back. She then waded through the shallows in a crouched position, Tiphane's legs dangling over her buttocks.

Tiphane craned her neck, but could see little beyond the sky, treetops, and mountain summits. She knew Myrene was strong, but...

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"Don't know," Myrene grunted. "Sedir's 'bout out of his trance now."

Myrene's ankle chains clattered across rock as she staggered onto shore. Tiphane twisted her head, pressing her cheek against the back of Myrene's head, so she could see better. They passed Cha'korth who still stood enveloped in the spell of ecstasy, drool sliding down his chin. She brimmed with pride at a job well done.

"What's happening here?" It was Sedir, apparently fully out of his trance and much surprised by the turn of events. "You're ruining the ritual. Cha'korth! Cha'korth, to me!"

"Myrene," Tiphane said, "you've got to strike now while Sedir's between energies. If you wait, it'll be only moments before he regains his strength enough to use his powers against us."

"Hold on," Myrene said, gasping.

Tiphane gritted her teeth as Myrene's lopsided gait increased in speed. "Do I have a choice?" She prayed to Givean that Myrene wouldn't trip over her chains.

"Stick your feet out. He's coming at us with a knife."

"Wha—?"

"Do it!"

Tiphane obeyed and straightened out her legs. The warrior half-loped at the best pace she could manage, chains ringing, Tiphane bouncing. The priestess thought her teeth might rattle out of her head. The next thing she knew, she was spinning, her surroundings a blur of granite, evergreen, and sky. She glimpsed Sedir briefly, his expression frozen in astonishment, before

her feet connected with his wrist and sent the sacrificial knife flying out of his hand in a glittering arc.

They stopped abruptly, but it seemed the world spun for a breathless, dizzying moment. Myrene panted raggedly.

"Uh-oh," she said.

"What? What?" Tiphane twisted her head this way and that, but she still couldn't see what was going on.

"He looks unhappy."

"Unhappy? How unhappy?"

"Very unhappy. He's holding his hands out, and there is a bluish, grayish glow floating above them."

"Put me down," Tiphane said. "I need to see what he's doing."

Myrene straightened, and Tiphane slid down the accursed mail shirt. When her feet met the ground, her legs were wobbly, but they didn't fail. The two shuffled around so she could see Sedir.

Indeed, Sedir was recovering rapidly, and the spell he was weaving had a sickly cast to it. Myrene sneezed violently.

"Now what?" she asked.

Tiphane thought hard. She could not attack him directly—it would go against her beliefs, and she couldn't get around his protective cloak anyway. Not that she had much energy left from spell weaving, but there was a little reservoir perhaps, and she had Myrene oozing with her violent urges.

Sedir's incantations reached a crescendo as the cloud of blue-gray vapor enlarged.

"Myrene," Tiphane said, "it's your turn to trust me."

"I always have," her partner said in a quiet voice. "Always."

Tiphane was touched by this admission, and wished she had not seemed to doubt Myrene in return, for she depended on her brave partner—no, not just partner, but *friend*—a great deal more than she liked to admit.

"We need to get closer to Sedir."

Without comment, they shuffled within feet of the vengeful wizard. He was so involved in his spell that he could do little to stop them. It was such times as this that a magic weaver was most vulnerable and depended on his Shield for protection. Sedir's Shield still stood on the lakeshore drooling.

"I want you to face him," Tiphane said.

Myrene's shoulders tightened, but she faced Sedir without argument. She was, after all, the Shield, and putting Tiphane's life before hers was a matter of course, and of honor. Still, it humbled Tiphane.

"Now what?" Myrene asked, her voice catching on a sneeze.

"I'm going to make a little spell. I think I have the necessary energy."

"Do it quickly then!" Myrene replied.

Tiphane was already deep within herself, shaping a globe of blue fire, calling up a gust of wind, or at the very least, a slight breeze. She molded it into the globe. Then she found a spark of light and energy belonging to Myrene, and touched it with the globe.

Myrene sneezed so explosively the two of them toppled over onto the stony ground. A gust of wind, born of Tiphane's magic and channeled through Myrene's sneeze, blew Sedir's cloudy spell back into his face. He screamed, clawing at his eyes. Red, oozing boils sprang up instantaneously across his flesh. He whimpered and ran knee-deep into the lake, splashing water onto his face.

Myrene clucked. "Not a good move. You would think he'd know better."

Half-wedged beneath Myrene, Tiphane wriggled around so that she might see better. Sedir paused in his splashing, looked into the water, and screamed again. Something jerked on his leg.

The surface erupted and boiled around him. White deathly hands reached out to clutch him and drag him under. The struggle was brief.

"Sedir had the key to the lock," Myrene said ruefully, "and I'm not going in after it."

They sat on the "sacrificial altar," still chained back-to-back. They had managed to find one of Sedir's knives to cut the ropes binding the boy who had been the intended sacrifice. Sedir had then run on ahead to his village to tell family and friends the news of his rescue and the demise of Veidan Sedir in the Lake of Souls.

"The boy said his uncle was a blacksmith," Tiphane said, "and would break the chains."

"Do you think he'll remember to send him?" Myrene asked.

"I doubt it. They'll be celebrating all night."

Already, the autumn sun was making its westward descent. The Lake of Souls darkened under the shadows of the mountains.

"I'm cold," Tiphane said, "and hungry."

"Let's go before all the feasting is over."

"That village is five miles away, and over a mountain path, no less."

"Then we'd better get started."

Tiphane groaned.

They stood up, accustomed by now to coordinating their efforts.

"What about Cha'korth?" Myrene asked.

Tiphane glanced at the warrior still caught in the rapture of the ecstasy spell. "The spell will wear off in a day or so. Exposure to the harmony of Givean will undoubtedly give him a new perspective on the way he leads his life. Like it did for you."

Myrene snorted.

The two women sidled and shuffled along the trail that skirted the lake. It was slow going.

"There is one positive thing that has come out of this," Myrene said.

Tiphane, of course, knew it was not only the demise of Veidan Sedir that made this a good day, but the reaffirmation of their friendship. So it surprised her when Myrene sniffed and smiled with great joy, "My head has never felt so clear!"

The eagle soared above the lake anxious to tell his brothers and sisters all he had witnessed. Never before had he seen such sport, and he wondered what folly the winds had in store next for the two females. Whatever it was, it was sure to be entertaining.

Maybe, the eagle decided, he would stick around and find out.