

Chapter Three

Autumn Turning

We arranged a trip to Manna. It was September, and the weather was perfect for traveling. We would take my car, and bring enough money to stay in hotels if we had to. Momma and I had not heard from any of the family, and I didn't know quite what to expect. Raven was nervous about meeting them, and tried to make himself look as conventional as he could, which I thought was a waste of time. I tried to give him as much confidence as I could; Momma and Gran already loved him, and I felt Amnael had made his feelings obvious, so he had impressed all who mattered to me.

The trip to Manna was a joy. I loved the scenery of the desert, and I loved Raven. I found it hard to keep my eyes on the road, my hands on the wheel, with him beside me. His beauty bloomed in the desert, unrestrained by the walls and traffic of the city. He was a wild creature, in his element, and I was bewitched by him.

When we reached Manna, it was indeed abandoned. The gardens, however, were overgrown with weeds, the animals gone. There was still some furniture and provisions in the house, but it looked like no one was planning on coming back for a long time.

"I don't think their coming back," Raven said, spreading his hands out around him, eyes closed, in the foyer of the big house. "It feels..." he shook his head, "desolate. Not like physical death, more like the death of hope. Forgotten dreams." He lowered his hands and looked at me. His eyes were sad, as if he had known this place and was going to miss it. I went over and pulled him into an embrace. We both started to cry. The feeling of sadness in the house was unbearable. We looked into each others eyes, feeling

around each others thoughts. Then, there was an electric hum around us. Our auras fused into a blue white cocoon, and I could see Raven's eyes begin to dilate into a trance. I, too, was slipping out of normal consciousness.

First, we got water from the well, I put a pot to boil over the wood burning stove while Raven half filled the steel bathtub, which we had dragged into the middle of the large kitchen, with fresh water. Then we rooted around the kitchen. Finding some coarse salt and olive oil, we brought them over to the kitchen table. Instinctively, we held our hands above them, directing light into them. When the water was ready, I poured it into the tub. Raven had placed the salt in one bowl, the oil in another, and placed them both on the table next to the tub. We undressed and got in. Slowly, meditatively, I began to rub the salt all over his body. I rinsed him like I was baptizing him, then he did the same to me. We pulled closer together, aroused, and kissed, but didn't linger. Instead, we climbed out, dried off, and I anointed him with the oil. I massaged him from head to toe, slowly and delicately, mind still and focused, and then he did the same to me. We walked up to the big bedroom, Lavinia's room. When we got there, we spread a white sheet that was left in the closet out on the middle of the floor. We held hands as we walked in the center of the room. We faced each other, and I realized with sudden clarity how alike Raven and I looked; we stood the same height, and our bodies were mirror images. The differences were in our hair, mine as white as his was black, and our eyes, his cold blue ice and mine smoldering red embers. We sat across from each other, in half lotus, on the sheet. Closing our eyes, we both began to meditate, our minds touching, palms together. Our palms were the only part of our bodies that were touching; the sexual tension was like psychic fuel, and we channeled the energy up our spines and into a point of energy

above our heads. I could have sworn I saw blue light beaming out of Raven's eyes before I closed mine.

We both received a vision then, as clear as a film projection. It was not information about what Manna had been, what had happened to it recently, but what it might become. I saw it filled with life, bustling with people of varying ages, races and backgrounds. They were all working together, sharing knowledge, learning about their capabilities. Raven and I were there, and we were teaching them, we were leading them. We weren't priests or rulers, though, but guides, leading people to themselves. I was reminded of the vision I had of the Annanage colony, of what Amnael and I had built.

Amnael's voice cut through, his presence ripping through us like lightening as we held each others hands tightly, buffeted by a psychic wind tunnel.

"Awake the New Dawn," he said, before disappearing in a swirl of light.

Raven and I stared wide eyed at each other, panting and sweating, exhausted from the force of Amnael's presence. It had been a short but powerful experience.

"We have to stay," Raven said to me, eyes round as saucers.

"Yes," I said. "We will make Manna flower again. And then...They will come. We will bring them."

He nodded and we held each other, still pulsing with electricity, amazed at what we had briefly beheld and felt. We finally untangled our limbs and headed back to the bathtub, suddenly aware of our bodies, slick with sweat and oil. We found some soap left in a drawer and had a more leisurely, if colder, bath than before. We were too exhausted to make love, but enjoyed touching each other, enjoying the solidity of our physical bodies, which seemed almost like a novelty. I basked in the beauty of his face, dripping

with water and filled with wonder. I could never get enough of that face, kissing those lips, the feel of his skin on mine.

Raven and I didn't leave Manna, didn't even go back to tie loose ends. He called his mother on his cell phone to tell her the news. She came with Lily, Momma, and Diego. They brought clothes and supplies with them, but I think they were just curious to see what we were up to. So many useful things had been left behind at Manna, we didn't need much. It had been waiting for us.

Momma had lived enough of the rough life and didn't want to stay for more, so she gave me a warm goodbye. Grandma Lily and May had become good friends on the trip, and when they left I knew we had given them a gift in bringing them together. Diego, to my great surprise, stayed with us. I had barely spoken to him in my life, but he stayed all the same. He brought a laptop computer, a scanner, and a printer. He also brought connections to Mexico and a surprising knowledge of herbal remedies and gardening. He was a silent and comforting presence, and he worked hard helping us rebuild.

We discussed whether we wanted to hook Manna up to electricity and running water or stay off the grid. We opted to stay off, but ordered wireless internet and phone services. Our home would be pure and hidden, but our communications as advanced as we could afford.

In little over a month we had a chicken coop, a few goats, and respectable gardens. I taught Raven and Diego to make jams, pickles, and cosmetics. Before long we were selling our wares at the roadside stand, like I had so long ago with my family.

I laugh thinking about what we must have looked like out there. Diego, still suave

and smooth, with his glossy black coif and Mexican soap opera star looks, probably brought in most of our business. He taught us a little Spanish, and I was delighted at how the introvert I knew at home would become an outgoing charmer when speaking to customers. Raven and I had started to let our hair grow, his framing his face in pointy locks, looking like the feathers of his namesake. Mine puffed out in jagged, unruly cotton fluff, like a Persian cat's. Our eyes were always gleaming with the freedom and spark of our new life, our new love, and shared hopes. I wondered how anyone could not notice us from miles away, giving off our firework sparks of bliss.

Perhaps we were giving off sparks, visible for miles, because soon enough, they came. The first was an engineer who was traveling the country in a van he powered with vegetable oil. He stayed, and taught us how to make the fuel, which we began to sell by the roadside stand. It only worked on diesel engines, but it brought in a steady profit. His name was Dylan, and he had grown up Quaker, but called himself a Gnostic. It was he who chose the new name of our home: Thunder. It was taken from one of the Gnostic scriptures, called Thunder: Perfect Intellect. We had all begun to meditate on that scripture daily, the Zen riddle of it flowing through us, taking us higher, out of our waking selves, as we held hands in a circle by the creek. It was the place I had first learned to Commune, and it had become the place we all came to when needing to reflect.

Next came Calliope, surprising me at the door in jeans and a kids t-shirt. She had bags of vintage fabrics and a small sewing machine in her little car. She became the resident seamstress and decorator, and soon Thunder was a riot of color. We then added clothes, curtains, and pillows to our stand.

So many came, so many contributed. Piper, who knew how to bind books, and

convinced us to start writing down all of our ideas and rituals. We did, and we sold them at the stand too, as well as on a website Diego had set up. Some who bought the books came to Thunder, others passed them on, sold them, left them on the street - the pollen of our ideas spread. The Big House was turned into a bed and breakfast. Those who couldn't afford to pay cash gave us their work, helping around the subsistence farm or doing anything they could. A couple of girls named Asha and Felicity, artists and poets, came. They had read about Thunder on the website and wanted to get married there. We made up a ritual, performing it by the creek. They stayed, selling their paintings in the dining room of the Big House and adding their fluid verse to our burgeoning library.

The stand turned into a shop, then three. It seemed that whatever talent we needed, whatever next step Thunder needed to take, someone showed up that was perfect for the job. This is too easy, I thought. But everyone who came, and especially the ones who stayed, had been seeking. They were drawn to us, called to us. Thunder was off the grid physically, and all who came were off the grid psychically. I felt a surge of warmth, of soul memory of other places like this, other tides of gnosis, spreading like wildfire through the desert of souls.

One night, two years after we re-settled Manna, Raven and I were in our little kitchen cleaning up after dinner. We had built a small bungalow for ourselves, feeling too overwhelmed in the Big House. We wore our hair in braids, like Laura Ingalls, and linen peasant shirts paired with sturdy cotton trousers. I looked out of the kitchen window, drying my hands on a towel, breathing in my bliss. Raven circled his arms around me from behind and kissed my neck. This cozy domestic scene - how did it happen? I could have sworn I saw the shining figure of Amnael in the sky, spinning,

arms open side, smile beaming in supernova sparks, up in the starry night. I turned around, putting my arms around Raven's neck.

"It's real, isn't it?" I asked him. He smiled back at me.

"Of course it is. Did you ever doubt us?" he replied.

"Constantly!" I answered, before kissing him deeply. We went to our room, to our large feather-top bed, much more comfortable than his old futon, and made love. Raven's calloused hands ran over my body, and I thought of how far we had come. His unbound hair brushed my skin, and as I ran my fingers through it I touched the passage of time. Wasn't it just yesterday this hair was just a few inches of mod, angled perfection, coyly covering a guarded eye that now was always open wide in wonder? I remembered how soft his hands used to be, and realized how much I preferred them now. His arms and legs were still lean as before, but corded with taut muscles from working the land. Our early fumbling in bed had given way to more smooth and ecstatic love, the kind that comes from intimate knowledge and trust. Our thoughts, our bodies, were shared now, nothing came between us. We knew where we stood with each other, and nothing could be said that could not be forgiven, nothing suggested that wouldn't be considered.

I think I may have been foolish enough at the time to believe things could stay that way forever. As Raven and I lay wrapped in each others arms, I idly played with his hair and let myself bask in love and security. I told myself the nagging sense of foreboding I had was just my inability to allow myself to enjoy life, a refusal to let myself be happy. I hadn't remembered any of my other incarnations since returning to Manna, and I saw that as a positive change. I was fulfilling my duty. The past didn't matter. Thunder was the future. Thunder was my destiny.

Our years at Thunder were undeniably the finest days of my life. I didn't live in the kind of fear I had when it was Manna; everyone at Thunder was an adult, and there were no illegal plural marriages to make anyone in the state uncomfortable. We feared no raids, no rival clans. We were autonomous and harmless. Thunder became a town, where trailers turned to houses, stalls turned into shops, little discussion groups became meeting houses. Raven and I lived in domestic bliss, fueled with purpose and energized by the purity of our surroundings. There were problems, of course; all the petty squabbles of communal life and the drama of a small community.

The original "settlers," as I liked to call them, became a sort of inner circle in the life of Thunder. Dylan became a Solomon figure; he was a natural leader and was able to see things with a sense of compassionate logic that made him the perfect man for settling disputes. Piper and Diego had business sense, and thanks to them we were able to profit with our various enterprises while still helping those who couldn't support themselves as well as others. As our legend grew, we did attract more unsavory characters; drifters, trend followers and predators would try to sneak in, but we generally froze them out. Even gentle spirits like ours could be intimidating when the need arose.

In my own territory, free to explore myself and abilities, I started to truly become the half-heavenly creature I had learned I was. I learned to focus in on the light inside of me, and to open it up and out into the world. When I walked the lanes of Thunder, I imagined myself as my astral body, a giant light reflecting being, shooting sparks of bliss all around. I became aware of the needs of people before they spoke them, maybe before they knew them, and the right words or actions to initiate change came to me instinctively. I became a catalyst; even people who only passed through, that I only said

a passing remark or gave a meaningful look or psychic impression to, I knew I had changed. Chain reactions of events and mind shifts were spreading out from me, changing the world in subtle and substantial ways. I learned to look beyond my own life, to look beyond my works, and see how just a chance encounter could ripple into amazing results. I knew that this effect I had was not benign, that not all change was necessarily good, but I had ceased to think in terms of "good" and "bad." In expanding my view of the world and of the events of history, I began to see the necessity of destruction. In many ways, I had stopped thinking like a human. I no longer had the short view, the tunnel vision of self that all humans have. All creatures are catalysts, but I was aware of my role, which magnified it. I was coming into my own power, feeling the effects of my blood.

The laws of earth didn't effect me as much as before. For example, all my life I had been extraordinarily effected by the phases of the moon. My mother told me it was because I was in touch with my feminine side, but to me it was just a distraction. Whether I was burning with undirected psychic buzz during the full moon or lethargic and moody during the dark moon, I twisted and turned like the tide. When I stopped thinking of myself as human, I was able to control my moods and my energy level, no matter what phase the moon was in or what season it was. It's not that I became totally disconnected with the Earth, but I was no longer a victim of its influence. I also needed less sleep and food, and could push my body further than before. My Will was more focused, and I knew that I could effect my body on the cellular level with it. I could levitate, stay underwater for long periods of time, and move things with my mind. All these things took great effort, but I had never even thought to try them before. I did have

to remind myself, however, that the "magic tricks" were only a side effect of greater inner achievements, and not to get wrapped up in my own ego about them. Perhaps the hardest part about becoming more than human was controlling the very human pull of ego that wants to run around shouting, "hey everybody, look what I can do!"

At Thunder I learned how to heal with my hands. It's not so much that I learned how, as much as I discovered a previously dormant ability. One day, after completing a fast, I was feeling very centered. My ego seemed to have drifted away, and I walked Thunder as an observer, not as the proud parent I usually was. My hands felt odd, tingly and electric. I held them in front of me. They looked the same, but when I focused my second sight on them, they emitted a rainbow aura. I kept walking. I stopped in the bookshop, where Piper was leaning on the counter. I loved Piper, she was smart and funny, but she often seemed pre-occupied, like her inner light had a blanket thrown over it. Her aura looked muddy, and I saw darkness around her shoulders. She was in pain. I walked over to her.

"Hi Adam," she sighed, in a tired voice.

I smiled at her, then I walked behind her and placed my electric hands on her shoulders. I focused the buzzing energy in them on the site of her pain.

"Wow," she said, after a few seconds. "You fixed it!"

Piper turned and gave me a big hug.

"You can fix it yourself," I told her. Then, after shaking my hands out, I placed them on the crown of her head, sending her in a current of the energy that burned in them. Her face brightened, then I left.

Soon, the current of healing spread through Thunder. It was passed on from one

person to the next, without words or instructions. It was hard to explain it anyway, the feeling so unique. Once I felt the buzzing energy in my hands, I knew what to do, and it was the same with the others.

Raven was discovering new talents too. He had always been psychic, but now his visions were more focused and true. He had very vivid recollections of our lives, and told me many things about Abbasa, James, and others I had never known about. He has been with me from the beginning, I realized. He is another part of me.

"We were Gnostics once," he told me one day, as we were sharing a picnic by the creek.

"Well, we didn't call ourselves Gnostics," he added, thoughtfully. "That was actually an insult the other Christians used against us. They said we were 'know-it-alls,' because we thought we knew God." I laughed at that. We were still know-it-alls.

"Do you recall much of what happened to us?" I asked. He shrugged, looking up at the sky.

"Oh, the usual. Hunted down and killed, books burned, you know the routine," he smiled over at me. "We made sure one of our followers hid all the important stuff, though. Deep in the dry desert, where it wouldn't be destroyed. To be found at a later date."

"Nag Hammadi," I said. "That's where they found the so called Gnostic gospels. But some of those were burned before they were discovered for what they were."

Raven nodded. Dylan had told us all about the discovery at Nag Hammadi when he first came. He told us about the parallels between the beliefs of the so-called Gnostics - actually a very diverse array of Christian sects that had only one thing in common - a

personal, experiential concept of divinity - and Quaker faith. Many of the teachings also had a lot in common with James Johnson's revelations. It seemed that some ideas refused to stay buried.

"Don't you wonder who's behind it all?" Raven asked. "Why there's always something like the conference of Nicea or the Catholic church or the government to stamp out these developments?"

"Or a great flood," I added.

"Do you think it's one very covert organization or just the cycle of history that causes these kinds of ideas to get wiped out only to be re-discovered again?"

"Maybe it's a combination of both," I said. "Human evolution would have happened, for example, but certain Annanage just sped it up a few million years. In the same way, the cycles of civilization - spiritual awakening, then corruption and back again in a different place - maybe would happen anyway, but some other force just speeds the process up."

Raven nodded. "But why," he mused.

At that I only could laugh. I may be more than human, but I don't know why. I rarely even know how.

I stretched my arms out and turned off the computer. Pulling on some pants and a shirt, I decided to take a look around the Citadel. Knocking on Orrin's wall on my way out, I called "Going out!"

"Okay!" he shouted back. My door was no longer locked from the outside at all times; either they were starting to trust me or I had no chance of escaping anyway. The latter was most likely the answer. The locked doors were probably more for psychological effect than actual security. Even if I escaped, I would be lost in the mine strewn crags of Kurdistan without a map or a word of the native tongue to guide me.

I wandered the halls idly. The Citadel was beautifully furnished, giving every impression of a manor house as opposed to a steel fortress. I explored sitting rooms, offices, vacant bedrooms - all spotless, though there were no signs of staff or habitation anywhere. Probably self cleaning, I thought, or maybe they used robots. I had come to expect anything from this place.

I finally found a library. I searched for a tasseled cord; I'd be needing some refreshment, as I decided to spend some time there. I began to scan the stacks. I could swear I felt someone else in the room. The attendant? I looked around, but I didn't see anyone. Turning the corner of a bookcase I thought I saw a flash of clothing brush by in my peripheral view...no. Whoever it was had gone. Probably just security or housekeeping. I continued scanning the stacks until I found something interesting. The Memoirs of James Johnson. As I pulled Volume one off the shelf a veiled attendant came in. "Coffee please, and some sweet rolls," I ordered. The attendant bowed and left silently. I sat down at a polished oak table and opened the book.

I immediately noticed it wasn't like the Testaments or diaries we had at home. As I suspected, these were originals, and the ones Johnson's followers, and even his family, had were edited. Maybe even fabricated. I smiled to myself, excited about the discovery. My food arrived. I settled into the cushioned leather chair and began to read.

Most of Johnson's scriptural revelations were published in his own lifetime, unlike the teachings of Krishna, Siddhartha, or Jesus. The things he wrote at the Citadel, awaiting his death after learning the truth about his existence, are personal and private, not the high handed scripture I was brought up on. Flipping through them, I tried to work out what time period they were actually written in. I knew about his death, the mob that broke he and his brother Thomas out of jail before chasing them down and killing them, but these memoirs appeared to be written after that incident. I suddenly remembered, with a sickening feeling, that Johnson's body had never been positively identified, nor Thomas', for that matter. It was assumed that the bodies had been destroyed, torn apart and burned by the mob. What if they weren't? What if James and maybe even Thomas were spirited away to this place? I immediately thought of Raven. Thomas. Had Raven already been disposed of or was he being kept prisoner too? What had the Council of Elders done to him, if anything? The thought of them having their claws on Raven made my stomach clench in dread.

I didn't cry. There would be plenty of time for crying. I was starting to wonder if I had any saltwater left in my body to cry with, I had cried so much. It made Orrin so uncomfortable, Orrin the manly. Orrin the traitor. My brother. My friend.

It was strange for me to read about Thomas as a brother. My romantic love for Raven is so strong, I can't really imagine having a relationship with him that is anything else. I could see that James loved Thomas as much as I love Raven - but in a different way. The great romantic love of James' life was a woman named Elsbeth. I had seen photographs and paintings of Elsbeth; she was a beautiful woman, and her willfulness came through even in the stiff Victorian poses she had been propped in. She was from a rich family,

her father a successful merchant and her mother a society matron. When James came to woo Elsbeth, her parents were horrified. James had a charm that was hard to resist, though, and in a couple of years of flowers, poetry, and promises, he had won Elsbeth's hand in marriage. Her parents disowned her when she ran off with him at the age of 18.

James was a handsome man, with confidence and charm that had many women following him around, lovesick and obsessed. Elsbeth was aloof and usually acted bored when he was near her, which of course made her irresistible to James. Whether Elsbeth was truly the love of his life or a challenge he just couldn't walk away from, I'll never know. James was passionate about his message, adamant about his legacy, and dedicated to his Work, but selfish and cold in his relationships. Perhaps his love of Annael was greater than he would care to admit, and that's why he never truly loved anyone here on Earth, only used them for his own games and plans. Elsbeth did love James, though, and sacrificed her wealth, family and good judgment to be with him. I knew she did not approve of James taking other wives, which he did towards the end of his life, in his obsessive quest to infiltrate the bloodlines of society. She was firm in the stance that the other wives were not allowed to live in the house with her, and he conceded to her wishes. I don't blame her, and I can't imagine myself doing such a thing to Raven. I also have to wonder if I know Elsbeth, if she has reappeared in my story, or if one life with us was enough for her.

James never knew that Elsbeth left the community he founded. He never knew about the journey west his other followers made. He never knew about the legacy of polygamy his own actions, vaguely explained, left behind. Devouring his private words, words he wrote here, maybe in the same room I was being kept in, I began to make out what kind

of man he really was. Maybe the greatest shock of all was the fact that he seemed nothing like me. I suppose I have always known that the things that make up our ego, the way we act and look and dress, really aren't our true selves. Still, it was odd to me that my own previous incarnation was so different from who I am today. He was wild. He was proud - too proud. He was a fierce man, who could get violent and manic, but also compassionate and sweet. He was like the tide, a destructive force as well as a soothing creative one. His energy was undeniable, and it had an effect on everything in it's path - the effect was change. Not good, not evil, just change. James brought out the truth in people - sometimes the ugly truth. One person may become a great leader after meeting James, another a murderer. He incited as much hatred and fear as he did love and loyalty. That mob that came after him and Thomas was not sent by the Elders, it was a convenience they took advantage of.

James wrote often in his diaries of statues underground in the Citadel. He visited them often and asked Amnael for help, but it never came. He tried to hate Amnael, feeling betrayed and abandoned by him, but even the ferocious heart of James could not hate the angel, however dim his memory of him became. He called to him constantly. He ran through the halls, tried to get out, to just find a window, even, believing if he could call to him, Amnael would come and release him. James sometimes wondered if Amnael was in on the whole thing, if he was just a tool for the Elders to bind with, to deceive with.

I had a dim memory of my capture; either I had been drugged or had blocked the memory of it from my mind. Statues? I closed the book. It was time to do some more exploring.

Finding the underground chamber was easy. Too easy. None of the doors to it were locked or guarded, no one was anywhere in the halls. I couldn't hear or feel any presence, human or Annanage. I no longer felt like I was exploring, I was going someplace, tracing steps my feet knew. Here is the room, I realized, pausing before a non-descript door. I breathed deeply, steeling myself for I knew not what, and opened it.

There we were. On a dais in the middle of an otherwise empty room, dimly lit from an unseen source, were two life size statues. I slowly walked up to them, willing myself not to run away, and investigated. One of the statues looked like me and I examined it first. It appeared to be made of pink tinted alabaster. I touched the wig on it, and it was soft and cottony like my own hair. Closely examining the eyes, the pupils were made of faceted rubies. The statue was wearing a skirt made of swan feathers. I touched the statues face. I suddenly wanted to turn around and run back to my room, but I did not dare.

Both statues were sitting on a gold bench, arms on the shoulders of each others backs. After examining what must have been Abbasa, I closed my eyes and breathed deeply before going to his mate. Amnael. This one was gilded. His straight glossy hair of cornsilk fell gracefully to his nipples. He also wore a skirt of swan feathers. His eyes were faceted aquamarines. I touched the planes of his face. Too perfect, too perfect to be human. His features were absolutely symmetrical, his eyes almost twice the size of a humans, his eyebrows impossibly high. I touched the smooth gold of his chest. My hand felt energized, and I almost heard his voice, muffled and distant. I began to cry. I felt a sense of deep loss. This was where they did it, I realized. This was where they separated us. I didn't remember how. I didn't remember when. I didn't know why I was so certain,

but this was the place. The tragedy, the blasphemy of separating us. I curled up into the lap of Amnael's statue. He was so tall, so strong. I put my head on his shoulder and cried myself to sleep.

In the gilded arms of my love I dreamed.

In the dream, Amnael and I were in the same Annanage colony as the one in my first vision of him, but the human settlements below had changed considerably. A few hundred years had passed, and the fruits of our labors were apparent. Gone were the mud hut dwelling savages, and in their place resided sophisticated people living in well crafted homes, wearing beautiful clothes and jewelry. Mixed in with the humans were Annanage, and children of mixed birth as well.

The Annanage are not effected by many of the laws of Earth; they do not age and die in the same manner as humans. They can be killed, but they rarely get sick or die of old age. This is due to their ability to bend their bodies to their own wills, and even bend time and space to some degree. It is genetic, but it is also learned. They developed a system of focusing the Will over so many thousands of years, that things such as levitating, which takes great effort for even an adept human, many Annanage take for granted. There are limitations to their powers, one of them being another of their own with stronger or more focused will. One of the ways the Council of Elders control others is through the combined strength of their will; a judgment from them can only be broken by a greater force of will. Considering all the Elders are high adepts and there are 33 of them working in accord, it is rare that they are thwarted .

The children of mixed stock live long lives, up to 150 years. These children are also less likely to get diseases, and they show little of the ravages of age. The Johnson clan are notorious for longevity and beauty, having Annanage blood, and I'm sure I would live for a long time if I weren't going to be killed.

The Annanage were once like humans, but they had evolved over millions of years by the dawn of humanity, which is why they seem like gods to people of Earth. Humans can and probably will eventually develop the capabilities that the Annanage take for granted on their own, but due to the encroaching takeover of Earth, Amnael and I believed that human development needed to be sped up for it's own survival.

When Amnael and I became bound to each other, I was given the gift of a Annunaki lifespan. When we performed the Bonding ritual, our bodies and souls became one, disintegrated, then came back together each with some of the other within them. I contained a part of him in my body, giving me more evolved genetic materials. I had also learned how to manipulate my own cells, the way time effected them, and how they metabolized and processed my environment. I don't have to tell you that I cannot for the life of me remember any of it, nor do I still possess that body. My soul is still bound with Amnael's, but my body is now subject to Earth's laws.

The Council of Elders, members and initiates of the original colonists of Earth, had so far tolerated the actions of Amnael, myself, and our followers. They disapproved and looked down upon us, but they took no action against us. They did often make offers to us, to try and bribe us out of the Work. They offered position, wealth, and secret knowledge if we stopped mixing with the humans and joined them, but never threats. We refused their offers. As we saw the great leaps humanity was taking, we could never turn

back. We were fueled with success, and we also loved to rebel against the Elders, whom we felt were corrupted by power and greed.

Annael and I were leaving an unmarked hall in the human settlement below the Colony. It was a meeting place where people and Annunaki came together to discuss philosophy, spirituality, science, and also shared meditation and healing techniques. Shared gnosis had made us all starry eyed, walking on air as a summer breeze caressed us on the street. After saying goodbyes, Annael and I began to walk home. "Beautiful day," he said to me. I nodded.

We walked to our small but comfortable house and a boy with eyes like Raven's was waiting with refreshments. I ruffled his hair and he smiled at me. When he didn't leave after we sat down and began to eat, Annael asked, "Is there something on your mind? Sit with us," he gestured to a seat and the boy gladly joined us.

"There has been news of foul weather," the boy said.

"Mm?" Annael mumbled, sipping tea, "go on."

"News of a great flood. One that could wipe out all of the life in the area. There is also news of two great barges, one for the Council of Elders and one for humans of their choosing. Those who are not on the barges will perish in the flood." The boy's eyes were glazed. He was a seer, and the "news" had not come from any herald.

Annael and I glanced at each other, concerned. The Council of Elders held all the secrets of Annunaki magick and technology, many secrets that Annael had never learned, being shunned by them and kept away from anything they didn't want humans to know about. We know they could control the weather of Earth to some degree, but would they do something like this? Surely it would be a colossal waste, just to teach a lesson to a

few rebellious comrades? The flood could not wipe out the Annanage, being able to shift their cellular structures to survive underwater, but all the humans and the mixed race children would perish. More to the point, the writings, buildings, culture and civilizations that had been built would be destroyed. Although many Annanage shared the view Amnael and I had of humanities potential, few had gone through the Bonding with their human mates. It was considered an outdated practice, and most practical Annunaki felt it was more trouble than it was worth, fearing being tied down for eons to a being they may not always get along with. The relationships that had formed, the empathy and compassion that was a result of those relationships, would be destroyed by this disaster. The Annanage would choose survival over love, and the Council would teach them that they could not love humans and survive.

"Where have you heard such things, child?" Amnael asked, sharply. He was piercing the boy with his eyes, and I feared for the young one. But the boy held his ground, back straight and eyes unwavering, locked on Amnael's gaze.

"I know," he answered. "You know how I know."

Amnael nodded. The boy was no ordinary seer, he was always right. His soul was a crystal, clear and pure, and nothing could hide from it's gaze.

"What else do you know, child?" Amnael asked, gently now.

"I know this," he said, beginning to cry, "You must hide. Hide yourselves somewhere...put a glamour over yourselves, bend the waters so you can live in them. Go to another plane but just go, don't let the Elders take you. Please," he was sobbing, shaking, "please hide."

Amnael shook his head. He would never hide. Hiding would be seen as an admission

of guilt.

As we lay in bed, I clung to Annael, head buried in his shoulder. The boy was never wrong. I was frightened, not knowing just how vast the powers of the Elders were, and how well we could defend ourselves against them.

"Where are we going to go?" I asked, whimpering, "what will we do?"

We had built a community below the Colony, where many different people and Annanage came together, worked together, argued, and loved each other. Learning and working together they pushed themselves higher than they thought they could go, became more than they thought they could be. We had led them, but they had found themselves. I was distraught, clinging to Annael like a child afraid of a storm. His body was stiff, his jaws clenched. Anger seethed out of him. I clung to him harder, and he finally turned to me, taking my face in his hands.

"I love you," he said, his bright eyes gleaming with tears. There was something in the way he said those words, something charging them. Something final. My heart started to ache, as I felt a dark wind of change coming into our lives. I kissed him, held him close, close as I could, wanting to just meld into him, and not have to bother with a second body at all.

The wait was excruciating. Months went by, nervous, paranoid months where we tried not to make our followers panic yet also attempted to prepare them for the danger ahead. The boy was a wreck, imploring us to leave, go somewhere else, change our identities, anything, but we refused. Annael was stubborn, he was angry, he refused to hide.

They finally came for us. A tide of destruction was created by the combined efforts of the Council of Elders : a great and terrible flood, destroying everything but the great barge

they had built for themselves, and another built for some of their carefully picked human sheep. The only freedom open to humanity henceforth would be the freedom of slavery, the freedom of never having to think for oneself, of letting go and letting something else take over, something "better." The Elders would fashion themselves as Gods again, would no longer be an example to emulate, but distant, uninvolved, jealous Gods. People would grovel to them, offer themselves to them, do things in their names - they would forget about themselves and focus instead on a vague idea of heaven. They would not become gods, they would worship. Some would know better, some would try to change, try to help, but the tide of ignorance would rise and people would even forget how to bathe in the clouded fog of their souls.

They killed the boy in his sleep, and we had been physically restrained through psychic means. Our bodies were paralyzed but our minds lucid as we were kept on the deck of the Elders barge. We were forced to watch the destruction, sickeningly beautiful in its mindless, watery rampage. The Annunaki that followed us survived, but all their Earthly consorts and progeny perished. Few would continue the Work, brought to heel by this reminder of the powers of their Elders. When the rain stopped and the flood waters began to clear, we were taken to the old colony, so quickly rebuilt in the wake of the deluge. We arrived at the Citadel in chains, and were brought before the Council of Elders. We stood in a windowless room in homespun robes surrounded by stern Elders. They sat on iron thrones, all wearing gray robes, hair cut around shoulder length. They looked at us through scowling eyes, clearly exasperated.

"Abbasa and Amnael," said a particularly commanding one, tall with iron colored eyes and hair, voice like a gong.

"Our favorite troublemakers," this caused a little stir of snickers through the room. I felt like a child being chastised by my pedagogue. This can't be real. We are dreaming.

"It grieves me to tell you two this, but your work, this work you have assigned yourselves to, has to stop. Humanity is a failure. The planet is ours. They need to be kept in line, not turned into 'Gods.' Your ideas spread madness. It has been decided that the two of you are nothing but trouble together and you must be stopped. You must be separated."

There was a murmur in the room as the other Elders whispered amongst themselves. I squeezed Amnael's hand so hard I feared breaking his fingers.

"We are bound," Amnael said, voice strong and steady, though I could feel the heat of his fear through his hand. "You cannot break our binding. Nothing can."

I hoped he was right as I stared at the smiling face of the iron Elder. Surely they can not break the Binding against our will. Surely they were bluffing.

"It is true that I can not break the Binding of your souls, all of us together can not do that," the Elder said. "But there are some things we can do."

The Elders all came off of their thrones and joined hands in a circle around us. They began chanting in a language I recognized, but couldn't understand. I looked at Amnael, and his eyes were closed with agony. He understood. He knew.

The leader came up to us, not part of the circle, and addressed me.

"You, Abbasa, will die and be reborn on Earth perpetually until Earth is no more. You will forget everything with every death; any knowledge you may gain of former lives you will always doubt, as you will doubt any communications you have with Amnael, who will only rarely appear to you in physical form. You will work in the fog of doubt, doubt

of the truth of your visions, doubt of your own sanity. I can not stop you from doing the Work you have sworn to, nor can I stop you from loving Annael, but both will threaten your mind and safety as you walk among your kind.

"You, Annael, will live in the spirit world. You may be able to find a way to appear in flesh on Earth for limited periods of time, by commandeering another's body or shaping the elements to your will, but you will rarely be able to remain in any fleshly form for longer than a few decades. You will not be reborn and you will not forget. I cannot stop you from being dedicated to your work either, nor from your love of Abbasa, but you will struggle with his doubt of your existence, his ignorance, his forgetting, his earthly bodies and their limitations, and his mind, which may hover at the edge of madness."

Annael and I turned to each other and embraced. I held him so tight, too tight for them to separate us. We are bound, I repeated to myself, clutching his hair, pressing so close. We are bound.

Two elders came to pry us apart. They had to push pressure points on our bodies to force our separation. They held us down, hard, using focused will to paralyze us. Our eyes were locked. You can not sunder us, we silently screamed, we will find a way.

I couldn't feel anything but my heart tearing itself apart. With Annael and I still restrained, two imposing Annunaki approached, one to me, one to him. They were wearing black robes. They put their hands on our heads and it was over.

I was floating, fleshless, above the scene. I could feel Annael's presence, but I couldn't see him. He had no body either. Our bodies were in lifeless heaps below us. We watched as they took the corpses to another room for embalming. When they were

finished they carefully sheered off our hair, collecting it in brass bowls. We watched as they took them to another room, placing them in sitting positions. They were then coated in metal. Annael was gilded, and I was covered in a substance that looked like alabaster, but was actually a pinkish white metal from Nibiru. They placed beautifully crafted gemmed eyes into our eye sockets, and dressed us in swan feather skirts. Our own hair was carefully made into wigs that were fastened to our heads. The statues were then brought back to the room we were separated in and placed on a golden bench. Still bound. Still together. I reached my Will out to Annael; my Will was the only part of me that was left, perhaps the only part of me that ever was real. I made contact. Still bound. If I had a body I would scream and the scream would crack the crust of the earth, but instead I was plunged into darkness.

I awoke in my own bed. I was still wearing the clothes I had on the day before. My mouth was dry and crusty, throat parched. I got up to get a drink of water but there was one on the nightstand already. I gulped greedily, noticing how stiff my body felt. Out of curiosity I checked the door. Locked. Just as well. All the knowledge I discovered here was a curse. I wondered why Annael and I had never been content to just be together, to just live out our lives for eternity in blissful ignorance. Why did we find it so necessary to teach, to correspond with others, to share? Why couldn't we be happy misanthropes, why couldn't we leave well enough alone?

I knew why. How could he live here all this time and not want to do something? If he could fall in love with a human he must see us as his equals, and the actions of his

comrades enraged him. It's disturbing sometimes that I don't have as much regard for humanity as Amnael does, but maybe that's because I am so wrapped up in him, in his otherness, that I think of the people of Earth as dull by comparison. Maybe that's why people like Raven and my mother keep coming along, to remind me of the beauty of our people, their worth. I wondered about the Raven-boy in my dream; our herald. I wished I could remember more, I wished I knew more of what Raven means to me, why he keeps coming back to me, why he must always be sacrificed.

I didn't want to do this any more, I didn't want to remember anymore.

"Orrin!" I shouted, banging on his wall. "Orrin!"

"What?" he called from the other side. I heard him running to the door. "What is it, Adam?" he asked, poking his head through, concerned.

"Nothing," I sighed, turning around to my desk. I had wanted to tell him I hated him, for no reason, just to shout at somebody, but I changed my mind. Poor Orrin. Who knows what they did to him?

"Did you write more?" he asked, following me.

"A little," I answered, slumping into my desk chair. "I guess I'd better continue."

"I'd like to know about what you did to Manna," he said, encouragement in his voice.

"I wish I had been there."

"Do you?" I asked.

"Yeah!" he answered, nodding. "Better than the sandbox," he added.

"So when did they recruit you?" I asked. "The Elders, not the Marines."

"Pretty much as soon as I got here, though I still stayed with my platoon for a while. They faked my disappearance."

"Lavinia was crushed. Still is, I guess."

"I know," he said, not meeting my eyes. "They didn't give me much choice, Adam. I hope I don't have to tell you that."

"I don't blame you, Orrin," I replied. "You're just a pawn. I just get so mad sometimes...I know I take it out on you. I'm sorry."

Orrin shrugged. "You could be a lot worse," he replied. "Hey, don't go away, I got something for you," Orrin got up and jogged back to his room. He looked excited, like he did when he gave me my first bike, on my tenth birthday. It was his old bike, but he had fixed it up for me. I smiled at the memory as he came back, hands gingerly holding a little cedar box.

"I was wandering around here one day bored," he said, "and I found this in an old chest. Take a look."

I opened the little box, not knowing quite what to expect. Inside, laying on a little silk pillow, were two stones with holes in them. One was white and one was brown.

"James Johnson's peep stones," I said, smiling.

"Yep," Orrin nodded, beaming. "He saw some of his greatest visions through those. I don't know if he had any particular use for one color stone over the other, but I figured you could probably work that out." He was eyeing my reaction, looking for my approval.

"Thanks Orrin," I said, hugging him. My eyes watered up a little as I watched him get up to leave, giving me an "aw it was nothing," wave as he went back into his room to sleep.

I handled the peep stones and wondered just what I'd see in them, or if I wanted to see anything at all anymore. I carefully replaced them in their box and put them under my

pillow.

I spent the first half of the next day moping around my room, ordering copious amounts of junk food, smoking cigarettes and drinking soda, feeling sorry for myself. After a few hours of this misery I decided I wanted to fool around with the peep stones.

I took the cedar box out from under the pillow and placed it on the center of my bed. I opened it and just sat looking at the stones for a few minutes. James Johnson was very clear on the necessity of a pure body and sound mind, preaching that if one is tainted, visions and inner sight would be tainted as well. Though I could feel the emotional and chemical toxins of the past month or so plowing through my veins like sludge, I picked up the stones. Life is messy, life is toxic. If the power of the stones are clouded by the ugly truths of existence, then they aren't worth a thing anyway.

I picked them up and held them in my hands. Except for the natural holes eroded into their middles, they were ordinary rocks. The white one was more smooth than the brown. I examined it first, holding it up to my right eye then my left. Nothing so far but a faint buzz of prior psychic activity. Next I held up the brown. Same thing. Sighing, I considered putting them back. James Johnson didn't need these, he just used them as a crutch. Sometimes when a person sees visions they start to think they may just be crazy or delusional, and need some physical manifestation to give them confidence. Divining rods, pendulums, cards, scrying pools and stones, all could be used to give a visionary a sense of confidence about their work, but they aren't necessary. Often they are a hindrance, blocking more clear visions that could be had with a meditation or a dream journey.

Finally, for the heck of it, I held both stones up to my eyes, the white to the left, the

brown to the right. Suddenly, like the tide of emotion when seeing a natural wonder, I was flooded with memory. I lay down on the bed, eyes closed behind the stones I balanced on my eye sockets, and remembered being James.

James Johnson was born to an English family that came to America seeking their fortunes. They traveled in a wagon, telling fortunes, selling potions, and swindling their way across the Northeast. As a tide of new, ecstatic religions began to burn over the land, young James was swept into the wave of cults, forming his own group, the only one from the time period that still survives today, with the help of his visions and his charisma. His tribe grew and prospered, building their own town even, which was a shining city of dreams, like Thunder expanded twenty-fold. Surrounding settlers and politicians began to notice Johnson's people and grew wary and jealous of this new breed of American. Johnson himself grew feverish and paranoid, having fatalistic visions and receiving threats both psychically and physically. He became obsessed with the notion of progeny, deciding he had to have as many children as he could to ensure his Work would continue and spread, hoping blood memory and the advanced genetic material he contained could initiate the changes he thought must be necessary to bring enlightenment to the country. After years of this kind of behavior, Johnson and his brother, who did pretty much the same as him, were taken into custody by the law on the charge of counterfeiting. They had been printing their own money in their new city, also declaring it a sovereign nation. Before they could be brought to trial, an angry mob broke into the jailhouse, running James and Thomas down and killing them, or so they thought. The Elders had actually spirited the beaten and unconscious bodies away, replacing them with some kidnapped,

drugged unfortunates that were soon burned beyond recognition.

Seen from afar, Johnson appeared almost cynically opportunist; a swindler of the highest order who took advantage of the gullible citizens of a newly formed nation. People came to America to start over, to become something other than what they were, to transform. Johnson offered this transformation, and there were many takers. At no other time in history after the flood had so many people followed the call, and at no other time was the call itself less clear.

James was a bold personality, and that's what was needed to make a splash in the New World. The only problem with a charismatic spiritual leader is the qualities that make him charismatic; the ego, the lust for power, and the desire for adoration. All these qualities dulled the message while adding luster to the messenger. James was so caught up in his own celebrity that he forgot about his purpose, forgot about his goals. At no other time in our history were Amnael and I more at odds concerning our own Work, but because James was seeing visions, with only rare physical manifestations, he rarely heeded Amnael's warnings. Some part of James didn't really believe Amnael was real, or separate from himself. He began to believe Amnael was his own imagination, his own idealized self, and therefore refused to listen to his concerns, brushing them off as self doubt. By the time James was taken to the Citadel, learning the truth about their relationship, it was too late. The damage had been done, the head of the serpent severed, and his people broken into shards, each containing fractured versions of a flawed message.

My heart filled with regret at the waste, at the folly of pride. Amnael had been wise by making my first vision in this incarnation one of us instead of our mission. I knew

from the beginning that I was a part of a larger whole, while James thought he was making everything up out of whole cloth.

When I put the peep stones back in their box, it was late evening. Time stood still in this place, the days and nights meaningless markers of borrowed time. I put the box back under my pillow and fell into dreamless sleep.

The next morning, my door was unlocked. I decided to go back to the library again. I didn't feel like I needed to look at any more of James' memoirs, but I wanted to get out of my room. I had put on a pair of Orrin's desert fatigue pants and a linen peasant shirt similar to the kind I used to wear at Thunder. My hair was long and loose, in a tangled mass of knots. I bathed regularly at the Citadel, but didn't take care of my hair for some reason. Maybe it was an impulsive ritual of mourning to wear it unbound and uncombed. My hair has the sort of fuzzy cat texture that mats easily, so it was beginning to form fat, uneven dreadlocks, which I liked. I supposed if I spent some time forming and twisting them they could look quite nice, but that was more than I could bear to do those days. My body, without Raven to see it, just didn't concern me anymore.

When I arrived at the library there was someone else there. I stood in the doorway in shock for a full minute before entering, so surprised to see an unveiled face other than Orrin or the Elders. Was this another "guest" or was it an off duty attendant?

He looked up and smiled at me, sitting back in his chair and stretching his arms. He had a large book in front of him and an urn of coffee on the table, obviously settled into a long study session. He was a sight for sore eyes after my forced isolation; light gold skin, lean muscular build, aristocratic bone structure and golden blonde hair, cut like a Roman

soldiers. He wore an off-white linen tunic with matching drawstring pants. He was barefoot, as was I. He gestured to a seat at his table.

I went over cautiously and took the cup of coffee he offered, noticing that there were two cups instead of just one. When I ordered coffee, I was only brought one cup; I must have been expected. As I observed his graceful hands and beautiful features, I decided he must have been some kind of peace offering. Maybe one of their recruits or even a very exquisite prostitute.

"So," I started, leaning back lazily in my chair, "what's a nice guy like you doing in a place like this?"

He smiled and laughed softly at my inane come-on. "Waiting for you," he answered, matching my tone.

I smiled into my coffee. What the hell. He tapped me on the arm and got up out of his chair. I followed him out of the door, down the hall, and into a room similar to mine.

When the door closed he pushed me up against it. He kissed me and I snaked my arms around his waist, devouring him desperately. We made our way to his bed, throwing off clothes on the way. His breath was fresh, as if he had been chewing mints while he waited for me. His skin was warm and smooth, smelling like soap, clean and soft. I clawed at him, wordless and hungry, not caring who he was, why he was there or where we were. He pulled my hair and bit my neck, throwing me around playfully on the bed, on the floor, against the wall, over the table. I didn't want it ever to end, I wanted him to take me until I wasn't me anymore, until I exploded into dust.

When we finally collapsed on the bed, his golden arms entangled in my medusa hair, I felt more alive than I had since the day I arrived. I turned my head to look at him,

wondering if I should ask his name, wondering if I cared. Seeing his nakedly blissful face, golden and sculpted, I smiled.

"What's your name?" I asked.

His eyes flickered away from mine for a seconds hesitation before he said "Tristan."

I shrugged. He was lying. It didn't matter.

"Alright Tristan." I turned on my side, facing him. We were looking into each others eyes like we were old flames instead of a couple of desperate strangers. I ran my fingers through his short silken locks and said, "you look a little like Caesar."

"Which one?" he replied, laughing. He had an easy laugh, and his face settled into a smile as if that were his natural countenance. I was hopelessly charmed by it, as I was his long, aquiline nose, which I traced with my finger.

"Julius of course. He's the real Caesar, the rest just took the name."

He shrugged. He didn't care much for history. "It's the hair," he said, twisting a lock of mine around his finger.

"It's lovely," I replied. I wanted to shower him in compliments and treat him like a mistress. I wondered if he was even a human and not some android created from the extracted sexual fantasies of my life, collected in my sleep by the Elders. Those old bastards had to be good for something.

"I like your hair," he said, raking his hands along my scalp, making chills run down my back. It was too tangled to run his fingers through, but it was still quite soft to the touch.

"You look so feminine," he continued, running his hands over my body. "but your very hard under here, aren't you?" his hands were lingering over my narrow chest.

"Heart full of lead," I replied, flatly.

His brow was creased in a frown.

"Don't you dare ask me about why I'm here," I told him, before he got any ideas about revealing pillow talk.

Looking up, face back in it's characteristic state of easy charm, he replied, "I wouldn't dream of it," before cupping my face in his hands and bestowing upon me a gentle kiss.

"Let's take a shower," I said, aroused once again. Perhaps it was the anonymity, or my upcoming martyrdom, or just the result of forced solitude, but I couldn't get enough of "Tristan." As we splashed in the shower and I let him condition and comb my hair, falling once more under his spell as we rolled under the sheets, more gentle this time, I forgot. I forgot everything for a time but the naked bliss of our bodies and it was liberating.

I fell asleep with my head on his chest, one leg and one arm flung over his lean body. He fell asleep quickly, not tossing and fretting all night like I did. Proof, in my eyes, that he wasn't a "guest" of the Citadel, since anyone being kept there would have too many ghosts clawing at their dreams to sleep as deeply as he did. When I woke up, I was in my own bed, a lumpy pillow taking the place of "Tristan." I stretched my limbs out, rubbing my head as I crawled out of bed. My hair was smooth and free of tangles. It wasn't a dream, at least.

Orrin came in with coffee. I wondered how he knew I was awake. "Good morning," he said, setting the pot down and a couple of cups, laying out a fresh pack of cigarettes next to my ashtray on the desk. "I was worried about you. When they brought you in they said they found you in one of the unused suites, asleep. Are you feeling okay?"

"Yeah," I answered, pouring some coffee for us both, "just wanted a change of scenery."

I guessed that the Elders didn't want to upset my brother with news of me engaging in anonymous sex on his watch, so I let the matter drop as I sat at my desk to work. I felt energized by the night before, ready to get back to work and get on with whatever was left of this life. Bring on the memories, the visions, and the dreams, and let me revel in the seduction of ghosts until I forget once again.