

A photograph of a person's hands holding a glowing orb in a forest at night. The scene is illuminated by sunlight filtering through the trees, creating a bokeh effect of bright spots. The text is overlaid in a bold, red, italicized font.

NeoDruids #1

Druids Dawning

Lark LaTroy

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NeoDruids Book 1

Lark La Troy

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*Dedicated to Faith Bicknell-Brown:
Her knowledge and teaching made this story possible.*

*And as always,
To Sharon*

Initiation

The young man stood still as the members of The Order gathered around him. The altar held all the instruments of initiation; the High Priestess lay perfectly still in her role on the altar. The night felt warm and the forest echoed with the sounds of the night. They had all gathered under a new moon to initiate the newest member.

"Step forward, Falnon," Galnor said in a gentle voice

The initiate in the black robe stepped forward and bowed his head to his mentor.

"Are there any of The Order who can find cause for this student to not be admitted?" Galnor asked.

No one moved, nor spoke.

"Very well. Falnon, do you swear to uphold the Druid creed? To teach as well as be taught? To protect all from harm and to revere all nature and the goddess?"

"I do," the student replied in a shaky voice.

"I have trained you for a year and a day. You have learned of our ways and our codes. No one knows what the true Druids were like except in us, the keepers of the ancient wisdom. We, the New Druids, try our best to uphold the old ways. You, Falnon, are the latest to accept those ways. Prepare yourself for the vision."

He dropped his black robe from his shoulders and stood naked before the seven Druids. The High Priestess remained on the altar but her gaze went to the young man. Galnor brought up the chalice and the young man drank the mixture of wine and herbs. The mixture produced a mild hallucinogenic, which would aid him in his quest.

Next, Galnor brought forth the pitcher. He poured the scented oil over the man's head and shoulders. The aroma of sandalwood and lavender filled his nostrils. The drug started to take effect. As the oil ran down his naked frame, the hands of the Druids worked to smooth the oil over his skin. The new Druid swayed slightly as the drug and the sensation of touch took over.

The Druids moved their hands over his body in a more intimate fashion. He felt many fingers between his legs and the crack of his rear. As the drug worked on his mind, the Druids worked on his cock and rump, and he became lost between reality and vision, between control and the erotic desire to spread his seed.

"I see the world, Galnor; I am above it, soaring over it. I see it as a negative, white is black and black is white," he said in a stilted voice.

The others continued to worship the young man's body, and tenderly they stroked his hard shaft and probed his fluctuating rear with their fingers.

"Mountains, mountains of dark trees, trees that sing. I hear them, Galnor, they sing and I hear them. I see a citadel. It is all black; black onyx. Tall, polished, and with many spires. High on a mountain covered with singing dark trees. I'm settling on a battlement."

His body swayed more and his hard flesh began to throb. The Druids continued to manipulate him, and one of them started gently squeezing the undulating sac between his trembling thighs.

"I see myself, Galnor. I am a raven. A black raven perched on the battlement. I see myself and know myself, Galnor," he cried out happily.

As he described his vision, his body gave way to the hands of the Druids. Jets of hot white sperm exploded from his throbbing cock and his body twitched with ecstasy. The Druids did not stop, but continued to stroke and fondle the young man, keeping him aroused. The vision had not ended and the others kept him at the edge.

"I see people, Galnor, hundreds of people below me, in the citadel. They are sharing life. Men, women, all of them a tangled mass of life and humanity. Their bodies moving as a sea of flesh, human flesh that needs to be held. They hold each other as lovers and share their lives together. They are so beautiful, Galnor," he stated and cried.

The Druids gently helped the young man to his knees. He knelt on animal skin and they prepared him for the ending of his vision. The one called Galnor stepped behind him and poured more oil over the tight rear presented to him.

"I am life. I see life and I am life. The world is a beautiful woman and I see the life she gives."

Galnor knelt behind his student and slipped off his white robe. He poured oil over his own throbbing flesh and moved forward.

"Galnor, I understand. The sun is black and the shadows are white. I see and understand."

Galnor slowly pressed his way into the tight rear. He smiled at how easily his hard cock slid into the tight opening. Galnor slowly started using the younger man's body. He reached around and stroked the twitching cock and undulating sac.

The student moaned in time with Galnor's thrusts. They picked up speed and he gave himself over to both the drug and his mentor. Galnor stroked his student as the drug filled the student's mind with visions.

"A world of life, all life. Past life, new life. I see it all. I feel the life of the goddess and the gods within me."

It took very little time before the two men both cried out as they came together. Galnor pumped jets of hot cum into the twitching rectum of his student. Hot cream exploded from the new Druid and landed on his legs and the fur. Galnor held him tightly during their shared orgasms. When finished, Galnor extracted himself from his student and the Druids helped to lead him towards the altar.

The Druids tenderly washed the body of their newest member. Galnor put his white robe back on and watched as his student prepared to receive his new status. The High Priestess motioned for Galnor to approach. When Galnor reached the altar, he took the silver ring from her hand.

The Druids dressed the new member in a white robe and Galnor could see the drug started wearing off. His student looked around, very aware of the change, and Galnor smiled. He approached and nodded.

"Falnon, you are now a Druid. You have seen yourself as you exist beyond the veil of reality. You understand your place in the universe and you will do wonderful things in the years to come. Remember always, there is no end to learning, and what you teach to others, teaches you in return," Galnor said as he slipped the silver ring onto Falnon's right ring finger.

"Thank you, Galnor. I will honor our ways all the days of my life."

Falnon looked at his hand and smiled to himself. A silver ring with an oak tree carved into the disk. The symbol of the grove, their sacred meeting place. Falnon stepped over to the High Priestess as she stood up. She tenderly kissed him on the lips and whispered into his ear.

"Now, handsome Falnon, you understand both male and female. You have acted as both, remember always how it felt."

"I will, Priestess. Thank you for your guidance and support."

As the ceremony ended, the nine Druids slipped off secretly into the woods to return to their homes.

Chapter Two

Discovery

"I've added those last two servers and ports to the users' document, Mitch," Jill said.

"Thanks, Jill. Maybe now we can get it past legal."

"Well, they are picky, Mitch. But I think this is a good document."

Jill Reese, technical writer for the NeoTech Company, smiled as she handed the finished document to him. She gazed at him and sighed softly, and felt herself becoming lost in his appearance. Without meaning to, her eyes locked onto his. Twin pools of hazel, which looked almost like ice. She reminded herself of the company's policy of no fraternization. Still, she wondered what it would be like to feel his arms around her, pressing her full breasts into his chest. He might not have been a body builder, but his tall frame and satisfactory build enticed her.

He took the document from Jill and their fingers touched; he grinned happily at his tech writer before starting to read.

"So, did you have a good weekend, Mitch?"

"Yes, in fact I did," Mitch replied, showing Jill the ring on his right hand.

"Oh, that's nice. What kind of tree is that?"

"An oak tree. It's the symbol of the grove."

"So, you were initiated, finally?"

"Well, not finally. Training lasts for a year and a day. Initiation happens on the night of the first full moon after training."

"What happened?"

"Well, that part I can't tell you about. But I can say that I am now a full Druid."

"I think it is just so different. You told me what you were studying, but to actually hear you talk about it. I'd have thought you'd have to keep it secret."

Mitch giggled. "No, nothing like that, Jill. We're allowed to discuss just about all aspects of our religion, but the initiations are kept private."

"And the ring, that's to show you passed everything, right?"

"Something like that. It's a signal to others that I'm a member of a very old religion and order."

"I'm just glad you made it, Mitch. I know how much you were looking forward to it," Jill said softly.

* * * *

Jill returned to her desk, sat down, and sighed in frustration. It had happened again. Just seeing Mitch, talking to him, even about work, made her feel things she knew were wrong. The feelings had been growing stronger too. Before, she had only been fascinated by the highly intelligent man. However, in the last few weeks, fascination had given way to something more intense. She felt moisture start to seep into her panties. The urge to slip her hand into her pants for relief was most frustrating.

"Knock it off, Jill. Never get your honey where you get your money," she muttered. The feeling of lust Jill had for Mitch was maddening.

Just once, she wished he would look at her as someone other than a coworker. Sometimes she wondered if Mitch even saw her as a woman. Jill had always brushed off the advances of other men in the company. She knew her looks attracted them, but she only had eyes for one man, and he apparently did not see her as she wanted. All of her self-recriminations did nothing to relieve the itch between her thighs.

Throughout the morning, Jill struggled to keep focused on her work. Desires and fantasies kept getting in the way. Mitch came out to her desk a couple of times during the morning to clarify a few things, which made the frustration even worse. She asked herself, *'Why do I get all flustered around him?'* and she could only come to one answer. Mitch Walker had become the object of her desire and nothing short of a good fucking would help. The problem, however, was they worked together, and the company had very strict rules about office romances. Jill groaned in sexual agony and wished the clock would move faster. She would give herself some relief during lunch.

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Mitch sat back at his desk and let his thoughts wander. He had started to feel things the morning after the initiation, and two days later, those feelings were crowding in on his concentration. Trying to clear his mind, Mitch realized he could not help but focus on the vision. It made an impact on him and his mind constantly showed him the images. More than that, Mitch felt things from around him. It seemed as if he were more attuned to the world and everyone in it.

He'd felt something from Jill when their fingers touched, something good. He noticed the pretty tech writer many times, but he always saw her as a member of the company, never anyone he could become involved with emotionally. That Monday morning, however, he had

seen Jill Reese in a different light.

Mitch watched Jill head off to lunch. Something in her walk told him Jill had some intense feelings. The slight swelling of her nipples and the sway of her hips as she moved towards the elevators hinted she could be a very seductive woman, and he was not the only person watching her. Two other members of the department, Jeff and Brian, talked about the pretty lady. Their conversation became crude and Mitch called them up short.

"You two know the rules. Sexual harassment will not be tolerated in this company."

"Oh, come on, Mitch, you know as well as we do, that babe is hot," Jeff said.

"Yeah," said Brian, "you can't tell me you haven't watched and wondered about her too, Mitch."

"You both want to be written up? Then by all means, keep talking like that. She doesn't have to hear you for a complaint to be made," Mitch said firmly.

"Fine, whatever you say," Brian replied with a sneer.

Mitch stepped back into his office, closed the door, and started his own lunch. As he ate, he thought about the comments made by the two programmers. He had to admit, Jill did affect him. He also made it a point to never discuss it or act on it. Jill had earned his respect and he would do nothing to damage the fine working relationship they had.

* * * *

Jill stepped out of her car and made her way into the forest. There were many secluded areas in the park and she had a favorite area no one else seemed to know about. Her desires had become a fire that needed to be put out and her love of the outdoors led her to that spot. Just the thought that she might be caught caused her lust to build even higher. As she walked towards her secret place, she felt her panties become drenched, and she moved quicker.

Once in the stand of trees, far away from any sensitive ears or prying eyes, she unbuttoned her blouse and opened the front clasp of the bra. She grabbed at her tits hard and tugged at the tight nipples. The warm air caused her skin to become more sensitive and she gently bit her lower lip and increased the pressure on her nipples. Sharp, electric shocks jumped from her tits to her crotch, and she moaned loudly as she continued to tease herself.

Jill tugged off her shirt and bra and sighed passionately as a gentle breeze caressed her bare skin. Unable to wait any longer, she pulled down the zipper at the back of her pants and pulled them over her legs. Her fingers slid over the front of the white cotton and she groaned at the wetness. The cotton was soaked and she yanked the thong off hard and fast.

She threw herself onto the ground and ran her hands over her body, increasing her lustful desires a thousand-fold.

She kept in mind an image, the image of Mitch Walker. As she fantasized about him, she rubbed her clit between the two middle fingers of her right hand. Her body responded wonderfully and she moaned a little louder. Reaching under her thigh with her left hand, she slowly pumped the middle finger in and out of her dripping opening. Jill became lost in her feelings and groaned Mitch's name.

Warm liquid ran from Jill's hot opening, down over her puckered rear. Moving her hand, she used the soaked middle finger to smear the natural lube around the tight hole. Slipping the two middle fingers of the right hand into herself, Jill gently pushed the other finger into her rear. Her voice grew a touch louder and the grass tickled. Jill started to pump both hands rhythmically at the same time. The singing birds covered most of the sounds and the warm breeze kissed her sensitive skin. Jill Reese became one giant sense organ, feeling nothing but the sensations of lust.

For Jill, the world vanished. The intense pleasure she felt in her body drove all other thoughts from her mind. Only Mitch remained, and she became the plaything of the man she desired. She gave herself over to him in the fantasy and he used her in the most incredible ways. As her fantasy built to its climax, she felt her own orgasm building as well. Jill started to tease her g-spot, and in moments, she lost all control.

She bit her lower lip as she started to come. Hot juice flowed and her fingers drove her over the edge into bliss. The orgasm became overwhelming and her body was not her own. Jill cried out loudly as she came. She pushed her butt up off the ground and arched her back, shaking with delight. It seemed as if her orgasm would never stop. The power and sensations kept growing the longer it lasted.

Finally the orgasm passed. A wonderful afterglow of sensual lust filled her mind and she brought her right hand to her face. She licked and sucked the juices from her fingers and then dipped those fingers into the dripping hole for more. Many times her fingers found her soaked flesh and many times she sucked her fingers dry. It had been one of the best sessions she had ever given herself. Jill's only regret was the fact Mitch had not been inside of her when she came.

Once satisfied, Jill started to dress again. She found her thong still soaked and laid it aside. Rapidly, she slipped into her bra, pants, and shirt. Jill bunched up the wet thong in a ball and held it as she leaned back against the large tree. Looking up, Jill watched a squirrel scamper along the branches and she smiled. It suddenly dawned on her that she had treated herself to intense pleasure, under the spreading leaves and branches of a large oak tree.

"Just like the one on his ring," she muttered. "Why am I drawn to you, Mitch Walker?"

After a few minutes, she made her way back to her car. She needed to get back to work.

* * * *

The afternoon seemed to fly by, for which Mitch was grateful. After his coworkers had left, Mitch finished a few minor changes to Jill's document and then shut down for the night. He rode the elevator to the lobby alone and again started to feel something strange and new to him. He'd better call Galnor when he got home. Maybe the wine and herbs had unknown after-effects. Mitch was not so much worried as confused.

The feeling did not abate when he reached the street. He threw the strap of the computer bag over his head and walked towards the T-station. The new feeling was very strange, as if Mitch were somehow out of the correct time. He felt like he was seeing his actions before he preformed them. It had made for a rather difficult afternoon. As he started down the sidewalk, Mitch could not get the strange impression out of his mind.

Two steps later, a new feeling came to Mitch, and this one stunned him: it started at the base of his spine, like a tingling from electricity. It moved up Mitch's back and he stopped walking, unsure of what he felt. The tingle grew in intensity as it moved towards his head. Then the bright flash flared in Mitch's eyes and he closed them quickly. He felt no pain, but it scared him.

He opened his eyes slowly and what he saw shocked him more than the physical sensation. The world had turned to shades of gray in his sight, no color at all. Mitch could see the street, the people, the buildings, yet everything seemed to move slowly. More than the sudden loss of color, Mitch found his gaze pulled in a particular direction. A revolving door on the front of a building tugged at his vision.

A tall, well-dressed man stepped through the spinning door. He set down his briefcase, threw on his suit jacket, then grabbed the case and started down the sidewalk. For some reason, Mitch could not take his eyes off this man. Mitch did not move to follow him. He stood still and watched.

As the man walked down the sidewalk, he pushed through a number of people waiting at the entrance of an alley. The man did not seem to care, and he walked boldly into the mouth of the alley. Mitch sensed danger in what he saw, and just as suddenly, the vision ended and the world returned to normal.

He shook his head and looked around in a dazed state. The people did not take notice of the confused man standing in the middle of the sidewalk. As Mitch tried to gather his bearings again, he saw something that made him flinch. About fifteen yards in front of him was a familiar revolving door. The same man from the vision stepped out, threw on his jacket, and started down the sidewalk towards a knot of people standing at an alley.

Panic filled Mitch's mind. He tried to catch up to the man. He knew what would happen by the third step the man would take. He had to reach him; there were just so many people in the way. He remained too far ahead of Mitch. Even when he called out to the man, it did no good. The panic built to the level of fear, he would never reach the man in time.

"WHAT THE FUCK!" the man said as Mitch pulled on his jacket.

"I'm sorry... but..."

The delivery truck roared through the mouth of the alley. The driver did not even try to slow down as he turned on to the street, tires squealing.

"Jesus!" the strange man exclaimed.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to pull so hard," Mitch said.

"Sorry? Young man, you just saved my life. They didn't even slow down. How can I ever thank you?"

"Hmm, look both ways next time," Mitch whispered.

Mitch turned and walked back up the sidewalk, the way he had come, as the stranger shouted his thanks. Something else had happened and Mitch became very confused. When he reached the last spot he remembered standing in, he walked back towards the mouth of the alley. He counted as he walked and then stood stunned. Twenty yards. Somehow, Mitch had covered twenty yards on a crowded Boston sidewalk in an instant.

He looked around; no one seemed to have noticed. Now scared, Mitch hurried to the station. His mind raced with the kind of thoughts he could not even be sure were sane. He had to call Galnor, had to ask his teacher what had happened to him. Something was not right.

He set down his computer bag on the chair by the apartment door. His only thought at that moment: call Galnor. He picked up his phone, and did not even think about the numbers he pushed. He heard one ring, then a soothing voice.

"Hello, Falnon, something happened today, didn't it?"

"Galnor, I'm going insane, I just know it. What did you and the others put in that drink?"

"Relax, son, you're not going insane. Why don't you come down to O'Connor's? I've got a pint of ale here with your name on it. We need to talk."

"Galnor... I..."

"Ten minutes, Falnon. I'll see you here in ten minutes. You need answers and I'm here to give them to you."

Mitch hung up his phone and, in a dazed state, started for the pub.

Explanations

"You might want to slow down there, Falnon. No sense in getting drunk before you ask your questions."

Galnor laughed for a moment as Mitch drained the pint glass in one long swallow.

"Why stay sober? If it's real, then everything I thought I understood about the world has changed."

"Tell me what happened today."

Mitch told his teacher and friend about the events of the afternoon. Galnor listened very closely to everything and nodded a few times with a narrow smile on his lips. When Mitch finished his story, he poured another pint from the pitcher on the table and waited for his teacher to say something. Galnor sat quietly for several minutes and seemed to be lost in deep thought.

"Foresight. A wonderful gift, and very coveted too. Many Druids dream of having the foresight, but to also have been given blink-stepping. Incredible," Galnor muttered.

"I don't understand. What does it mean, Galnor? I thought the stories about the gifts were meant to inspire me and help guide me. I never dreamed they were true."

"They are true, Falnon, insofar as we have told you. The other eight of us in The Order, we have our gifts from the Goddess as well. Lang can create a thunderclap. Celice controls elements. I have the gift of deep darkness. But to receive these two, one only mentioned twice in our oral traditions, this is unheard of, Falnon."

"So, what are they, really?"

"The first: the foresight. This is no mere glimpse into future events, Falnon. With control and practice, you will be able to see events, past and future, as if you are living them, and for as long as you want. It can be as little as setting your sight a couple of seconds ahead in time to weeks, even months. Both forward and back.

The second, we call it blink-stepping. I would say it's being able to step from one place, to any place you want to be, in the blink of an eye. Not just places you can see, like what happened today, but even places you know. However, blink-stepping to an unknown place is dangerous. If you don't know what is around you, it is possible to step into a solid wall of rock."

"That would be bad, wouldn't it, Galnor?"

"You'd never survive. You would become part of the rock, or wall, or other solid

object you stepped into."

"Great. Just great. I find it hard enough to keep track of time as it is, and now I can be even more confused. Right up until I step into the side of a building and die."

Galnor could see that his young student had grown distressed.

"You have to practice, Falnon. However, you have to be careful when you practice. Only try to blink-step across an open room on the start, or in a park or open field. As to the foresight, you can practice that any time. Just understand, until you master the gift, you will see things that might not make much sense to you. Also, the foresight will affect your dreams. I'd suggest you keep a notebook by your bed, to write down any intense dreams you might have."

"Practice, you say. Sure. How the hell am I supposed to practice, Galnor, when I don't even know how I did it this afternoon?"

"By trying to recreate the feelings and sensations you had today. Remember, you felt a tingling sensation in your back. Try to call that back up. As to blink-stepping, I don't know. Druids so rarely receive this gift that information on practicing does not exist. I'm sorry, Falnon. That is something you will have to discover for yourself."

Mitch looked down at the empty glass in his hand. During his training, he had heard the stories of how the Goddess gave gifts to Druids that deserved and earned them. Most gifts seemed tied to the vision received during the initiation. Mitch tried to tie together his vision and what had happened, but could not find the link. He looked up at his teacher and shrugged.

"Why me? Why give me something my own teacher can't help me understand?"

"We don't have all the answers, Falnon, you know that. Magic and life are full of mysteries. It is why we teach and learn. You have been given not only a rare gift, Falnon, but also the opportunity to record how to practice blink-stepping. Perhaps, in another thousand years, your experience will help another young Druid learn the gift even faster."

"But why these two?"

"Sometimes, when a Druid receives more than one gift, it is because they will face something that will require them to use both. The last time, Quinsor faced a great plague. She had been given the gifts of healing and rain. She healed whole villages of the sickness, and then helped them grow their crops by calling down the rain. In this way, she kept the people healthy. I don't know what you'll face, Falnon. Just remember, The Order will be there to back you up and support you."

"I know. I'm just so confused."

"Don't dwell on it. Set it aside for a while and live your life. When your curiosity gets the better of you, then explore what you have been given. Just be careful. These gifts are

given to you to help guide all of us and so you may better teach and be taught. They are not playthings and not for petty amusements. If you abuse the gifts, they can be taken from you when you may need them the most."

"So, even if I do see tomorrow's lottery, I shouldn't play."

"Depends. Will you learn something from it? Will the winnings help you teach others or protect others? If you are meant to be involved in something you see, you'll know."

"Oh, so now I have to judge my visions as well. Wonderful."

"You act, Falnon, like you don't want these gifts?"

"No, Galnor, it's not that. I mean, I think it's great, really. The responsibility, that's the part that scares me. I mean, what if I abuse the gifts and don't realize it?"

"The old creed, Falnon: harm none, including yourself. If using the gifts will harm someone, then you're abusing them. Stop and reevaluate what you are doing at that time."

"Power corrupting, and all that. Is that what you mean, Galnor?"

"Yes. Don't let the gifts go to your head. You have them for a reason. Trust in your training."

Mitch thought for a few minutes, and then nodded. He stood up to leave and stopped next to his teacher. Something else had been on his mind and he decided to ask.

"So, Galnor, did you enjoy screwing me in the ass the other night?" he asked with a snicker.

"Falnon, it was a ceremony, your initiation into The Order."

"That's not an answer, Galnor, and you know it. I'm just curious, that's all."

"You responded quite well, young man. And you are rather desirable. Of course, the Priestess already has her hooks into me, so I can only indulge my other side during rites. But to answer your question, yes, I did enjoy myself, and you."

"I'm glad I pleased you, Galnor," Mitch replied as he headed out of the bar.

On his short walk back to his apartment, Mitch thought hard on what Galnor had told him. He still felt very confused about the two gifts. He questioned himself on how he could practice something he did not even understand. The fact that he had saved a stranger's life made him feel proud but, at the same time, troubled. He could not be sure of how he had done it, much less if he could recreate the event, even though he wanted to.

As soon as he stepped through the apartment door, Mitch decided he would try to blink-step. He looked at his phone on the breakfast bar in his apartment and concentrated on reaching the phone without moving. All he succeeded in doing was to develop a mild headache. His frustration grew but he also remembered Galnor's advice. Set it aside and try again when he was not so distracted.

Instead of trying to figure it out, Mitch made dinner, cleared up some work on his computer, and watched a little TV for the night. Near ten, he shut off all the lights, took a fast shower, and headed off to bed. He laid still and thought about work for a while, until he felt himself drifting off to sleep. It had been a strange day and, as he dozed off, Mitch hoped the following day would bring some answers.

The dream started simply enough. He flew over the city. A kind of giddy excitement filled his dream and he gazed down on the buildings and streets. The night seemed peaceful, and he felt drawn in a certain direction. As he slowed down in the dream, it seemed as if he were perched on a window two stories up from the ground. He peered into the open window and received a bit of a shock at what he saw.

Jill Reese lay on a large bed in a dark room. Her fingers were working madly between her thighs, and her naked body writhed with excitement and lust. It shocked him to hear Jill call his name in an erotic tone. Transfixed and deeply aroused, he could not pull his eyes from the beautiful woman as she brought herself to an explosive climax. It was as if he were actually peeking in on Jill and watching her most intimate moments. The realization that he was spying on his coworker brought up feelings of guilt, and the dream changed to a deserted street in an area of town he did not recognize.

As he tried to get his bearings, he felt a certain dread at the change in his dream. Everything looked gray and he searched for the focus of the dream. Suddenly, he realized he stood in an area of town just outside the infamous Combat Zone, also called China Town. The area looked to be made up of mostly cheap apartments and run down stores. Confusion grew over why the dream had changed to this setting. As he fought with the confusion, his gaze drifted up the street, and then he saw her.

A small woman with long black hair, wearing a traditional short Asian dress, moved quickly up the sidewalk across the street from him. She glanced behind herself several times, a look of terror in her eyes. Mitch moved across the street without walking and watched the woman approach him. She did not see him, and passed right through him as she hurried on. The look of terror did not leave her for an instant. Mitch followed her.

A huge hand in a black glove reached out of a dark entryway and grabbed the woman by the throat. She struggled hard to get away and Mitch hurried after her as she disappeared into the inky blackness. A large shape pulled the woman into what appeared to be an abandoned store. It dragged the struggling woman towards the far back corner where it then pushed her up against the wall.

She clawed at the large arm, her eyes blind with fear. Mitch was helpless to do anything but watch, and when the long, highly polished blade came into view, he screamed.

Mitch sat up in his bed, screaming in terror, and for the life of him, he did not know why.

Reason

The confusion did not abate in the least. In fact, in one particular area it grew to an almost unbearable level. It was not her fault, of course, but Jill Reese became more than just a coworker. Mitch fought the growing feelings he had whenever Jill came near him, but it was a losing battle.

Ever since the dream, Jill looked at him differently. He could almost see desire in her eyes and she seemed to put on an air of enhanced sensuality when she neared him. Of course, they both kept everything on a fully professional level, but he could not help but feel what he had dreamed might not have been a dream at all. The idea he had somehow actually peeked into Jill's second floor bedroom as she played with her body, confused him even more.

The dream about the murder, however, kept coming back to him. At random times during the day, he would see the large, black shape and the long, polished blade. Every time this happened, he broke out in a cold sweat and felt a fear he had never before known. For three days, Mitch tried to cope with the dream, but he finally had to admit he needed help. A fast phone call to Galnor set a meeting. Mitch took the T to Esplanade Park, and hurried to the stand of trees where he would meet with the others of his order.

"You look like you haven't slept in days, Falnon," Galnor commented.

"I don't think I really have. I can't shake it, Galnor, everyone. It felt and seemed so real."

"Tell us the dream, Falnon, and we'll help where we can," the Priestess advised.

Mitch recounted the dream about the Asian woman's murder. He left out no details, and while he could not be sure of what street he had dreamed, he knew the location was within about four miles. Mitch also informed The Order that the actual murder, though not witnessed, kept coming back to him in clear detail. He knew the long blade was used to kill the woman, even though he had not actually dreamed it himself.

"We live in a big city, Falnon. Murders happen often here and there's not much we can do about it," Gyffes offered in his deep voice.

"I know, but I can't get it out of my mind, and it's driving me crazy. It feels like I was there. Like I stood behind this giant and watched him get ready to kill a helpless woman."

"Perhaps, Falnon, you are meant to be involved somehow," Celice suggested.

"I hope not, Celice. I've never known this kind of fear."

"We cannot hope to deduce everything in one meeting, Falnon," the Priestess

commented. "Perhaps you will dream again, or have a vision that will add more clues to your knowledge. Be patient and open. Answer will come in good time."

"And what if I don't?"

"Then it was just a dream, Falnor. Take it for what it is and focus on your gifts," Galnor reassured the younger man.

"Yeah, practice. Do any of you have suggestions for me in that regard?"

The Druids all shook their heads but smiled. In turn, they each told Mitch that his gifts were his to discover on his own. They could only advise him about how not to abuse the gifts. This left Mitch still confused, but he promised The Order he would practice, as much as he knew. He also promised he would keep in touch with them through Galnor if he had any more dreams or visions.

Mitch, however, did not inform The Order about the other dream. He felt the one dream about Jill should remain private. Unfortunately, the dream about Jill made it very difficult for Mitch to practice his gifts, or concentrate on his work. Jill filled his mind and he wondered, with embarrassment, if what he had dreamed had been her actual body. If so, Jill had a phenomenal body, and, apparently, some pretty deep passions to go with it.

Throughout the days, Mitch gained a certain amount of control over his feelings. If he focused on the clock, he did not feel so far out of natural time. This gave him a kind of self-assurance he might yet master the foresight gift. As to his blink-stepping, however, Mitch only succeeded in frustrating himself. Try as he might, he could not find the right combination of feelings, desire, or thoughts that would allow him to move instantly from one place to another.

By the tenth day after the dreams, Mitch felt more at peace, enough so that he could concentrate again on his work, and he started to focus on seeing events, just a few seconds into the future. He learned, by keeping the time interval short, he actually did gain control over the foresight. The unsettling part remained, the tingling sensation in his back, with the final feeling of an electrical explosion in his head. It never actually hurt him, but he also did not care for the sensation at all.

Even though he started to get a handle on the foresight, his success caused more confusion with regard to Jill. It bothered him that his greatest achievement with the foresight happened when he would focus on Jill. He would concentrate, think of Jill, and see her doing her work, or heading towards his office, the copy machine, the break room, or elsewhere. It seemed to Mitch that as long as he focused on Jill, he had more control. Unfortunately, this practice made him feel guilty, as if he were spying on her.

As the end of his second week as a Druid drew to a close, Mitch realized he would

master his gifts if, and when, the time was right. He would not push too hard, nor would he allow himself to become frustrated by not succeeding within an arbitrary time frame. During his training with Galnor, he had learned to sometimes sit back and let the world move at its own speed. He would continue to practice what he knew, but would not get depressed if he failed.

With his newfound outlook on the gifts, Mitch sat down on his sofa that Friday night with a beer and a book. It was his time to relax and he needed it more than anything. The previous two weeks had been hectic, both work and being a Druid, and he looked forward to doing nothing at all. He took his time, sipping the beer and reading the novel, until he felt the week catch up to him. Another thirty minutes went by and Mitch decided bed would be a good option. As sleep started to steal over him, his mind turned towards the one thing he enjoyed thinking about: Jill Reese. She had been on his mind a great deal, and his thoughts about her as he dozed off were happy and tender.

Once again, the foresight took over and Mitch peered into a second story window. This time Jill sat at a small desk in her room, typing on her computer. He recognized what she worked on and it made him happy to see her so attentive to her work. He saw a diagram for a new system they had been designing and, from the look of things, he knew he would have a finished plan by Monday morning. Jill finished her work and shut down the documentation software, revealing the image she had as the desktop wallpaper.

She tenderly kissed her own fingertips and touched the screen. It made Mitch happy as he saw his own smiling face in a picture taken during the office Christmas party. Jill got ready for bed, putting on a simple nightgown, short and loose. In the gray tones of the foresight, Mitch could not tell what color it might be, but Jill looked fantastic in it. As the pretty woman crawled into bed, Mitch had an intense desire to tenderly say goodnight to his coworker. Despite all the company rules, there remained a longing to tell the lovely lady that he knew about her desire for him.

The dream, or vision, lasted quite a while and Mitch enjoyed watching over her as she slept. He wondered if the foresight were actually showing him what occurred in the present time, or if it were of past events, or possibly future. He did not try to analyze it. He simply accepted it and continued to watch. Jill slipped into deeper sleep and, as she did so, he seemed to be pulled away from the window. He did not want to leave, but the foresight had a mind of its own.

He woke in his own bed, and a wave of confusion swept over him. Looking at his alarm clock, the numbers read 2:14am. He could not be sure what had caused him to wake up, but he decided to answer nature's call before going back to sleep. He slipped out of bed,

and made his way to the bathroom. After a quick visit to the toilet and a sip of water, he felt ready to try to sleep again.

Two steps later, Mitch stood beside a hedge next to a house that looked very familiar to him. Then he realized he only wore his shorts. The shock almost caused him to cry out. The night was warm, and he knew if he were seen, he would be in big trouble.

"Damn it, now what do I do?" he muttered to himself. "Just what I need: to get my ass arrested as a peeping tom, at my coworker's home. I've got to get out of here."

He tried to make the blink-step work. Nothing happened. Again, he tried, thinking of his apartment across town. The only thing Mitch accomplished was raising his level of fear a great deal. That fear became near panic when a dog started to bark, it would be just a matter of time before someone saw him and reported him.

"Come on, you idiot, think. What made it happen?" he whispered. He crouched down behind the hedge and tried to concentrate. If he could only figure it out, he would be safe. The dog barking made it harder for him to relax and concentrate. The one thing he feared most might be Jill finding him. He had to find a way to reverse the step and get back home.

The sound of a neighbor yelling at the barking dog brought Mitch's fear to a new level and, despite his near naked state, he decided that moving away from Jill's place would be better than getting caught there. Looking around, Mitch saw no one. He broke from the cover of the hedge. In a low crouch, he started to move towards the street.

"Hey, you there," came a shout from behind him.

One step later, Mitch ran full tilt into his apartment door, then fell down onto his butt. He sat on his living room floor and rubbed his nose. Despite the pain he felt in his nose, he laughed. For two weeks, he had been trying to get the blink-step to work again. It did and he had almost been caught. He remembered Galnor telling him to practice only in open areas and places he knew. Strangely, the foresight had taught him about a place he had not known, and the blink-step had taken him there. The only question that remained, how?

Despite everything, Mitch still did not know how he had stepped from his apartment to the yard of Jill's house. He needed to talk to Galnor again and made plans to call his teacher in the morning. Perhaps Galnor would find something in the latest series of events to help guide the young Druid before he hurt himself. As he laughed, Mitch picked himself up off the floor, got some ice from the freezer, and headed back to his bedroom.

He slept soundly, and near nine the following morning, he woke up to his phone ringing. All he wanted was to sleep a bit longer, so he grabbed the phone and groaned.

"Hello," he whispered.

"Falnon, get up. Get up now, there's a problem," Galnor said.

"What's the matter, Galnor?"

"Go turn on the TV and find the news. We'll be at your place in an hour."

"Sure, Galnor. Sure. But what's wrong? You sound terrified."

"I have reason to be, and so do you, Falnon. Watch the news."

Mitch hung up the phone and dashed to his living room. After turning on the local news, he faced a dread that threatened to suffocate him.

"Lucy Wong, owner of the Golden Sunrise gift shop, was found brutally murdered today in an abandoned store just outside of China Town. Authorities are releasing very little information, but sources inside the police department are reporting this is the fourth murder by what some have dubbed The Full Moon Killer. This morning, workers discovered the body, and it is not clear as yet what connection Lucy Wong has with the other three murder victims, other than the time and method of her death," the reporter stated.

Mitch started to shake. The TV cameras showed a street and storefront that were all too familiar to him. He had seen them before; in what he thought had only been a dream. However, there, on his TV, was solid evidence that he had foreseen the woman's murder. The realization that this had been the fourth such murder caused Mitch's blood to run cold.

"What have I gotten myself into?" he muttered.

As he listened to the news report, Mitch dressed quickly and started some coffee. The report went on in great length about Lucy Wong's murder. Mitch, of course, already knew about the long knife or sword. He had seen it. The news went into details that Mitch had not seen in the dream.

For one thing, the four victims had nothing in common, except how and when they died. The first was Jeff Ross, a retired ship builder. That man would have been a tough opponent for anyone, but he had died horribly, his heart pierced by the long blade of the killer. The second victim, Stephanie McCormick, a housewife with two children. Killed the same way, and during a full moon. The third victim, Andrew Spencer, was a homeless drug addict. And, finally, Lucy Wong. Same method of death. Everything identical. The method of the killings sickened Mitch. The news reported that the killer used a very long blade, possibly a sword of some kind. What the police could report about the killer remained sketchy at best. The police stated, however, the killer would be a very large person, and very strong.

"These are ritual murders. Someone is performing a dark ritual, but why?" Mitch said to himself.

The knock on his door brought Mitch out of his deep thought. He let the other eight members of The Order file into his apartment, and turned off the TV. When everyone settled, he looked at them closely. Having them in his home gave him some comfort. He knew why

they had come to him; they had all heard the dream. Nevertheless, the solemn gazes they cast towards him told Mitch that his life had just gotten much more complicated. The Priestess stepped over to Mitch.

Mitch admired the very beautiful woman as she looked deeply into his eyes. Her long brown hair flowed over her shoulders and down her back. She wrapped her slim arms around him and hugged him tightly to her full breasts. He wrapped his arms around her slim waist and hugged her in return.

"You are not alone, Falnon. You will not have to face this on your own," she whispered in his ear.

"I know, Priestess. I know, and I'm thankful you all are here," Mitch whispered back.

Mitch and the Priestess sat down and Galnor looked around the room. As the oldest of all the Druids in The Order, Galnor would lead and the others would listen. When his eyes came to rest on Mitch, a warm reassurance filled the room and he believed he might yet get through the upcoming ordeal.

"Well, now I know why I received the gifts I have," Mitch commented.

"Perhaps. Don't be so sure that this task is ours to face, Falnon," Galnor replied.

"Then how will I know, Galnor?"

"By what happens over the next few days. If you were given the gifts to fight this man, you'll receive confirmation within three days. How have your practice session been going?"

"Hmm, well, I'm kind of getting the hang of the foresight. Not much control over it, but a little."

"And the blink-step?"

"It's only happened one other time now. And I still have no real control."

"Get control. If you get confirmation that this fight is ours, we only have twenty-eight days before the next killing. We cannot let that happen."

"I... I mean, how? I still don't know what triggers it."

"I understand, Falnon, but you have to understand. This is dark magic we are dealing with here. We have to be at full strength, all nine of us, if we are to win. We can't let this continue."

"But you don't even know if it's our fight. You said so yourself, Galnor."

"True, but Lang will help you discover the truth."

"Lang? I don't understand."

"I work in the police department, Falnon. A detective. I have access to all the evidence and information on this case. Monday, after things have settled down a bit, you and

I will visit the latest crime scene. Maybe you'll see something that will help us discover who we are looking for."

"But I already told you all about the dream. What more can I tell you?"

"Nothing now, but when you go to the crime scene, the impressions you get there will hopefully confirm our involvement. And your foresight might just help identify this killer before he strikes again," Lang answered in a very tender voice.

"All right. Monday. After work. I'll meet you at the office and we'll go," Mitch said.

"No, you'll meet Lang here. He will take you," Galnor stated in a flat tone.

"I have to work, Galnor. I still have bills to pay and a life to maintain," Mitch said.

"No. You need to focus and concentrate. You need to gain control and we don't have much time. If we are not to fight this battle, then all you have lost is one day. If, however, this is our fight, and more people die, how will that affect your life, my young friend?"

"Okay, I'll call in sick, or something. Lang, I'll be here. What time?"

"I'll come by around two in the afternoon. Don't wear anything you don't want to get dirty," Lang answered.

Search

Despite the admonition of his fellow Druids, Mitch could not relax and concentrate on his gifts that weekend. Instead, he started his own research on The Full Moon Killer. Mitch wanted to know everything he could about the murders, where they happened, when, how, and possibly even why. He knew the police were stumped by the seeming randomness of the murders. Each death happened in a different part of Boston, and with different kinds of people.

One thing Mitch and the police both knew was that the killer switched off for each murder. Male, female, male, female. The next murder on the full moon would be a man, although the police did not know where. By studying the past murders, Mitch hoped to find some clue as to the next one and maybe help Lang head it off. Even if he learned that the Druids were not to fight this thing, he could at least do something to help.

One of the first things Mitch learned filled him with a certain loathing. By counting out moon cycles, he surmised that the killer apparently planned not less than six murders. The cycle had come around once again and October would see both of the next full moons, the second being on October thirty-first. The fact that it would be a full moon on Samhain, the Celtic New Year, gave Mitch a slight shudder. He had never feared the day, but he also learned through Galnor that some cults viewed the day with malicious intent. Magic had power at the crossroad of a year, and the killer would try to perform some kind of ritual that night under the full moon. To what end, however, Mitch would not even hazard to guess.

Using his computer, Mitch plotted out the four murders on a map of the city. At first there seemed to be no pattern to the locations, and Mitch wondered if he'd find any link at all. Taking his time, he examined the history and pictures of the scene of each murder. He hoped to find some physical landmark, or clue as to why the killer picked those locations. After several hours of research, Mitch had just as many unanswered questions as when he started. Nothing seemed to be special about the locations, and he still could find no reason for the murders happening in those areas.

He went to his kitchen and grabbed another beer. Frustrated, he sighed hard at not being able to see a pattern or connection in the murders. While lost in his thoughts, Galnor's words came back to him. Perhaps he was not supposed to be involved. Maybe the vision he had happened because of the newness of his gifts. Maybe he should stop trying so hard to involve himself in something he probably could not fight anyway. Just as quickly, Mitch

berated himself for having such thoughts. He had become a Druid with the promise of helping people. To give up when he could at least try would be a violation of his oath, and Mitch would not allow himself to do that.

He returned to his computer and sat down, not really seeing anything. He let his mind go blank and hoped that maybe the foresight would show him something. He sipped at his beer and relaxed. Answers would come in their own time, and he knew that trying to push things would only lead to mistakes or errors. Mitch rolled over in his mind the little bit of connection he had found.

Three men, three women. Six murders, six full moons. Six locations. Six, six times six. Three times three, times six. Three times three is nine at six locations.

Mitch opened his eyes. The idea of the numbers three, six, and nine reminded him of something from his training. He looked at the map on his computer screen and saw a pattern. Using the scale marker on the map, Mitch plotted lines from the first three murders. Each line came to exactly nine miles and, when finished, Mitch saw a perfectly formed, inverted triangle. The fourth murder had happened six miles south of the third. With a shaking hand on the mouse pad, Mitch plotted two nine-mile lines from that point: one line due east, and the other towards the North End of Boston. Checking the distances and spacing, a strong sense of dread crept over him as he looked at a perfect right triangle positioned directly over the inverted triangle on the map.

The six-pointed star stunned him. Each murder planed to complete a geometric shape. The implications of the dark ritual scared him. Galnor had been right, a very dark and evil magic was at work in Boston. Someone, or something, would kill six times in a very specific pattern. The reason the police could not find a link between victims became clear to Mitch, there was no link. It did not matter who the victims were, as long as they were three males and three females. Clearly, the killer simply picked the most convenient person at the height of the full moon, and in the right location.

Using the zoom feature on the map, Mitch zeroed in as close as possible to the site of the next murder. The map showed a park in an industrial complex. There were also some apartment buildings nearby. Armed with the pattern he found, Mitch thought his day out with Lang would be more productive, and that with his discovery, Lang could mobilize the police to stake out the park and catch the killer before he could harm anyone. What the ritual might be remained a mystery to Mitch, but he did not care at that point. With the plotted location for the next killing, the odds were better that the ritual would be stopped, and the murderer caught.

Mitch called his office Monday morning and complained that he had the flu. His

manager did not argue and told Mitch to take care of himself. With that out of the way, Mitch contacted Lang to say he was ready. He then called Galnor, explained what he had discovered over the weekend, and asked for advice. Galnor told Mitch to be open to all possibilities, and to let his gifts guide him.

"Above all else, Falnon, don't try to force the foresight. You will be going into an emotionally charged area. A woman died there. Let the gift work at its own pace, not yours."

"I understand, Galnor." Mitch said. "I don't want to see it, but I understand why. Maybe I can get a description of this killer."

"With what you've discovered about the possible upcoming murders, the police will have much more to work with. Lang will get it to them in the proper way. You just concentrate on seeing the beast and details so the police know who they are looking for. You are strong, Falnon. You can do this."

Lang knocked on Mitch's door shortly after two. Before setting out, Mitch showed him what he had discovered, or thought he had discovered. Lang examined the map and addresses. Nodding in agreement, he told Mitch that his idea sounded more rational than anything else the police had been able to come up with.

"At least there is a pattern. I don't know why we didn't see it before, but then again, most of my fellow officers are not open to the more subtle aspects of the world and magic."

"It must be difficult, being a police detective and a Druid. Don't you ever wonder if the two worlds will overlap and you'll get lost between them?"

"No, Falnon, I don't. Part of your oath is to protect others. I took that same oath, remember? This is my way of protecting others and still remain true to my Druid training."

"Have you ever had to use your gift in the line of duty?"

"The thunderclap?" Lang chuckled. "No, thank the goddess. I like the other cops too much to subject them to that." Lang giggled as they both headed towards his car.

Lang's good nature helped to calm some of the dread. Visiting the scene of a murder would not bother him, but the dream of the murder scared him enough, and having to actually try to see more became a nightmare. He knew he would be looking backward in time, and that his goal was to gather information on the killer. Lang needed a description, and Mitch hoped he could provide it.

When they arrived, they approached the abandoned shop in silence. Mitch took a moment to clear his mind before crossing into the darkness. The two of them stepped over the threshold at the same time, but for Mitch, it took all his strength to do so. Lang turned on his flashlight and slowly, the two of them moved towards the place Lucy's body had been found. The silence and darkness became oppressive to Mitch, and more than anything, he wanted to

hurry up and get it over with. When he saw the tape outline on the floor a great sense of loss and sadness washed over him. She should not have died, not like that.

The two men moved around the scene. Lang watched Mitch as he tried to let his gift work on its own. He was too ashamed of his fear to meet Lang's gaze. Eventually, they wound up on opposite sides of the taped outline. When Mitch finally did look up, Lang gazed at him with an expression of soothing compassion. Lang clearly did not like using Mitch in this way any more than Mitch wanted to be used. But the killings had to stop, and Mitch was the only person who had any chance to end it.

The foresight hit him hard. The world suddenly turned into gray hues and Mitch could feel his body suspended off the ground. A giant hand held him by his throat, and he became almost blind with panic. The vision put Mitch into the place of the murdered woman. Everything she felt and did that night became his to know. He looked at the thing that held him by his throat and the fear grew. Despite his panic, he focused on the face he saw, made himself commit everything to memory. He tried to make the giant hand let go of him, just as Lucy would have, but the strength seemed inhuman. When the long blade came into view, Mitch made note of what it looked like, just before he screamed.

"FALNON! Falnon, are you all right?" Lang shouted as he shook Mitch by his shoulders.

"Oh god, Lang, I saw him!" Mitch cried. "I was her. Lucy. He held me. God, that face, the evil in that face,"

"You went blank, your face, it just went blank. Then, you screamed, like you were in pain."

"I died, Lang. I took her place and he killed me. So strong, so very strong."

"What did you see?" Lang pleaded.

Even as the tears coursed down his cheeks, Mitch worked to bring himself back in check. He had seen the killer and had to give Lang a description. Despite the horror of what he had seen, he had a job to do. Lang helped him off the floor and they hurried out of the shop, into the open air and sunlight. Mitch threw himself onto the hood of the car and sobbed. He died; he felt everything Lucy Wong felt when she died. The fear, the pain, the horror of what happened to her became a part of him. For just a moment, Mitch cursed the foresight for putting him in that situation. Lang's gentle hand, however, helped him relax, and to put the world back into perspective.

"I'm all right, Lang. It's not every day you see yourself die."

"You're not dead, Falnon, not yet. You said you traded places with her."

"No, not traded, I was her. Lang, it was happening to me. He held me off the ground

with that enormous hand. He stabbed me with that... thing. It's not a sword, or a blade of any kind. More like a giant spike. Maybe four feet long, a very sharp point on one end and, I don't know, about an inch and a half, maybe two inches in diameter."

"And the killer?" Lang asked as he pulled out his notebook.

"Awful. Big, really big. At least six-feet-ten. He has solid muscle and is unbelievably strong. He held her off the ground with one arm as if she was nothing. Stabbed her here," Mitch said, pointing under his left arm, "and pushed that spike through her, real slow. He wasn't in a hurry, Lang: he pushed it through her body and out the other side in one very slow motion. I felt her die, me die. But that face, like something out of a nightmare."

"Can you describe his face for me, please?" Lang whispered, writing rapidly.

"His head looks like it is too big. No neck, almost as if his head just grew up from his shoulders. No hair at all, not even eyebrows. The mouth, it looks too wide, like it had been cut at the corners to make it wider. But his eyes, god, those vile eyes. They're black, Lang, no color at all. I don't just mean because the visions happen in gray tones, I mean they're black."

Lang continued jotting down notes. "Anything else?" he asked.

"No, nothing physical. Just this... overbearing feeling of hate. Like he hates all humanity. Lang, I don't think he's human. I don't know what he is, but that was like no human being I've ever met," Mitch said in a pained voice.

Lang finished his notes and the two men got back into the car. As Lang drove them away from the crime scene, Mitch kept his thoughts to himself. Despite the queasiness he had about what he had seen, he felt powerful. He had actually looked back into time and saw more than anyone could have about a horrible murder. Even though the action had frightened him, the assistance he had given would help Lang and the police find the killer and stop him before he could harm anyone else. Mitch no longer cursed his gift, but saw it as a tool to help people, maybe even save lives.

He became so engrossed in his thoughts that it took several moments for him to realize that the car had stopped moving. Lang had parked the car near an industrial complex. There were four low-rise buildings to the complex and in between the buildings; a large park could be seen. Mitch climbed out of the car and looked towards Lang.

"I hate using you like this, Falnon."

"You're not using me. I understand. So where are we?"

"This is the site you indicated on the map for the next attack. I'm hopping you'll be able to see the next victim. If we know who we're looking for, and where, we can stop this thing. I need you to try."

"I'll do my best, Lang. I'm just not sure how successful I'll be. Seeing a few minutes

into the future is one thing, but weeks, I've never done that before."

"Take your time, Falnon. Do what you can."

The two men walked around the complex and park. Some of the apartment buildings shared the grounds with the complex. They also saw a small boathouse at the shore of the harbor. There were people enjoying the day in the area, but the two Druids approached no one. Mitch kept his mind clear and open to any impressions that his gift might suddenly show to him. Lang followed just behind him.

Unfortunately, after two complete circuits of the park, Mitch became frustrated. Nothing happened and he felt that he was letting his fellow Druid, and the people of Boston, down. As they continued walking, he tried to make the foresight show him events. It failed every time, and after another walk around the park and buildings, he sighed loudly and leaned back against a tree, folding his arms in frustration.

"Nothing. I'm sorry, Lang, I see nothing. Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe this isn't where he'll strike next. I just don't know."

"Relax, Falnon. I trust your judgment. Perhaps you're trying too hard."

"I've done both, tried and not tried. I didn't have to force it at the crime scene, but I'm not getting anything here."

"You sound angry. Don't be. Five hundred years ago, Visscon had foresight as well. Tradition says that when she needed to see something in the future, she'd focus on the date and time she wanted to see. Maybe that is what you need to do. Focus on October third at midnight and let the foresight take you there."

Mitch nodded, and they started another walk around the park and complex. He made the date of October third the only thought in his mind. All desire, hope, and need became focused on that one date, and he wanted to see the full moon. As they walked, he let nothing cause his thoughts to stray from that one goal. When they drew near to a large elm tree in the midst of hedgerow, the foresight hit him almost painfully hard. He saw the full moon, and a dark park. He stood near the large elm, his eyes drifting to the left. Off in the distance a young boy appeared. The child called a name, and seemed to be searching for something. As Mitch watched the scene unfold in the gray world, the large, black mass of the killer appeared out of nowhere near the hedge. In a fluid motion, the black giant reached the boy, grabbing him hard about the throat. Mitch took off at a run, fear motivating his actions.

Mitch threw himself against the giant, but nothing happened. He passed through the killer as if passing through air. The look in the boy's eyes told him more than he wanted to know. The vision seemed real, as if he were in the park, on the night, witnessing the event as it took place. Try as he might, there was nothing he could do to change what he saw. When

the long silver spike came into view, he closed his eyes, not wanting to see another murder.

"Falnon... Falnon, are you okay?" Lang whispered.

Mitch came out of the vision, on his knees under the elm tree, tears coursing down his cheeks. "No, Lang, I'm not. It is here, he'll kill here. It will be a boy, Lang, a young boy. Maybe twelve years old. He'll come from over there," Mitch pointed towards an apartment building to the south of the park. "The killer came out of those hedges. The boy will be wearing jeans, an oversize Boston Red Socks jersey; he has light hair, probably blond. The name he will be calling is Rocky, probably a dog. He is your next victim, Lang. I couldn't stop it."

Lang took down the notes he needed. That, and with the other information he had, Lang would set up a stake-out of the park on the night of October third. With enough police watching the park, there was a good possibility that the killer would be caught before he even saw the boy. Mitch had to hope they stopped him. It was the only way he could deal with what he had seen. He also knew of a way to find out if they would succeed.

"We need to visit the last site on the map, Lang," Mitch said.

"Why? I now know where this bastard will strike next, and what the intended victim looks like. With enough officers here that night, we'll catch him, and stop him."

"I have to be sure. I'm the one who sees these events, Lang, and I have to know."

"All right, we'll go check it out. I hope for all our sakes, you see nothing this time."

Mitch also hoped that he would see nothing, but he focused on October thirty-first as Lang pulled out of the parking lot. He continued to focus on the date as they rode towards the North End of Boston. The location he had indicated was not precise, and a short search would be needed to find the right street. They were going to an older section of Boston that Mitch had never visited, but he trusted Lang to seek out the most likely location from his map. They reached the area in good time, and Lang started a slow drive as Mitch concentrated on the date.

The first road they drove through, a cul-de-sac, turned out to be nothing. As they turned up the next road, with Lang driving slowly, Mitch looked at his feet. For some moments, nothing happened, until a familiar tingle started in his spine. Looking up, the house at the end of the street, in the center of the cul-de-sac, a house that had become very familiar to him over the last couple of weeks became his focus. When he recognized it, the pain hit him hard, and he screamed in agony and grabbed his head.

The foresight hit him harder than ever before and, in an instant, Mitch saw the dark street, the house, and a woman walking towards the house with some grocery bags in her hands. The black killer seemed to pour out of an alley directly in front of the woman. He

grabbed her hard and fast, the bags falling from her hands as the giant hoisted her into the air. In the vision, Mitch again threw himself at the killer, wanting to do anything to stop him. He failed, but something changed.

Just as the silver spike came into view, the killer looked at him as Mitch stood behind the woman. The monster could see him; it knew he was there. The killer smiled a sick, sadistic smile at Mitch just as he stabbed the struggling woman under her left arm. A split second later, the vision changed. A vile, perverted scene came to Mitch in his foresight, and he could not make it stop. One horror upon another filled his vision with pain and fear. The insanity of it all threatened to drive him mad. In an instant, the culmination of the ritual murders came to Mitch's gifted sight, and he recoiled in terror from what he saw.

The vision ended as abruptly as it started, and Mitch clawed at both the door handle and his seat belt. He got the door open but could not wait to release the belt. So, leaning over hard to his right, Mitch gagged as his stomach forced its contents out onto the pavement below. The foresight had shown him too much, and Mitch had been sickened by what the murders meant, and where they would lead. As he retched, he cried. He knew the police would fail on the third, and he knew the identity of the last victim. He did not want to believe it, but he had seen her die.

"Falnon, don't tell me we fail," Lang stated.

"You do, and god, what will come after, after the ritual is complete. We have to stop this, Lang, we have to," Mitch groaned

"What did you see?"

"Get me out of here; take me away from here, Lang. I can't bear to look at that house."

Lang gunned the engine, and the tires squealed as he pulled away from the cul-de-sac as fast as he safely could. Keeping one eye on the road, and one on Mitch, Lang was waiting until his partner said something.

The only thing Mitch wanted was to be away from that place. He did not know what to do, but he had to do something. Jill Reese could not die that way; he would not allow it, no matter the cost.

Revelations

Mitch sat perfectly still as Lang drove away from Boston's North End. He fought with the images in his mind, and the horror they created in his emotions. He had no idea what to do. Over and over again, his mind played back the murder of his coworker and what the world became after she died. He had to find a way to stop it, but he had no idea how. Since becoming a Druid, he had never felt so helpless. After the last vision, he wondered if there was anything anyone could do.

During the ride back to Lynn, Lang tried to talk to the young man, but Mitch did not respond in any way. He simply sat in the car, staring out the front window. He did not see the city, the sky, or the other cars. He only saw darkness and flames, a world where people were violated and brutalized by horrible creatures, and the human race did not die. He saw millions of people, screaming and begging for death, but they lived on. The whole of humanity reduced to nothing more than the playthings of insane, impossible, sadistic creatures that took great delight in torturing the flesh of humanity. He saw hell on Earth, and nothing more.

When the car stopped again, they were at Mitch's apartment. Lang had to actually pull the Mitch from the passenger seat and help him to his apartment. Once inside, Lang led the young man to his easy chair and helped him sit down. Mitch continued to stare off into empty space, fighting to regain some control over his thoughts. The horror of his foresight threatened to drive him mad. He tried to focus on more pleasant images, but failed, and wept at his failure. He wept painfully, out of bitterness for what he foresaw as a failure on his part and the end of life as he knew it.

Time became irrelevant to him. He no longer seemed to have a concept of time. In a single day, he had pushed his mind both backward and forward into time. However, he had not even tried at the last site. It had come to him without warning, hurt him in its power, and showed him a world where time ceased to have any meaning. As much as he sobbed for Jill's impending death, he knew she would be the lucky one. Those who remained after the ritual ended would suffer thousands of deaths, for eternity, and never be allowed the relief of death. Mitch sobbed for the world.

Off in the distance, deep in his mind, he heard a familiar voice. A voice of soothing tones and tender words. Words that cut through the maze of terror and seemed to pull him from the hell in his mind.

"We are here for you, Falnon, standing beside you. You do not face this alone. Come

back to us. Let it go and let us help you face the future."

In a slow, almost methodical way, the visions of horror and insanity started to fade, and after what seemed like days, Mitch opened his eyes to find the Priestess kneeling in front of him, holding his hand, and smiling at him. Looking around quickly, he saw the eight members of The Order in his apartment. Night had fallen and sometime during his struggle, and the other Druids had come to his aid. Lang had never left his side.

All the Druids showed signs of worry and compassion in their eyes. Galnor looked the most worried. "You have given us quite a bit to fret over, Falnon. Lang says you suddenly screamed and got very sick, asked to leave, and then said nothing."

"I know, Galnor, all of you. What I saw is... it's... I can't even describe it. One horror after another, on and on, everywhere, all at once."

"Take it easy, son," Galnor offered with a smile. "You've had a hard day. Lang told us what you saw at the crime scene, and in the park. Take your time; tell us when you are ready."

"We don't have time, Galnor. Two lives are in immediate danger, the whole world after that."

"It's that serious?" Eiler asked.

"I wish you could see what I saw, and then again, I'm very glad you can't. I can tell you all that the last victim is named Jill Reese. She is my technical writer at work, and my friend."

"You know her?" the Priestess asked in a stunned voice. "Is she important to you, Falnon?"

"She is important as a human being," Mitch replied as he felt his cheeks turn red. "I took our oath to protect all people, not just the people I know."

Lang giggled. "It would seem by your reaction Falnon, that Jill Reese means more to you than just a coworker."

Mitch looked at the floor. He had not told them about his dreams, or the time he had blink-stepped to her house without even trying. The dreams had been private, not something he felt he should share, even with his fellow Druids. But after the day of searching for answers, his dreams about Jill became much more than dreams and he had a stronger connection to her than even he wanted to admit.

He looked up and smiled at his eight companions. "You're right, Lang, there is more, much more."

Mitch related to the Druids what he had not told them before, the foresight-induced dreams, his feelings at finding himself outside of Jill's home. When he told the others about

being in a near panic at possibly being discovered, Galnor smiled at the revelation. Mitch finished his story; he sat back in the chair and waited for the rebuke he knew would be coming.

"So, this young woman is important to you," the Priestess stated. "Important enough that you have found control over one of your gifts by concentrating on her."

Mitch nodded. "I have found that if I focus on her, I can see through the foresight, events that will happen around her. But this last one, it hurt. Not just what I saw, but actual pain."

Galnor laid his hand on the young man's shoulder. "You should not have hidden this from us, Falnon. We are here for you, to help guide you."

"I know. It's just, the dreams were private. I saw things about her that are... personal, to her."

"And to you," Lang said. "She is your focus, your link if you will. Perhaps, with her help, you can gain control over the blink-step as well."

"Does she know?" the Priestess asked.

"That I'm a Druid? Yes, she knows. That I have gifts and have seen her? No, that I have not told her."

Galnor smiled. "She accepts you being a Druid?"

"Yes, in fact she is very interested in it. Of course, I now know why she is so interested. Jill Reese has the hots for me," Mitch said with a laugh, and the Druids laughed with him.

Galnor motioned for one of the other Druids to join him. The lovely woman smiled, picked up her sketchpad, and moved to the sofa next to Mitch's chair. She called herself Gywellyn, and she looked to be about thirty years of age. Her dark hair framed her pretty face, and her eyes gazed at Mitch with tenderness and compassion. In The Order, she was their healer. She possessed the gift of healing, whereby she could enhance a person's own healing ability. She also had an extreme talent for art, and Lang asked Mitch to describe the killer to her. Lang would use the sketch to start the search for the killer through police channels.

While Mitch described the killer for the artist, the other Druids congregated around Lang. He informed them about how he planned to make use of Mitch's visions, and the sketch. His plan sounded simple enough. Broadcast the sketch as far and wide as possible. Search everywhere and through every database available for any possible matches to the killer. If the police failed to track him down by the third of October, he planned to have enough police in the park to capture the killer before the boy Mitch had seen could be

harmful. Of course, none of them were fooled into a false sense of security. All of the Druids knew the police might fail.

"I doubt we will fail," Lang offered.

"I hope not. That child has not even started living his life yet," Galnor stated. "He must be allowed to continue on, safe from this killer."

"I just hope we catch this guy before the third."

"You will, Lang," the Priestess said "After all, Boston's finest are going to be on the job. And once that sketch is broadcast on television, you'll have the whole city helping you find this... thing."

Despite forty-five minutes of work, and three attempts, Mitch groaned at the latest sketch.

"I don't know, I guess I'm not very good at descriptions."

"It's okay, Falnon, I know the image scares you," Gywellyn said. The tenderness in her voice made Mitch stop worrying, and he sighed with resignation.

"He does scare me. The last foresight vision, I could swear he saw me."

"Just relax. Look at what we've got and tell me what to do."

"I'm glad you didn't see it."

"Perhaps if I did, I could sketch him more accurately," Gywellyn offered.

"What do you mean by that?" Mitch asked.

"This, Priestess, some help please."

"How can I help?" the Priestess offered.

"Falnon is having trouble describing the killer in accurate detail. I was hoping you could touch his mind and let me see the face," Gywellyn suggested

"Do you agree to this, Falnon?" the Priestess asked in return.

"I don't understand."

"My gift is the ability to touch and read other people's minds. I can see their memories and thoughts. But I can also transmit those thoughts from one person to another. Kind of like one of your networks, where one computer shares information with another. I just do it with people's minds."

"That's why I heard you. You touched my mind when I couldn't find a way out," Mitch replied in a stunned voice.

"Yes, that's why you heard me. You were so lost, you didn't even realize we'd come in to your home. Lang said you hadn't moved in over an hour. I had to do something to reach you."

"Did you see? See what I saw? Did you see what he plans to do?"

"No, I did not. I only spoke to your mind; I don't search for specific images or memories, unless you allow me."

"What do I have to do?" Mitch asked, as the other Druids started to gather around.

"Just focus on the face of the killer. See it just the way you saw it in your visions. Don't let your mind wander. I'll touch that memory and share it with Gywellyn. She will see exactly what you and I see."

"Okay, I'll try," Mitch sighed.

"No, don't just try," the Priestess exclaimed. "You have to stay focused. If you let your mind wander, we will both see more than you agreed to."

Mitch nodded and took a deep breath. He thought of only the killer's face. As much as he hated the image, he forced himself to see it. In his mind, he saw the murder of Lucy Wong again. He remembered seeing himself in her place, when he had the closest look at the killer. Mitch focused on that single image and nodded towards the Priestess. She took his hand and reached out with the other hand to Gywellyn.

He felt her mind in his, as if he were two people. Concentrating hard, Mitch worked to keep the image of the killer's face foremost in his thoughts. A strange sensation filled his mind — a feeling of incredible power and peace. The Priestess's presence had a very soothing effect on him. She not only touched his mind, but also shared a part of hers with him. In a few moments, an almost giddiness overpowered him, and in that moment, he made his one mistake. The horror of his last vision jumped to the front of his thoughts. He saw again, the world in chaos, and burning. The vile creature that killed on each full moon stood on a pile of writhing human bodies. Mitch again slipped into the hopelessness of defeat.

In the horror of it all, a sudden jolt of fear slipped into his mind. It was not his own, but it intensified his to a new level. He struggled to regain control, to focus just on the killer's face. But the damage had been done. Without meaning to, Mitch Walker had shared the most horrible memory in his mind with the Priestess and Gywellyn. No matter how hard he tried, he could not suppress the frightening final vision of what would happen if the killer was not stopped.

A sudden jolt of pain caused Mitch to yank his hand away from the Priestess. When he looked around, the sight of the other Druids caused him to become concerned. He saw something in their eyes that told him things had changed. Changed in ways he could not possibly imagine. Lang looked terrified; Gywellyn's body shook hard. The Priestess had a face of almost pure white, and even Galnor trembled with fear. Something had happened and Mitch had no clue as to the cause.

"I'm sorry," the Priestess whispered. "I had no idea. Oh, Falnon, what you've seen,

what he plans to do..."

"Priestess, you... saw it?" Mitch questioned.

"I couldn't help it. It's so disgusting. Those people, thousands and thousands of people. They can't die, but they want to, just to stop the pain."

"He is a monster," Lang hissed. "Sweet goddess. He has to be stopped."

"You saw it too, Lang?" Mitch asked

"They all did, and more." The Priestess whispered. "I couldn't help it. When I saw what you saw, my mind, my gift, sent the images out in a burst of pain. I've done something terrible," she said as she started to weep.

"I don't understand," Mitch said, looking towards the others.

"Our Priestess can broadcast the thoughts of others, over long distances. We saw your vision, Falnon. The horror you couldn't even tell to Lang. We saw it. No wonder you withdrew from everyone. If that is what happens when the last murder takes place, then the whole world is at risk," Galnor said in a shaking voice.

"He must be stopped, quickly," Eiler said. "The world can't end like that."

"What do you mean you've done something terrible, Priestess?" Mitch asked.

"My... mind blasted those images out of me. I couldn't control it." The beautiful woman wept. "I don't know how far, but every mind I touched saw what you saw. There are now dozens, maybe hundreds, of people who know what you know. They didn't ask for it, never agreed to it, but they know it, they saw it."

"People, other people know?" Mitch asked.

"Yes, and it is all my fault," the Priestess cried. "I've shown others what they should never see," she exclaimed in a terrified voice.

"No, it's not your fault. I couldn't stay focused. I'm sorry. But... it just slipped in there."

"Falnon, you saw this. The world in flame and monsters tormenting people. This is the world you saw after the last murder?" Celice asked.

"Yes, what the ritual is for. Why he murders and what he wants."

"Then we have to be involved," Galnor spoke firmly. "This is not a matter just for the police. The whole world is under threat. All life will be chaos if this killer is not stopped."

"He will be stopped," Lang growled. "Even if it costs me my own life, I will stop him. I won't let the world end up like that."

"You have one chance, Lang." Galnor said. "If the police fail on the third, we will have to get involved. Falnon, get control of the blink-step. This is urgent. You must gain control. Talk with Jill; let her help you. Bring her to us if you must, but get her to help you

gain control."

"But, Galnor..." Mitch started.

"There are no buts, Falnon," Galnor snapped. "We have to be at full strength to face this thing. You were right; this man kills for a ritual. He is planning to turn the world into a place of eternal torment, to every living thing on this planet. We have to stop him. Talk to her, convince her to help."

"I'll try," Mitch replied, defeat in his voice. "I just hope she understands."

"Make her understand," the Priestess stated. "We need her help. She doesn't know it yet, but she has a very big part to play in saving the world from a fate worse than death."

"What about the others?" Lang asked

"There is nothing I can do for them," the Priestess replied. "I just hope they can deal with it. We can't waste our time finding each of them to help them forget. We have to focus on stopping this beast before the ritual can be completed."

Mitch gazed around his living room at the other Druids. With a fast nod and a wink, he let them know that he would do whatever might be needed to stop the Full Moon Killer from carrying out his plans. The police had one chance, but after that, the Druids needed to take over. Even Lang agreed that when it came to the final attack, the Druids might be more effective than the police would be. The logical, analytical police department could not understand the implications of the ritual. Lang told all of The Order that if the police did fail on the third, the Druids had to take over. It would be a fight of magic against magic.

Mitch only hoped he would be ready for the fight.

Practice

Mitch sat in his office thinking of nothing. The horror of what he had seen filled his mind, despite his attempts to block it out. She would die, and the world would flame at her death. He had to do something, anything, but he could not think of one single thing that would change the outcome. His heart broke at the thought of Jill dying, but his mind screamed at the thought of the world being tortured beyond measure. He chastised himself. What good were magical gifts if he could not change the outcome of what he saw? Try as he might, Mitch feared he would lose before he'd even started the battle. The knock on his office door startled him out of his confusion and brought him back to reality.

"Hey, how are you feeling?" Jill asked softly.

"Oh, Jill, sorry. I didn't realize it was you."

"You don't look so good. Maybe this flu is tougher than you thought," she said

"Yeah, maybe," Mitch said

"Hey, it's not anything serious, is it?"

"No, no, nothing like that. I'm just tired. There's a lot going on, and I'm having a tough time dealing with it."

"Maybe you should take a few more days off. After all, we really don't have anything major going on."

"Yeah, nothing major. You have no idea how major things are," Mitch whispered.

"Pardon me."

"Nothing. Listen, I need to talk to you, Jill. Privately. Do you think you could get away for a couple of hours, just to talk?"

"Well, there's nothing big on the agenda right now. How about we go out for lunch?"

The gleam in the woman's eyes made him smile. The thought of a lunch date with him apparently made her very happy. She turned to leave and he admired her outfit. Jill had worn a cute dress, with a bib overall type of top, and a short-sleeved, white, pull-over top. The skirt stopped at her knees and, as she walked, her hips swayed seductively. Mitch thought about the dreams he had about her, and the memory caused his anguish to build again. She had only just really started her life; to see her die would be a tragedy he could not accept.

As the morning dragged on, Mitch rehearsed what he planned to say to Jill. Every conversation, however, sounded weak, without any real urgency. He could not tell her that she would die, but he also had to ask for her help. If, as the other Druids claimed, she was his

focus, he needed her permission to help with his practice. The blink-step had to be brought under control if he were to face the killer. Jill might be the only way he could achieve that control. He hoped she would understand and agree to help him with his practice. He needed her help, but he did not want her to be frightened by the gifts.

He decided that he would simply say whatever he needed to, based on the situation and her reactions. At noon, he called her desk and told her where to meet him, and what time. Despite the urgency of the situation, being caught by their boss, even for a simple lunch, might cause problems. She agreed to the rendezvous, and Mitch shut down his system, grabbed his jacket, and headed for the street. He waited in front of the Key Bank, four blocks from the office. When Jill pulled up with her car, he climbed into the passenger seat and started to relax.

"Where to?" Jill asked.

"Anywhere. I'm actually not that hungry, I just need to talk with you."

"It sounds urgent."

"Jill, you have no idea how urgent. We need to go someplace private, away from prying eyes and sensitive ears."

"I know a spot, near the Charles River. It's very private and secluded."

"That sounds fine," Mitch stated, then sat back to collect his thoughts.

The drive didn't take long, and after Jill parked her car, they walked into the park. Mitch kept a respectable distance from her, but could tell that she wanted him to move closer. Jill guided him to her secret spot, just beyond the hedgerow, to her place where she had spent some private time a couple of weeks before. Once past the bushes, she headed to her favorite tree, the big oak. She leaned back against the old tree and waited for Mitch to start talking.

Mitch gazed at the old tree and smiled. She had picked an excellent spot for their talk, and the site of the enormous oak gave him a sense of calm, for which he silently thanked the goddess. Turning his gaze towards Jill, he saw her not as his coworker, but as a beautiful woman, with a grown woman's desires and needs. Despite what he knew about the future, that moment in time became a wonderful scene for him. The image in his mind caused him to have a feeling of hope, that maybe he could help change the outcome. Then the familiar tingle started in his back, and in a moment, the foresight had taken him to a time where Jill laid under those branches of the great tree, lost in passionate ecstasy and lust. The vision ended, and Mitch smiled slightly at the pretty woman resting against the tree trunk.

"You've been here before, haven't you, Jill?"

"What makes you say that?"

"Oh, just your familiarity with this tree. This is your grove."

"My grove? It's only one tree."

"One or a hundred, it doesn't matter. You come here to find peace, to find yourself. This is the place you come to be with nature."

"Well, yes, I've been here before. I like this spot. No noise, a big tree, a lot of peace and quiet."

"Good, that will make it a little easier for me to tell you what I have to."

"And what is that, Mitch?"

"You remember when I told you about some of the Druid stories? How Druids receive gifts after their training and initiation."

"I remember. They are great stories too."

"Well... they're not just stories, Jill. Recently I've come to find out the gifts are real."

"Oh, come on, Mitch. Real? What, like magic powers and all that?"

"Exactly like that. I know it sounds incredible, but they are real."

"Mitch, I'm a skeptic and realist by nature. Many religions claim to have special powers, but I've never seen proof. You're going to have to do better than that."

"Okay, how's this? On your computer desktop at your house, you have a picture of me that was taken during the Christmas party last year."

"How did you..."

"You drink cinnamon apple tea with your lunch every day that you eat in the office."

"But..."

"You came here, about two weeks ago, and spent the lunch hour exploring your body with your fingers, leading you to a very explosive orgasm."

Jill's eyes grew large and her mouth opened in stunned amazement.

"Two nights later, you fantasized about me, while again playing with your body, leading to another..."

"That's enough!" Jill shouted. "How did you— where did you..."

"Like I said, the gifts are real. I have two gifts. One is called the foresight. It allows me to see events in the future, as well as in the past. Shortly after we reached this tree, I saw you here, about two weeks ago. I'm sorry; I still have problems controlling it. But I did see you, both here and at your house."

"You've been spying on me?"

"No, Jill, never. Like I said, I'm still learning how to control it, just like I'm trying to control my other gift."

"And what's that, remote rape?" Jill hissed.

"I'm sorry. I should have used more tact. I never meant to see your private life, but for

some reason, the foresight shows me things about the people I care most about."

"You care?"

"Yes, very much so. I don't mean to embarrass you, or peek where I'm not wanted. I'm working on gaining control, but sometimes the visions just happen. That's what happened today, right here."

"Then you know how I feel about you."

"Yes, I do. I've seen you, in your house, here under this tree. I even went to your house once. Despite not having your address, I found myself at your house, about three in the morning, close to a week ago."

"I don't understand."

"The other gift I have is called blink-stepping. It's the ability to move from one place to another, physically, in the blink of an eye. The first time it happened, I actually saved a man's life by stopping him from stepping in front of a moving truck. The second and third times, I found myself at your place, and then back in my apartment."

"But how?"

"I don't know how. All I know is that I can. Most Druids only receive one gift. Once every thousand years, a Druid comes along who receives more. It usually happens because they will face a great challenge. Apparently, it is my time."

"But, why tell me this? I mean, it sounds special, and wonderful. But, Mitch, why are you telling me?"

"Because I need your help."

"My help? What about the other Druids in The Order?"

"They are the ones who told me to talk with you. You see, Jill, they feel that you are my focus. You're the link to tapping into my gifts and gaining control over them. With the foresight, I have the most control when I focus on you. I think that is why I've seen you so often, even when I didn't want to. They hope that by telling you about the gifts, you might be willing to help me gain control over the blink-step."

"But what can I do?"

"Give me someone to focus on. The idea is, if I concentrate on blink-stepping to you, I'll learn how to control the gift and use it whenever I need to."

"So, what, you just want me to be here?"

"I guess. The blink-step is so rare that our oral and written information on it is sketchy at best."

"This is a lot to take in. You know that I desire you, that I have strong feelings for you, and now you want me to be available to you so you can just appear, in front of me? I

don't know, it sounds a bit fantastic."

"I know, and believe me, if there were any other way, I'd take it. But time is short, and I have to gain control over this before..." Mitch trailed off and shuddered.

"Before what? Mitch, what's wrong?"

"There is something bad in this city, Jill. Something evil that is trying to create a horrible world of never-ending pain and agony. You've heard about The Full Moon Killer?"

"Yes, he struck again just a few days ago."

"Yeah, I saw it."

"You what? Mitch, how?"

"The foresight showed the death of Lucy Wong to me. At first I thought it was just a dream, but it wasn't."

"Have you told the police?"

"Yes, one of The Order is a detective working on the case. He took me to the latest crime scene and I saw what happened, saw the killer. I also know where the son of a bitch will strike next. The police are going to do whatever they can to stop him, but if they fail, we only have one more chance to stop him. The Druids will have to face him, and I have to be the one to lead the others. It is my burden, my calling, if you will. If I fail, the whole world will suffer."

"I don't understand. I mean, what you've told me so far is incredible, but the whole world?"

"He's performing a ritual. Six murders, in six precise locations, on six full moons. The next is on October third, the last, October thirty-first. The Celtic New Year."

"Halloween. I never believed the day could be so powerful. I mean, I'd heard stories about it, but, Mitch..."

"Believe me, Jill, I never thought there was much to the stories either. But what I've seen, what I've done, I don't doubt it any longer. I know far too much now."

Jill moved away from the tree and thought very hard on what he had told her. It would be an enormous amount of information for anyone to take in, but she also had to deal with being the focus of a Druid's powers. She walked slowly round the area, not saying a word, but clearly lost in thought. Mitch did not interrupt her. He waited silently as she fought with the sudden influx of fantastic information.

"Can you prove to me that this... blink-step is real?"

"I can try. That's all I can offer right now."

Jill nodded and walked back to the tree. She pointed out into the clearing, indicating that Mitch should move away from her. He walked about thirty yards into the clearing and

turned. She leaned back against the tree and watched. Mitch focused all his attention and energy on reaching her without walking. His gaze grew intense and his desire to stand near her built. Despite all his focus and concentration, he remained rooted firmly where he stood. His frustration started to grow and he tried even harder to reach her.

Jill, from her vantage point by the tree, waited as Mitch concentrated. He clearly believed what he told her, and she wanted to believe it as well. For several minutes, she waited for him to cross the distance between them, in the blink of an eye. Nothing happened. Finally, taking a chance that maybe the focus of his attention had to be more basic, more primal, she reached down and took hold of the hem of her skirt. In a slow, seductive fashion, Jill pulled the dress up to her chest, spread her legs wide, and showed off the white cotton that covered her intimate flesh.

"Jesus!" she shouted. "You did it!"

"I did, didn't I?" Mitch gasped.

"It's primal. You have to need to be with me, not just want to," Jill offered.

"Apparently. I saw your panties and suddenly wanted you. That has to be it."

"You sneaky pervert." Jill laughed. "You want me just as much as I want you, and you never said."

"I guess I didn't realize it. Maybe the old primitive nature is what is needed. I'm sorry, I don't mean..." he stammered.

"Shh," she said while placing a finger on his lips, "it's okay. Nothing to be ashamed of. I want you, you want me, and we're both adults. What's the problem?"

"Work," Mitch muttered.

"I think, from what little you've told me, this is a lot bigger than our jobs. But I won't say anything if you don't."

"I don't want you to get into trouble, or get fired. We have to be careful."

"Agreed, mum's the word," Jill said.

"Can we try again?"

"Sure. You head out into the clearing and I'll stay here."

For more than an hour, Mitch practiced his blink-step with the help of the beautiful woman. Every time he used the gift, he appeared standing only inches from the pretty woman. Her poses were provocative, almost as if she were modeling for him. If one pose did not produce the proper response, she would strike a more seductive one. At some point during the practice, he saw her panties on the grass near the tree. When Mitch appeared in front of her that time, he had stepped closer than ever before, and the growing bulge at the front of his pants made him smile.

On the last attempt, Mitch dashed across the clearing to the trees on the far side. He disappeared from Jill's view. He hid in the trees, watching her, but she did not have a clear indication where he might be. He watched her as she waited for him to appear. He wondered how far she would go to draw him out. He gasped in amazement when he saw Jill. With a quick hand, she unbuttoned the straps to her dress, and it fell to the ground. Seconds later, her top laid next to her panties, and moments after that, her bra joined the pile of clothing. When she kicked off her shoes and leaned back against the tree, spreading her legs wide, she raised her arms over her head, and closed her eyes. He could wait no longer.

His lips pressed against hers with a passion he had never dreamed. From out of nowhere, he had appeared in front of her, closer than ever before. His hand gently cupped one of her breasts, and she sighed with intense pleasure at finally feeling his touch. It did not take long before more clothes joined hers, and the two of them started to roll on the cool grass. His hands needed to be everywhere and she let his fingers explore her most private areas. She reached between his thighs and found the hard, throbbing flesh she had longed after. In seconds, she had guided that hard shaft into her sopping opening. A cry of joy escaped her throat as he started to pump his flesh in and out of her body.

Mitch groaned with erotic joy as he felt his seed rush into the body lying below him, and he tensed hard as he continued to thrust against her, her own powerful orgasm starting to build. She wrapped her legs around his hips, tugged at his shoulders, and he picked up speed. Mitch lifted her off the ground, and as he held her in his arms, her body exploded in lustful abandon. She shook against him and cried tears of joy. He helped her finally realize what she had desired for so long. The man that filled her dreams had filled her body with the warm passion she desperately needed. The answer to a question came instantly, the moment her orgasm started. He delighted in the fact that she did love him, and would continue to love him.

"My god, I never imagined." Mitch panted.

"Neither did I. I mean, I fantasized about you, what it would be like. But this, I never dreamed it could be like this."

"We're in trouble. If Dunlap finds out, he'll fire us both."

"Mitch, there are more important things in this world. You've shown me that your powers are a fact. You have gifts I can never have. But magic does exist. You've shown it to me. Who cares what Dunlap might think? You have a job to do. And I plan to help you do that job, any way I can," Jill said firmly as she sat up.

"I believe you will." Mitch sighed. "Thank you. I just hope we have enough time."

As Jill started to get dressed, Mitch thought about what he had seen.

"Over my dead body will you kill her," he muttered as he grabbed his pants.

Failure

As the days progressed, Mitch gained more control over the blink-step. With Jill's help, he could focus his attention, and the gift, on moving towards Jill without her needing to be so provocative. He called Galnor and explained how he had started learning what sensations he needed to use the power. Galnor asked him to record his findings so that future Druids that might receive the gift would have a guide to follow. His teacher also updated him on the actions of Lang and the police.

With the sketch in hand, Lang informed the task force that an anonymous witness provided him with a description of the killer. The sketch was shown on every news broadcast, as well as published on the front page of the Boston Globe. Tips as to the possible location of the killer poured into the police hot line. Unfortunately, all the tips proved to be dead ends, and the police were no closer to catching the killer than before the sketch had been shown. Still, the effect on the city helped to alert people about what to look for. Lang also convinced the Commissioner to stake out the East side park. With luck, the killer would be caught before the next murder could take place.

Mitch and Jill continued their secret rendezvous, so that he could practice his blink-step. Each meeting became an adventure in erotic exploration of the other's body. Jill acted especially thrilled, and explored her deepest fantasies with him. Mitch enjoyed his intimate times with his coworker, but never lost sight of why he practiced. The memory of his vision helped to keep him focused, and his desire to see Jill's life continue made him practice even harder. She always rewarded him with an intense roll in her bed, and the love they felt for each other grew with every meeting. Even though they had become close, Mitch continued to keep his vision of Jill's death a secret. He did not want to frighten her, and vowed to protect her at all costs.

On October first, the Druids met in the Esplanade Park. Lang took charge and started their meeting off with information about the police plans.

"We will have almost two-dozen officers in the park. Since Falnon has given me the exact location of the murder, or planned murder, I'll have my officers spread out to cover the entire area."

"And when the boy shows up?" Mitch asked.

"He'll be shuffled away quickly. I want the child out of the area and under police protection till he gets back home."

"Then you'll wait for the killer to make his move?" Galnor asked.

"Yes. Since Falnon has identified where the killer will come from, we will have the largest contingency of officers in that location. Our hope is to catch this person alive. But they have been told to take no chances. If they have to shoot, they will."

"I hope it does not come to that," the Priestess replied.

"So do I, Priestess. I want him alive. He has to stand trial for his crimes. I will not lose a single officer if I can help it."

"They mean a lot to you, don't they?" Gywellyn asked.

"They are my brother and sister officers. Their lives are in my hands. I won't lose any of them because of this murderer," Lang stated in a firm voice.

"You will let us know what happens after it is over, right?" Mitch asked.

"Of course. We have to know, all of us. If, and I hope that is a small if, we fail, then as Galnor told us, the last site is up to us. If the police cannot stop this killer, then we have to. I'll tell you all honestly, I don't relish that idea at all."

"Lang, you are probably the bravest among us. Your work as a police detective is part of our strength. If this killer frightens you as much as it appears, then we will support you in whatever you do," the Priestess replied in a tender voice.

"Thank you. I'll need that."

"How goes your practice with the blink-step?" Galnor asked Mitch.

"Well, it's going well. You all were right, if I focus on her, the blink-step is easier to control," Mitch answered.

"Good. And how is the lady?"

"Well, she's fine. She doesn't know everything, but I've been working on helping her understand our ways."

"Does she understand what you are doing?" the Priestess asked.

"Pretty much. She knows that magic is real, and that we have gifts. I just have not told her what I've seen. I don't think she can handle that right now."

"Well, do what you have to. She means a lot to you, Falnon. You've obviously developed a relationship with her," the Priestess offered.

"She has come to mean a great deal to me. I won't let her die. But more than that, I won't let this bastard turn the world into hell. If preventing her death stops him, then I'll stop him," Mitch said.

"Good. Keep practicing. We might need your special gifts to defeat this killer," Galnor stated.

"I hope not," Mitch replied. "He scares the hell out of me."

"Do you want to save her?" Lang asked.

"It's not about her. I realized a couple of days ago; the whole world is in danger. It really does not matter what I want. It's not about Jill, but the whole world. How can I live with myself if I fail?" Mitch stated in a firm tone.

"You will do what you have to. Not only to save your love, but the whole world," Galnor offered.

"I just hope the police catch him first," Mitch replied.

"I agree. If Lang and his officers do what they do best, then this killer will be arrested long before October thirty-first," the Priestess said.

Despite Lang's reassurances, the evening of October third became a tense time for all of the Druids. Mitch had gone to Jill's house that evening. She knew he worried about what would happen near midnight. She tried to comfort him, to take his mind off the killer, but he remained lost in his thoughts. Near nine o'clock, she presented herself to him in a soft, long, dark blue nightgown, and clearly aroused. Unfortunately, he looked right through her.

They went to bed together and Jill fell asleep quickly. Mitch, however, continued to check his watch. The last time he saw read 11:32. When morning came, he found himself waking up to the smell of fresh coffee and breakfast. Rubbing his face with his hands, he stepped quickly to the bathroom, then grabbed his robe and made his way downstairs to the kitchen.

"Morning, sleepy head," Jill teased.

"Hi. Sorry I was so distant last night."

"Don't worry about it. You have things on your mind. Any visions?"

"No, thank the goddess. I probably wouldn't have gotten any sleep if I had seen anything."

"Well, breakfast is ready and we have to go to work."

"I'm going to call Galnor, just to see what went on this morning."

The call to the older man, however, brought the world crashing down. The boy had been saved, but a murder had still taken place.

"How? I thought..."

"It was one of Lang's officers," Galnor said.

"Oh, no. How is Lang?"

"He's doing his job. I don't have all the details, but Lang has asked to meet with all of us tonight, away from Boston."

"Where?"

"The Swampscott grove."

"What time?"

"Eight, or as close to that as possible."

"We'll be there."

"We?" Galnor questioned.

"I'm bringing Jill. It's time she knew everything."

"We'll receive her with all respect and tenderness."

Mitch hung up the phone and told Jill about the morning's events. She quickly turned on her TV, and they both watched the horrible report on the news. The murdered officer, Thomas Mitchell, was a fifteen-year veteran of the Boston Police Department. He had asked to be assigned to the task force. Despite all safe guards, Lieutenant Mitchell had been killed inside the hedgerow where Mitch had seen the killer come from. The detective's gun lay next to his body, and no other officer had heard a sound. It had only been during the checking process that Lang learned of one officer not responding. Mitch and Jill both knew that Lang must have been devastated at the loss of a fellow officer, and friend.

On their way to work, Mitch told Jill to cancel any plans she had for the evening. He would direct her to the grove that the Druids used near Swampscott. Jill protested at first, but he explained that she needed to meet with the Druids and that there were things she needed to hear. He could not be sure of how he would tell her she'd be the next victim. He did know that she had to be told, and that she would not be out of sight of at least two of the Druids at all times.

Work that day for both of them became a tedious activity. Jill answered her phone in an automatic way. She heard some coworkers complain that Mitch spoke short and direct to everyone with whom he came in contact. They both ate silently in their respective spaces at lunchtime. Jill wanted to go to Mitch, but she knew that would be a risk. Despite everything she knew, she still had to worry about their jobs. She loved Mitch deeply, and would do nothing to jeopardize his position in the company. Even if it meant she would quit. She knew he loved her, and that he would do the same for her, if he had to.

At five, Mitch joined Jill at her car and silently the two of them headed off. Unknown to both of them, they had been seen. A stealthy figure slipped from the shadows of the parking garage, and headed back into the office building.

Jill and Mitch grabbed a quick dinner, which neither of them tasted, at a restaurant in Salem. After their meal, they started towards Swampscott, Mitch giving directions to Jill as she drove. The drive through part of the wild country south of Swampscott gave her an eerie feeling. She saw the tall, old trees and smelled the swamp gas. Her mind filled with images of ancient rites and magical practices she had always believed as just stories. The thought of

meeting Druids, other than Mitch, filled her with a certain apprehension.

Mitch guided her along a dirt road. When a line of trees stopped their progress, she shut off the car, and they both started to walk in the direction he indicated. After about ten minutes, they came into a thinner section of the woods. They stood in a small clearing and waited.

"Where are they?" Jill asked, while looking at her watch.

"They are here. Wait," Mitch whispered.

Out of the trees, shapes moved into the small clearing. They all wore normal clothing, but the way they appeared seemed magical to the uninitiated woman. When the eight other members of The Order gathered around them, Jill reached out to take Mitch's hand. She clutched at it in fear and turned to look at her lover. Mitch smiled softly towards her and squeezed her hand with warmth.

"Falnon, perhaps you should introduce your guest to us," Galnor started.

"My friends, I'd like you all to meet Jill Reese."

"You are welcome in our circle, Jill Reese. There is nothing here to harm you, and you are among friends," the Priestess replied.

"Umm, hello," Jill stuttered.

"Falnon, why have you brought this visitor to the sacred grove?" Galnor asked.

"She is in danger, and with her, the entire world," Mitch replied.

"I'm what?" Jill gasped.

Mitch explained his visions, and what he had seen to Jill in the gentlest way possible. Jill stood rooted to the spot, in stunned horror, as her lover told her of the future. She gripped his hand harder than even she thought possible. The Druids drew closer to her, and as Mitch finished telling her what he had seen, she broke down crying, slumping to her knees.

"Why? Why me? I've never hurt anyone. Why does he want to kill me?" she sobbed.

"Because you are a woman," the Priestess replied. "You happen to live right where he plans to finish the ritual. Jill, you must understand your part in this."

"Understand my part? You're all telling me that some freak plans to kill me, and bring hell on Earth after my death. What's to understand? I want to live," Jill screamed at the Druids.

"We know, and you will," Lang said, trying to sooth the frightened woman. "We are going to protect you. But we need your help."

"My help? My help will get me killed. I don't want to die."

"And we won't let anything happen to you," Mitch replied, trying to comfort her.

"You get away from me," Jill shouted. "You've been using me. You knew this would

happen, knew what he would do, and you hid it from me," Jill cried, and dropped to her knees.

"I've been trying to protect you, to keep you alive. I needed your help, now you need ours."

"How can you help me, when a cop died because of this killer?"

"We can be near you, watch you, guard over you. You won't be alone, Jill Reese," Galnor said as he knelt down next to the hysterical woman. "We have ways of keeping you under our care, even if you don't see us. We don't want anything to happen to you, but you must understand."

"Understand what? Am I bait?" Jill hissed.

"Perhaps. You have to understand that it does not matter who this fiend kills, as long as the last person to die is a woman, and before the full moon passes its zenith on the thirty-first," the Priestess stated.

"So, he might not kill me?" Jill asked.

"No, he might kill some other woman. But that is not the end of it. If he does kill on that night, the ritual will be complete. What comes after, you will wish he had killed you," Lang said.

"I don't understand."

"Falnon, she needs to see," the Priestess said.

Mitch nodded, and knelt down next to his lover. The Priestess knelt with them and took both of their hands.

"I'm going to show you what Falnon has seen. I need to ask you, do you agree to this?"

"You can show me what he's seen?"

"Yes, but it must be your choice. I will tell you that what Falnon has seen affects the entire world. It is the fate of this world, and all life, if we fail. Will you let me show it to you?" the Priestess said in a soothing voice.

Mitch watched Jill as she thought about the offer. He saw fear in her eyes, and he suddenly could not look at her. What he knew frightened him as much as it did the other Druids. Jill, however, was not a Druid. She had become a part of something beyond her ability to control.

"Show me. I see the fear in his eyes and I need to know what he knows. If it scares Mitch this much, I need to know why." Jill sighed. "After all, I love him, and I know he loves me."

"Then close your eyes, relax, and don't try to resist. You'll feel as if there are two

people in your mind. Don't try to push me out, I'm there to help," the Priestess offered.

With his eyes closed, the Priestess took his hand. He called up in his mind the memory of the horrible fate of the world, after Jill's death. When the Priestess touched his mind, he felt her recoil from the memory. Still, she remained connected to him. Even with the horror of what he knew, Mitch held nothing back. The terror of what he had seen filled his memory. By focusing on the feeling of the Priestess in his mind, he was able to remain in control, barely. As the memory flowed, he kept focused on the sensation of a second mind, joined to his own. It was not until he heard the horrible scream that he felt the Priestess let go and his eyes snapped open.

Jill had come up off her knees. She screamed in terror and backed into Galnor, who grabbed her in his arms. She struggled to get away. Her voice echoed in the night as the horror of what she had been shown took hold. The Priestess jumped up just as quickly, dashed to the frightened woman, and placed both her hands on Jill's head. The Priestess closed her eyes, and in a matter of moments, Jill stopped fighting, stopped screaming, and started to relax. Moments later, she crumpled into a heap of sobbing flesh on the ground at Galnor and the Priestess's feet.

"No. Oh my god, no. The children... the people, what are those things?" Jill muttered through her tears.

"It is the world as it will be, if we don't stop this killer," the Priestess answered as she knelt down. "It is why we need your help. Why Falnon asked you to help."

"It's not about me," Jill sobbed, looking up at the Priestess. "The whole world, everyone, even you, will suffer if he is not stopped."

"Yes. There is much more at stake than six lives. If he does not kill you, he will kill another woman to complete his ritual. We have all seen this horror, Jill. We know what you know. Falnon saw a fate worse than death, we have to stop it from happening," Galnor whispered.

"I'm sorry, Jill, I couldn't tell you before," Mitch said. "The police were going to do everything they could to capture, or kill, this guy on the third. A man still died. There is only one full moon left, and we know it will kill on your street. Please, don't hate me. I just want to save you and the world."

"I don't hate you, Mitch," Jill cried. "I understand now. You've been carrying this for weeks, you know. I don't want to die, but I don't want the world to become what I saw."

"Then let us help keep you safe. We will maintain a watch on you, both the Druids, and the police," Lang offered.

"Thank you, all of you. But this is also my fight now," Jill answered as she stood up.

"What can I do to help?" she said with firm resolve in her voice.

"Jill..." Mitch started.

"No, don't tell me to stay out of the way, Mitch Walker. I may not be a Druid, I may not have gifts and powers, but damn it, I'm going to help stop this fucker, no matter what," Jill replied in an angry, tone of voice. "No one deserves to suffer like I just saw. Now what can I do to help?"

The Druids laughed loudly at her determined nature. Clearly, Mitch had not expected Jill to want to take an active part in stopping the killer and his ritual, but he realized there would be no arguing with her. He put his arm around her shoulders and hugged her close. The love he felt for her grew immeasurably that night, and he knew that if they survived the thirty-first, Jill would make a fine student, and Druid.

"Help Falnon practice his gifts," Galnor answered. "Somehow, he is the key. He has two gifts, both powerful and special. He must be in control of those gifts, regardless of the situation."

"I will," Jill said. "And you'd better be ready to practice you butt off, mister. No nookie for you if you don't stop this monster."

The Druids laughed again as Mitch felt his face turn red. Jill threw her arms around him and hugged him tightly. Even in the somewhat irreverent nature of her statement, he heard the truth in what she said. There would be no love, no passion, if he and the Druids failed. Life as he knew it would come to an end, and the world would suffer untold misery. Despite his feelings for Jill, he had to be ready. Somehow, without the benefit of his foresight, he understood he would be the one facing the killer.

A situation and event he did not relish in any fashion.

Planning

"What do you mean, by zenith of the full moon?" Jill asked Lang.

"We're not really sure, but apparently, this guy has to kill before the moon passes the zenith point, directly overhead. We've used the best forensics technology and timed the deaths of the other victims. Lieutenant Mitchell died before midnight, but apparently, just as the moon was overhead, directly overhead," Lang replied.

"So, if he misses that point in time, he fails. Is that it?" Jill asked.

"We hope. Honestly, Miss, I doubt if any power, Druid or human, could stop this guy. He killed my officer, and no one heard a sound. He managed to slip into and out of the park without being seen and killed one of my men in the process."

"You don't sound too sure of yourself, Lang. It is Lang, right?"

"Yes, Lang. That is my Druid name. Just as your young man is called Falnon, but you know him by another name."

"This is very confusing," Jill muttered.

"Just understand, Miss, we have two names. The name the world knows, and the name the Druids know."

"Jill, we all pick a name that we are known as for our Druid names. You know me as Mitch Walker, and it is the name I was born with, but I chose the name Falnon as my Druid name. It sounded a bit more Celtic, if you know what I mean," Mitch said.

"I think it is a wonderful name, Falnon," Jill replied.

"All right then, to business. We know we are going to face this killer on the thirty-first. Lang, how should we proceed?" Galnor boomed, bringing their meeting back to order.

It was the night of October fifth, and the Druids had come together to set up their plans and strategies for dealing with the killer that threatened the existence of the world. Galnor took charge and looked to Lang for advice on the best ways to deal with the evil in the city.

"Well, I really don't know," Lang replied. "I mean, we did everything by the book in the park, and I still lost a man. We saved the child, but the killer still got what he wanted. He apparently came out of nowhere, killed Tom, and then vanished the same way. How do you plan against that?"

"We have to come up with something. If nothing else, some way to keep him from killing, at least till after the appointed time," the Priestess said.

"Okay, so what do we do?" Mitch asked.

"Well, I'm open to suggestions," Lang replied.

The Druids sat in Jill's living room and pondered the question. They were out of their element, dealing with something that, despite two days of research, they had found nothing in the way of information as to what they were up against. A killer that could evade the police, kill without a sound, and vanish into the night, and they found nothing about this in their lore or tomes. Worst of all, they could find no information as to the kind of ritual the killer focused on. Mitch's frustration seemed to grow the more he tried to find a solution. He and the Druids knew they had to fight the killer, but actually finding a way, seemed impossible to them all.

"Okay, fine," Mitch blurted. "We already know events can be changed. The boy didn't die. Someone did, but not the boy I saw. That means we can change the outcome, right?"

"Sounds reasonable," Galnor answered.

"Then perhaps it's time I used one of these gifts to our advantage," Mitch growled. "Wait here, I'll be right back."

Without even trying, Mitch appeared in an instant on Jill's street, two doors down from her house. He looked around at the state of affairs in her area. Many of the houses were empty, as the city had started a renovation project to make her neighborhood a historic area. Many houses on Jill's street were under repair, and Mitch made note of all the construction supplies and tools. Perhaps he could make use of them, when the time came. He started walking up the sidewalk, and he fixed his mind on October thirty-first. Within three steps, the foresight took over and Mitch again saw the full moon, Jill's street, and Jill.

Unlike the first time, Mitch also spotted the Druids. They were situated in various locations around the cul-de-sac. Mitch watched himself, and the sight of his actions caused him to gasp in amazement. He saw Jill, facing the killer. In an instant, he watched himself blink-step to a space behind Jill. The killer reached out and grabbed her by her throat. Jill tried to fight back, but Mitch remained focused on his future self, grabbing Jill around her waist. They vanished from sight. The killer looked around in confusion. As Mitch concentrated on the vision, the killer turned and looked in his direction. Mitch once again felt as if the killer could see him.

That feeling became a realization a moment later, as the killer charged towards the spot where Mitch felt himself watching the events unfold. The hate in the killer's eyes scared him. As the giant brought up his silver spike, Mitch threw his arms over his eyes, and the vision ended.

Looking around on the street, it was daylight again; color filled his sight and Mitch

shuddered at the memory of the vision. Moments later, he appeared again in Jill's living room, among the Druids.

"Things have changed, but some of it is not for the best," Mitch reported.

"What do you mean?" Galnor asked.

"He saw me. We do face him, and I somehow blink-step both Jill and I away from him. But he saw me — the 'me' watching the vision. He attacked me," Mitch replied in fear.

"Oh, this is not good," the Priestess groaned. "If he knows who you are, he might try to kill you before the thirty-first."

"I don't think he knows who I am. But I just feel like he can see me in the visions."

"Then you must mask yourself from him. Don't try and see him, don't try and see the thirty-first," Lang offered.

"I won't. I don't like seeing him at all."

"You said you were able to blink-step, both you and Jill, away from him?" the Priestess asked.

"Yeah, I grabbed her around her waist, just as he started to lift her off the ground. Then, bam, we were gone. He looked around for us, and that's when he charged at me."

"Then we know one thing that must be done. Falnon, you need to practice carrying something when you blink-step," Galnor stated.

"You didn't see where you took her?" Lang asked.

"No, I didn't, but it was away from the killer. And he seemed mighty pissed about it."

"Good, then we have a way to fight him. Falnon, as long as you can blink-step someone away from him, then you can keep him off-guard till the moon is out of place," Lang commented.

"That's a good idea, but I think we need more," Mitch commented.

"Like what?" Jill asked.

"Like Galnor. Just as he attacked me, I saw Galnor start to form an area of darkness."

"I can do that, but it is total darkness. No one can see inside of the area."

"Maybe. Perhaps I can," Mitch said with a grin.

"How?" Jill asked.

"Easy, I set my vision a second or two into the future."

The Druids looked at Mitch with a mixture of amazement and admiration. He had hit upon the one idea that none of them would have thought of.

"It's like this. Galnor creates his area of darkness, around the killer and me. I use my foresight to see just a second or two into the future. I then spend however long it takes to keep him off-guard. Once the moon has passed zenith, he will have lost."

"Risky," Lang offered. "We can't see into Galnor's area of darkness either."

"Ah, but you can." Mitch said, and looked at the Priestess. "She can touch my mind, and show all of you what is happening."

"But we don't even know if you can see in the darkness," Galnor protested.

"Only one way to find out, isn't there?" Mitch replied.

He took Jill by her hand and led her to one side of the living room. He then stood on the other side and smiled. Galnor stood up, spread his arms slightly, and turned his hands, palms up. In seconds, a dark sphere started to form in the center of the living room. Within moments, it had grown to cover the entire room. Mitch concentrated on Jill, and focused his attention two seconds into the future. The gray hues of the foresight took over, and Mitch saw Jill, the Druids, the furniture, everything. He walked over to Jill, took her hand and led her to the Priestess. He then walked around the living room, touched each Druid in turn and called them by name.

Galnor called back the dark sphere and smiled. "We have a plan."

"All that is left is for me to practice blink-stepping with a payload. I've never done that before, but apparently, I will."

"Start small," Galnor offered. "Don't try it with Jill right away. Try a book, a cup, anything, but not her until you have control and confidence."

"I understand," Mitch replied with a nod.

On the start, however, Mitch discovered that carrying an item while he blink-stepped could be a problem. He started with a book, a rather large book with a decent weight. He stood in his living room and willed himself to the bedroom of his apartment. When he arrived by the bed, he his hands were empty. Returning to the living room, he found the book lying on the floor, right where he had been standing just a few seconds before. Each of seven attempts failed. His frustration started to grow, but he quickly forced it down and tried again.

After several more attempts, Mitch took a break. He sat in the big recliner and thought. It struck him as strange that he always found himself clothed when he would blink-step. He also remembered that when he saved the man's life—the first time he ever used the gift—his computer bag traveled with him. He knew it was possible to carry something, but the question of how it happened eluded him for some time. After several more attempts with the book, he looked at it on his floor. Suddenly, he broke out laughing.

'Don't think about it. It's a natural part of you, not something special,' he thought.

He realized that he never thought about carrying his clothes with him and that when he first discovered the gift, he hadn't even thought about the computer bag. He also realized how lucky he was to live on the ground floor. The idea of the heavy book being dropped

many times would have aggravated his neighbors. As he giggled, he picked up the big book, tucked it under his arm, and blinked. He appeared next to his bed, the big book still under his arm. He had found the answer. He simply had to make whatever he carried a natural extension of himself. Mitch began to practice with other objects, and his theory proved to be correct.

Even awkward objects, like chairs, a small table, a sofa cushion, he carried with each blink-step. He finally decided to try to move something rather large. Wrapping his arms around the big recliner in the living room, he focused on blink-stepping to the other side of the living room with it. Unfortunately, he ended up standing alone. He tried several more times, but the big chair seemed to refuse to budge. Finally, with a hint of anger, Mitch grabbed the large chair and actually lifted it slightly before blinking.

He shocked himself when he and the recliner appeared on the opposite side of the living room. It suddenly dawned on him that he had to lift an object in order to move it with him during the blink-step. He tried again with the recliner, returning it to its original location in the living room.

'That explains it. She was off the ground when I grabbed her. It can't be grounded or I won't move it,' he thought. *'A limitation, but not an insurmountable one.'*

Mitch reported his discovery to the Druids. He demonstrated for them his ability to move an object with the blink-step, as long as he could hold it off the ground. With newfound confidence, the Druids made plans to gather at Galnor's house for several drills. Galnor asked Mitch to bring Jill with him. When Mitch presented the idea to her, Jill accepted without hesitation.

"If it means keeping the world safe, I'll happily help all of you," she said.

"Would you like to see it?" Mitch offered.

They stood in Jill's kitchen. He gently wrapped his arms around her and lifted slightly. Jill gasped in amazement as she suddenly stood with him, in her living room. Then, with just as much surprise, they appeared in her bathroom. Again, Mitch lifted and they popped into her bedroom. Then finally, back in the living room. With a look of extreme admiration in her eyes, she kissed him deeply.

"I never imagined," she said, "to be able to move instantly from one place to another. This is incredible."

"I think I have control over it. That's why we need the drills. Lang says it's to prepare us for the thirty-first."

Mitch scooped Jill up in his arms, and in an instant, they arrived outside a large house. He set her down and then rang the doorbell. He put his arm around her and held her close.

When the Priestess answered the door, she smiled at them and motioned for them to enter her home. At the back of the house, Galnor had a large gym. The other Druids were present and everyone quickly arranged themselves for the drills.

During that evening, Jill met with all the Druids. She at last learned all their names and gifts. The Priestess impressed Jill with her beauty, as well as her gift to work inside the minds of people. Tall, blonde, and blue-eyed, Celice showed her how anything she held could be changed and altered. The small stature of Gywellyn made Jill wonder how the little woman could help. When she heard that Gywellyn would only be used to heal injuries, Jill understood. When Lang used his thunderclap, she realized just how powerful the police Druid could be. Eiler would not be taking part in the battle. The quiet brown-eyed woman's gift gave her mastery over all languages, and she told Jill she would be of no use in the fight to come.

When Jill saw Imhear use his gift, she smiled big. A man who could explode to redirect kinetic energy would be devastating. She also met Gyffes, the master of throwing. A big man who had the ability to hit any target he thought of, with anything he threw at it. She admired Gyffes' gift, especially when he threw a knife or some other pointed weapon. Galnor's zone of darkness continued to impress her. However, Mitch's ability to see in the darkness, and move instantly from one place to another, gave her hope.

Lang pushed everyone hard. He drove the Druids to their limits, and then pushed even more. Jill had the easy part, she just needed to play the victim. She watched intently as the Druids practiced with their gifts, all for the purpose of saving her life, which would save the world. She enjoyed being carried by Mitch every time he would blink-step. However, more than her enjoyment, she realized that the Druids were preparing for a battle none of them wanted, but that they could not avoid. She saw in several of them a look of worry, as if they wondered if they could actually defeat the creature that planned to throw the world into chaos.

Their intensity, their drive, caused Jill to admire the Druids as much more than just people. She saw them as protectors, as the only beings that stood between life as she knew it, and a world of unimaginable torture and madness. The memory of Mitch's vision, which the Priestess had shown her, came back to her mind. The horror of what this killer planned for humanity was what drove these Druids. They would not let the world suffer. They would give their lives to save the world, if they had to.

In that moment, Jill Reese felt an intense desire to join them. To become a Druid, and to help protect the world from forces that most people did not want to acknowledge, much less knew about. She had been thrown into their world, forced to see what had been hidden for thousands of years. She had not asked to see the power of the Druids, but that night in

Galnor's gym, she found them to be the most incredible people on earth. They asked for no recognition, and they would slip into the shadows once the fight was over. Only Lang would remain, and he would keep the Druids' presence secret from the other police. His fellow officers would not understand, but Jill did. She understood, and felt herself drawn to the nobility of the people who practiced so hard around her.

Mitch used the blink-step to take Jill home after the practice session. She looked at him, drawn to his strength and power. Those were not the only traits that attracted her. She kissed him hard, trying to tell him with her emotions how much she appreciated him, and what he planned to do. Despite the fear she felt over the killer, being with Mitch made her feel safe. She knew he would do everything to protect not only her life, but also the lives of every woman in the area on October thirty-first. He had to; the world depended on it, even if the world did not know about the danger it faced.

"I think we're ready. We'll have several more sessions to hone our skills together, but I think we're ready for this guy."

"Don't get cocky, Mitch. He's been impossible to catch so far, and he kills without regard as to whom. He's mad, and with what I saw, from you, he's dangerous to the whole world."

"I won't let anything happen to you, Jill."

"It's not about me anymore. I get that now. I can't die. If I do, by his hand, the whole world suffers. I don't have powers like you and the others; I'm just a mortal woman. But I can help, and I will. But promise me; promise me one thing, my dear sweet Mitch."

"Anything."

"If you can't save me, if it comes to a choice between me and the world..."

"Jill, stop."

"No, I'm serious. If there is no other way to save the world, don't let him kill me. You do it."

"I won't do that."

"Mitch, you might not have a choice. If he kills me, then the whole world is doomed. If you or one of the others kills me, he fails, and the world is kept safe."

"You'd do that? You'd sacrifice your own life to save the whole world?"

"Yes. Because I can't stand the idea of you, living in that world, suffering what we all have seen. I love you too much to let that happen to you."

"But..."

"Lang is a good shot. If it comes down to it, a bullet is better than what this freak has in mind."

With tears running down his cheeks, Mitch grabbed her hard and hugged her tightly to his chest.

Battle

Despite the festive decorations and costumes in the office, Mitch found no reason to be happy. October thirty-first had come. He and Jill had gone to work, just to keep up appearances, but both showed the strain of their knowledge. He wished his gift had been the ability to stop time, not just see through it. Nevertheless, no matter how hard he tried, the clock continued to move forward. He knew that when darkness fell, and as the full moon traveled across the sky, the killer would look for his last victim. He prayed to the goddess that they were ready.

The stress on both of the young lovers also drew the attention of several people in the office. No one said anything, but the inability of the two young people to concentrate on their work became whispered rumors in the office. No matter what he tried, the relationship he'd built with Jill had become common knowledge in the office. He did not want her to lose her job, or to lose his. However, they had bigger issues to worry about that day, and the ridiculous rules Mr. Dunlap had established were very low on his list of priorities.

When the day ended, Jill stopped by his office. He put on a weak smile, asking her to be careful on her way home. She nodded and left for the day. He knew that several of the Druids were already near her house, watching the area. Lang had not informed the department about the possible location of the killer. He did not want the uninitiated police getting in the way of powers they could not possibly understand. He would call them when, and if, they were victorious. After a few minutes, Mitch packed up his computer, headed for the bathrooms, and once he found himself alone, blink-stepped to Jill's house.

He did not appear in her house. Instead, Mitch hid himself near the hedge. He took his position and waited for whatever the night might bring his way. Jill pulled up into her driveway, but he did not call out to her. She had been told the Druids would stay near her, but that they would not acknowledge her. A precaution Lang put in place, in case the killer was in the area, watching.

The vigil became one of stress and foreboding. Even with their practice sessions and training, Mitch wondered if the Druids could defeat the killer. He had seen things about the killer that made him doubt the nature of the giant man. There were times during his foresight visions when he felt the killer might not even be human. The only worry he had centered on Galnor's darkness. Mitch wondered if the killer might be able to see in the intense black. They had no way to test it, and the Druids all agreed that if the killer could see, they might

fail.

'Relax, Falnon. You will do just fine, and we will support you. We will fight, and we will win,' the Priestess sounded in his mind.

The voice of the Priestess made him relax. Knowing the other Druids were nearby helped to calm his nerves as he watched the sun set, wishing it would not. Just after dark, the Trick or Treaters started their rounds. Children, with their parents, walked around the cul-de-sac looking for any house that might have candy for them. Jill had wisely kept her porch light off, so the children did not approach her house. At 8:40, Mitch noticed that no more children came into the street. He looked up and saw the full moon, and his spirit started to sink again. Looking around quickly, he noticed only a few houses with lights on. Most were empty, for which he felt eternally grateful.

While the minutes ticked by, a sense of apprehension filled his mind. Looking up, he saw the second floor bedroom light on and knew that Jill had probably seen him in his hiding place behind the hedge. His nerves were on edge, and every little sound made him jump.

'Goddess, please help us be victorious tonight. The world is under threat, and I don't know if I have the strength to see this through. Please, help me keep her safe, help me keep the world safe. Guide me; guide us all as we face this monster.'

Mitch watched the moon travel across the sky; he began to wonder if he had seen the wrong images. The moon had climbed high, and nothing had happened. There had been no screams, no sign of the killer. He hoped he was right, that they had positioned themselves in the correct location. As the moon climbed higher in the sky, doubt started to creep into his mind.

"I thought you could use some coffee," Jill's voice sounded behind him, making him jump.

"Jill! You're supposed to stay in your house," Mitch hissed.

"I'm sorry, but nothing is happening. I thought you could use some coffee. It might be a long night."

"I doubt it. The moon is close to the zenith," he replied, pointing up at the sky.

Jill looked up and smiled. The bright full moon lit up her street in wonderful shadows. "Maybe he won't strike tonight."

"He will, I've seen it. And so far, my foresight has not been wrong on big events. He'll be here. Now get back in the house," he growled.

"Fine, I'm going. Not even a thank you."

"Thank you, now get."

Jill smiled at Mitch before heading back towards her back door. Mitch watched her

leave and sipped at the coffee she had given to him. It tasted good, but he remained focused on his work. He watched Jill start around the corner of her house, then, she stopped. She turned quickly, started to run towards the street. Mitch saw the black shape following her, and he crouched low as it passed. Mitch was not the only one to see the killer pursue Jill. He felt the Priestess touch his mind, and he broke cover, charging after the killer.

It started. Jill dashed out to the front of her house. The huge black mass followed her, and Mitch followed the killer. In mere seconds, the killer caught Jill in his massive hand. He turned her quickly just as Mitch rounded the corner of the house. His vision became reality; the killer grabbed at Jill's throat and started to lift her off the ground. Mitch counted to three, and then he blinked. His sudden appearance behind Jill caused the killer to jerk and pause. It was all the time Mitch needed. He wrapped his arms around Jill's waist, blinked, and emerged standing next to Celice.

"Protect her," he hissed.

Celice smiled and opened her arms wide. Mitch pushed Jill against the woman. "Stay here, don't move, don't make a sound," he whispered.

Jill nodded. Mitch stepped back as Celice brought her arms forward, wrapping her large cloak around Jill. In an instant, the cloak, turned to granite. Mitch looked down into the small opening created by Celice's head and her arms. Jill huddled against the statue's body. Mitch blink-stepped to a pile of construction supplies and grabbed a four-foot length of rebar, about two inches in diameter. He stepped out in to the street, looked towards Galnor, and nodded.

The black sphere started to form in the middle of the street. As the killer approached, Mitch hefted the iron bar in his hands. Crouching low, he prepared to meet the killer in direct combat. The black sphere enveloped them both. Mitch quickly set his foresight to two seconds in the future, and he smiled at what the future vision showed him. The killer looked confused. His great black eyes searched the darkness for his enemy, but he could not see. The Priestess relayed the information to the other Druids from Mitch's mind. They were right; the darkness affected everyone, except Mitch. With a certain confidence, he started to approach the giant man.

"Where are you, Druid?" the giant shouted, his voice deep, but hollow. "Bring her to me. I will make her death quick, unlike yours."

Mitch moved around, watching the killer, as he would appear two seconds in the future. He could also see the other Druids. They had moved out of their hiding places and formed a circle around the black sphere that Galnor controlled. The sphere covered the entire cul-de-sac, and Mitch saw Galnor concentrating hard to maintain the zone. The killer pulled

the long silver spike from his coat. Seeing the weapon made Mitch shudder. He knew all-too-well what the thing would be used for, and he would not let the killer get near a single woman on the street.

"You will lose, killer," Mitch shouted. "You won't get her; you won't end your ritual."

"Bring her to me and I promise to kill you both, quickly, painlessly."

"Never!" Mitch shouted, and then blinked.

He materialized on the killer's right side. He swung the iron bar as hard as he could against the giant's wrist. Once he stuck, he blinked away to a space some fifty feet from the killer. The big man roared in rage and swung the spike at where Mitch had been just a moment before. Mitch hoped to disarm the brute, but he realized quickly that his blow had not caused the desired effect. The man swung the spike in a circle around himself, roaring with anger, not pain. He had a sudden sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach. If he could not hurt the killer, how could he protect Jill, or anyone?

The battle started in earnest. Mitch blink-stepped rapidly around the killer, striking him as hard as possible each time he appeared. Despite his attempts, the killer always struck out at where Mitch had stood just two seconds before. It did not matter where Mitch struck, head, arms, legs, or body. The killer seemed impervious to pain. As the battle raged, Mitch started to feel lost. His arms grew tired; his head throbbed with the pain of concentration. He had to stop this thing, but every strike enraged the monster more. Mitch hid in the darkness, watching the killer swing his spike, looking for him.

'You are not alone, Falnon, let us help you,' the Priestess spoke in his mind.

Without warning, Mitch saw Imhear step into the darkness. His fellow Druid stood still, and Mitch saw a wicked smile on his face.

"Over here, monster," Imhear shouted.

The killer swung hard with his spike, right at Imhear. Mitch dropped the ground to avoid the enormous explosion that resulted from the strike. The killer staggered back, and fell on to the street. Mitch watched the bright lights form together in the shape of a man. Imhear stood again in the street, smiling broadly towards Mitch.

"You missed, killer. Care to try again?" Imhear taunted.

The killer struggled to his feet and charged in the direction of the voice. The spike held in front of him, he ran straight towards the Druid. When the tip of the spike touched Imhear's chest, another explosion took place, and the huge man flew backwards some twenty feet. After the lights reformed into Imhear, Mitch blink-stepped to his side.

"Thanks, I needed the break. How long can you keep him busy?" Mitch whispered.

"As long as you need me to. You just keep your foresight as it is, I'll do the rest," the

man replied.

"Well then, between the two of us, we'll beat this guy yet," Mitch said.

"Just help me see him, Falnon, I'll keep him busy," Imhear offered.

Mitch looked up at the moon. Zenith would happen very soon. They just needed to keep the killer from all the women. Together the two Druids fought against the killer. Mitch would use his blink-step to get in close and strike hard. Imhear would attract the killer towards him, only to send him flying in a massive explosion of energy. They fought hard, and both of the Druids started to show signs of fatigue. The killer, however, seemed to have energy to spare. Despite all their attacks, the monster acted just as fresh as when the battle first started. Mitch looked up and wished the moon would move faster.

"I have to kill," the giant shouted. "The world belongs to me, give her to me. Let me finish what must be."

"The only thing that will be finished tonight is your reign of terror," Mitch shouted as he blinked.

As the battle raged, Mitch's control started to slip. The exhaustion affected him, and it took several moments to recover after each attack, before he could see and blink-step again. Imhear looked worn as well. The Priestess advised Mitch on another course of action. Mitch took it, needing the break.

"Over here, fucker," Mitch shouted, "Come get me if you can!"

The killer moved towards the voice. Mitch waited until the last possible moment. When the giant drew near, Mitch dropped to the pavement and covered his ears.

"Now, Lang!" he shouted.

Lang brought his hands together in front of his body, hard. The sonic boom that sounded from Lang's gift sent the killer flying further than ever before. The big man in flight was not the only result of Lang's thunderclap. Car alarms started to ring, and glass fell from broken windows. The thunderclap would no doubt bring others out to the street. At that thought, Mitch lost contact with the Priestess as she let go of his mind. He suddenly felt very alone, but got ready for another barrage against the killer's body.

Mitch appeared again near the killer's right side. He swung his iron bar with all his might. He had to keep this man from finding Jill, or any of the other women. Even as he swung, he got ready to blink-step away from the killer, knowing his attack would do nothing. He suddenly became rooted to the spot, as a sickening crunch sounded from the giant's forearm. The silver spike fell to the pavement and the giant man howled in pain. Not losing his momentum, Mitch dropped low, driving the end of the iron bar against the back of the killer's knee.

The giant went down. Mitch looked at the moon. It had moved, just west of the zenith point. Stepping back again, Mitch looked down at the killer and saw something strange. While he gazed at the sight, Galnor started to pull back the sphere, and police sirens sounded in the distance. The killer rolled on the pavement, screaming in pain, cradling his right arm, and sobbing. As the darkness cleared, the giant looked up at Mitch standing over him.

"Please, don't hurt me, please. I'm sorry, I don't know... I'm sorry," the giant man sobbed.

Mitch had become engrossed in a strange prismatic mist that rose from the killer's body. It drew closer to him, brushed his cheek, and Mitch felt an intense hatred from the cloud.

'You've won, for now, Druid. But you cannot defeat us. One day, we will return, to sow chaos and eternal death to you humans. Enjoy your lives while you have them. We will return.'

The hideous, hollow voice had come from the mist and Mitch blink-stepped away from it as it started to rise into the sky. He watched in amazement as the multicolored cloud rose higher. He had no idea what it might have been, but the sudden touch of the Priestess in his mind caused him to relax. He moved towards Celice. Looking down into the small opening again, he saw Jill shaking against the stone statue of the Druid.

"Are you all right?" he asked in a soft voice.

Jill looked up at him, tears on her cheeks. "Are you?"

"Fine. I'm fine, Jill. It's over," he answered as he heard Celice sigh.

The granite statue started to change. The stone turned gray and cracked. A moment later, that statue shook off the fine dust, and opened her arms. Jill rushed into Mitch's arms, sobbing, and kissed him. Mitch hugged her and handed the iron bar to Celice.

"If you could, please? It has my finger prints on it."

"I'll take care of it, Falnon," the woman answered.

Jill watched in wonder as the iron bar became white. Celice had turned it into a staff of chalk, which she threw towards a pile of building supplies. It broke into dozens of pieces, and Celice smiled.

Mitch looked around. Lang had his gun drawn, standing over the crying man on the ground. The police cars flew into the cul-de-sac, just as other people started coming out of their houses. With his arm around Jill, Mitch led her up the street towards her house. They watched the police cluster around Lang, and the other Druids silently slipped away from the scene of the fight.

The Priestess met them both at Jill's steps. She smiled softly towards them and took

them both by a hand.

"You've done well, Falnon. Better than I think even you expected."

"Priestess, I don't know how to thank you," Jill said.

"Your life is thanks enough. Keep living it, keep learning, and keep him close. And if you ever want to know more about us, you have only to ask. We'll hide nothing from you; you've seen too much as it is. Ask us anything you like."

"I will, thank you."

The Priestess stepped away, and Mitch giggled. "That's different. Normally outsiders are only told that our religion is Druid. I think you've impressed her a great deal," he offered.

"That's good, and I will ask questions," Jill said. "But right now, I just want some sleep."

They stood on her front porch and watched Lang and the other police arrest the huge man. Even though they were faced with the killer they had searched for, the police treated the man tenderly. They took no chances, but they also did nothing to aggravate his broken arm. The giant asked, constantly, what he had done wrong. The police said nothing as they helped to load him into a large police van. Lang looked up at Jill's house and smiled. Jill and Mitch waved at him, just before he stepped into the van with the killer.

Aftermath

In the days following the arrest of The Full Moon Killer, the news reported everything. The morning of November first brought good news to the city of Boston. The police held a press conference during the morning news cycle. They announced the arrest of the killer, and reported that no murders had taken place during the night. The reporters asked if the strange sonic boom in Boston's North End had anything to do with the arrest. The police had no answers. They did promise, however, to look into the issue, and hoped to find the answer in possible military exercises. The killer himself became an enigma to both the police and the public.

Lang reported it all to the Druids about the big man. He called himself Todd, and became a strange case. After several examinations, psychiatrists and psychologists determined that Todd had the mental capacity of a four- or five-year-old child. Horribly deformed from birth, the giant man had never advanced beyond the most basic development. How he had survived and taken care of himself became a mystery. He stated that he had never seen the long spike before, and the last thing he remembered was finding a talking hole in the woods. It became clear that Todd showed all the indications of being so severely disabled that he could not have pulled off the murders. This caused Mitch to tell the others about the mist he had seen rising from the large man, and of what it had said before vanishing into the sky.

"In a way, I feel very sorry for what we had to do to him," Lang offered. "But at the same time, I'm glad we stopped him."

"He's an innocent," the Priestess replied. "He probably didn't even know he'd been taken over. I just have to wonder what took him over."

"He said it came out of the talking hole. We can't get any information from him as to where this hole is. He doesn't remember."

"Will he stand trial?" Galnor whispered.

"Probably not," Lang replied. "He doesn't understand the difference between right and wrong. He can't even tie his own shoes. I have a feeling court will find him incompetent to stand trial."

"Well, that's something. Clearly, it wasn't his fault. Something used him," the Priestess said.

"Yeah, I know. But what do I tell the court? Sorry, your honor, but some power

beyond time and space possessed this child-like man, forcing him to kill five people, including one of my officers. Sorry, I don't think that will help, Priestess."

"I'm not asking you to, Lang, you know that. But you also feel for this child. A child trapped in a giant body, but a child nonetheless."

"Yes, I do feel for him. And I agree it's not his fault. I just hope they send him somewhere that will take very good care of him."

Even though the city was abuzz with the news of the arrest, Jill and Mitch had another, minor demon to face of their own. Mitch had seen it in a vision, two days after the killer's arrest. He had not been trying to see the future, but it came to him in a dream. He spent several days working on the problem, and informed Jill of what they would face, together. That Friday, coworkers saw both of them smiling brightly as they entered the office for work. Near ten, however, they both received a phone call, demanding that they present themselves to the director of HR.

Mitch knocked on Arthur Dunlap's door. When he answered, the two young people stepped into the office, and closed the door as requested. They sat down in the chairs across from him at his desk. The smiles never left their faces, and that seemed to put the man into a foul mood.

"It has come to my attention that the two of you have violated the company's rules about fraternization," Dunlap started. "You both have been observed, sneaking off together for secret meetings. You, Mr. Walker, have been observed at Miss. Reese's house on several occasions. What do you both have to say for yourselves?"

"It's none of your business, Art. I can call you Art?" Mitch replied.

"Excuse me?"

"You're excused. It is a common issue with people in power. They think they can control the world, when they can't."

"Your insubordination is not helping your case any, Mr. Walker."

"Like I give a fuck, Art. So Jill and I have a relationship, outside of work. It's none of your business, despite what you think."

"One, or both of you, is going to find themselves looking for another job. The choice is yours. I'll let you two decide."

Mitch laughed, loudly. Jill pulled an envelope from her jacket, and dropped it onto the desk.

"There's our answer, Art," Jill hissed.

The older man took the envelope, opened it, and looked surprised at what he found. The envelope contained a computer flash card, an index card, and a letter. The index card

said simply, "Play the card." Mr. Dunlap put the card into his computer, and the auto start software took over. As he watched, his face grew whiter. The faint sweat on his forehead left no room for doubt. Mr. Dunlap saw something on his screen that meant trouble.

"How did you..."

"Does it really matter, Art? The fact is, I have it, many copies of it, in fact. Now, what will Mrs. Dunlap and your daughter say when they see this on the evening news? And I mean, really. How many blondes was it? Four, five? Art, for shame," Mitch said as he sneered.

"What do you want?" Dunlap asked, the sweat starting to form on his brow.

"It's easy, read the letter, sign it, give it to your boss. Bye-bye." Mitch laughed as he waved. "If not, one of the copies I have of your extracurricular activities will find its way into the hands of our CEO."

"And if anything unusual happens to either Mitch or me, the police, the press, your wife, they all get copies," Jill said, twisting the knife that much further.

"This is blackmail," Arthur growled. "You two won't get away with this."

"It's not blackmail, Art," Jill replied, "it's called justice. You've been chasing after other women while your wife and daughter have been away. The word you're searching for, Art, is hypocrite. You want to tell us how we can live away from work, but you don't follow your own rules. Do the smart thing, Art, sign the letter, and leave. Don't press your luck. You have no idea who or what you're dealing with," Jill stated in a cold, direct voice.

"So, we're going to get back to work, Art. Have a nice day," Mitch said as he led Jill from the defeated man's office.

"Aren't you abusing your gifts?" Jill asked.

"No, I don't think I am," Mitch replied as he took her hand. "I'm protecting women from a letch, not just saving our jobs. Also, he has no right telling anyone what they can and cannot do in their private lives."

"So, what does your foresight tell you now?"

Mitch closed his eyes and focused on the afternoon. In moments he saw a defeated man, Arthur Dunlap, carrying a box of personal belongs to the elevator. His eyes did not rise to meet any others, and a certain amount of fear showed in his face.

"We win," Mitch answered, "even if it's not the way we wanted."

"How long did it take you to make copies of his stash?"

"Three nights. I had to wait till everyone had gone to sleep, blink-step into his private office, start the copies, and hope I wasn't caught."

"No wonder you look like you haven't slept in a week. You're coming home with me

this afternoon, Mitch Walker. You will have an excellent home-cooked meal and a very quiet evening."

"Yeah, sure. Right up 'til bed time. Then I'll have this wild woman who can't keep her hands off me. Good thing it's the weekend. I'll just sleep in late on Saturday, if you don't mind," Mitch replied with a hearty laugh.

The two young people went back to their work, and for the first time in weeks, found they both enjoyed working. With the threats removed from their lives, Jill and Mitch focused on the activities they liked in the work place. They went out to lunch together, not even trying to hide their attraction for each other. Many of their coworkers watched in amazement as the two of them held hands, waiting for the elevator. After lunch, they both smiled as they read the company-wide e-mail from the CEO regarding the sudden departure of Arthur Dunlap from the company. The best part of the e-mail was that all of HR's policies regarding employee's private lives were being rescinded at Arthur's request. The CEO wrote it was not the intention of NeoTech, or of the management, to interfere with employees' personal relationships, as long as those relationships did not interfere with work practices.

The afternoon work went by quickly, and the lovers shut everything down for the weekend, anxious to enjoy each other's company without having to worry about other issues. The ride to Jill's house gave Mitch time to relax. The three nights he had spent gathering evidence against Mr. Dunlap had worn him out. He looked forward to a restful weekend in the company of the beautiful woman. When they turned onto Jill's street, he chuckled as he watched the workers at the various houses. The broken glass had all been replaced quickly. The police had no idea what caused the sonic boom on the night they arrested the killer. However, the money to replace the windows had come from an anonymous donor, who also arranged the contracts for the glass companies. The residents did not pay one penny for repairs.

"I see Galnor's generous donation worked out well. How long did it take for them to replace the glass in your house?"

"A day and a half. Not that I'm complaining, I know why the glass was broken. Some of the others are still pissed and think the police used some kind of sonic weapon to catch the killer. But I'm not going to enlighten any of them," Jill said as she parked her car.

"You have visitors," Mitch commented as they walked around to the front of her house.

There on the porch stood Galnor, Lang, and the Priestess. They greeted the two young people happily and Jill quickly showed them into her home. Once settled, the Priestess smiled in a big way and nodded towards Lang.

"Well, I thought the two of you would like to get this news directly. Todd will not stand trial for the killings. He's been seen now by a half-dozen mental health professionals and even the DA feels sorry for the guy. There is still a lot of paper work to do, but the DA has spoken with the public defender and they agreed that Todd will be declared a ward of the state, and he'll be sent to a group home for care."

"That, Lang, is wonderful news," Jill said.

"Indeed it is," Galnor said. "He had no control over what happened to him, doesn't remember what he did, and is more like a child than a man. I think the state will do the right thing."

"I'm just sorry now that I broke his arm," Mitch said. "I didn't know; none of us did."

"Don't worry about it," Lang said, "he doesn't remember seeing you. He doesn't even know how his arm was broken. He just wants to go somewhere safe and be taken care of."

"Well, an almost happy ending. Has anyone found out what the mist was?" Mitch asked.

"No," the Priestess said. "We've looked everywhere that we know to look. None of the written lore, books, or even the Internet can tell us what that thing might be. You were the only one to hear it speak, Falnon; I didn't have a touch on your mind at the time. I used my gift to keep people in their houses after Lang used the thunderclap. But whatever it is, it won't bother us again for some time."

"Perhaps one day we'll know what it is. Until that time, however, we have added these events to our collective writings," Galnor stated. "We three have come here for another reason. One that I hope someone will consider deeply before answering."

The Priestess stood up and walked over to Jill. She took her hands and smiled. "You, Jill Reese, have been thrust into our lives and ways, without choice. Normally, we only accept students to the training when they seek us out, like Falnon did. You are the first to be asked to join us."

"I don't understand," Jill said.

"You have seen our ways, and worked with us to defend against a common threat. You were pushed into this by circumstances you had no control over. And you responded better than any other person I know would have. The choice is yours, Jill. We will accept you for training and finally initiation in to our Order, as a Druid, if that is what you desire," the Priestess said with deep admiration in her voice.

"It will require the same training that I had," Mitch replied with a grin. "You'll have to study the basis of Druid lore and law, for a year and a day, starting with a new moon."

"Then, on the next new moon after the last day of training, we will meet in the grove

and initiate you into the rights of the Druids. Your black cloak will be traded for a white one, and you will receive a vision of your own, and a sliver ring, just like ours," Lang explained.

Jill looked at the four of them thoughtfully. Her mind became a swirling mass of conflicting thoughts. She admired the Druids, not only for saving her life, but also for what they had been willing to do for the entire planet. At the same time, she had seen things that frightened her to her very core.

"You have learned what we all had to discover in our own time. Namely that magic is real, and still exists in this world," Galnor offered. "Those of us that are now Druid did not actually believe the stories, until we received our gifts. You, however, have seen those gifts in action. You know they are real, and I can see that it frightens you."

"You do not have to answer us today. In fact, we want you to take your time," the Priestess said as she squeezed Jill's hand. "It is a big decision, and one that you should not rush into."

"We will, however, add one little incentive to help you make up your mind," Galnor said. "Should you decide to join us, Falnon will be your teacher."

"And I can take my time and think about this," Jill whispered.

"Take all the time you need, Jill," Mitch replied.

"Why me?" Jill asked.

"We believe that everything happens for a reason. Somehow, destiny, fate, magic, you were meant to see what we can do, and to take part in it," the Priestess offered. "We can't know everything, and we don't want to. But I believe that the goddess has something special waiting for you. It's almost as if you were born Druid, meant to be Druid your entire life."

"Or, I just happened to be at the right place at the wrong time, and saw something I shouldn't have seen," Jill replied.

"No, I don't believe that, and neither do you," Galnor said. "You not only saw great evil and chaos, but you didn't run away from it. You practiced with us, helped us focus on what had to be done, and even feel sorry for the innocent man used by some force we can't even name. No, you were supposed to see all of this, Jill, and perhaps, much more." Galnor gently touched her shoulder.

"Okay, give me some time and I'll let you know through Mitch what my answer is," Jill replied.

However, even as the three Druids left, Jill knew where her heart would lead her. She didn't have to think about it, needed no time to consider her options. She'd made up her mind when the Priestess had shown her what Mitch saw of the future. She had decided that night to do whatever she could to help. Not for power, or glory, or recognition, but because it was the

right thing to do; and she would continue to follow that concept, no matter where it might take her.

When they went to bed, she gave her body to the man she loved with more passion and desire than either of them could remember. She denied her lover nothing, and he explored her body, and her love, like a starving man given food. They took possession of each other, joined themselves together in a primal dance of life and love. Their bodies heaved together in orgasmic delight, and their desire for each other seemed to know no boundaries. They drank deeply from each other's bodies during their release, and she kept her Druid's throbbing flesh hard and ready for their mutual enjoyment.

It took hours for them to spend all of their sexual energies. Jill sighed as she laid her head on Mitch's chest. He ran his fingers through her soft brown hair. She listened to his heart pounding in his chest as she rubbed his stomach.

"I love you," Mitch whispered.

"And I love you, my Druid," Jill replied. "Love you more than I can express in words. I feel like I'm a part of you, and I like that feeling a lot. I just hope that you can teach me all there is, in only a year and a day."

"You— you agree to their offer?" Mitch asked.

"To both of their offers: To be trained to become a Druid, and to have you as my teacher. I can't think of a better way to learn about this world of yours, then to join all of you in it."

"When would you like to start?" Mitch asked.

"I need to take care of matters with my mom. Dad's brother is still being an ass about Dad's estate. We can start after the new year."

"I'll let them know. You can pick your Druid name whenever you like during the training, but you'll need it before the initiation."

"I already have that name picked out, Falnon. I hope you enjoy spending your nights holding Brigh in your arms."

"I like it. You know, Brigh is the name of one of the Celtic goddesses."

"Yes, I did know that. Why do you think I wanted to use that name? I've always liked it, and it sounds pretty."

"Then I accept you as my student, Brigh. I'll call Galnor in the morning."

"There is one other change I'd like to make as well," Jill started as she sat up. "If you're going to be teaching me, then I'd like to be able to ask you questions and stuff, easily. If it's not against the rules, I'd like it very much if you would share my house with me. Move in here, and be near me."

"Well, this is a surprise." Mitch laughed. "You're sure I won't be in your way, cramping your style, invading your privacy?" he teased.

"Knock it off." Jill laughed, slapping his chest lightly. "You're more than my teacher, you're also my lover. I want you to live here with me, Mitch. I want to keep you close to me, so I can always be close to you. Please say yes."

"Yes. As soon as my lease is up, I'll move in here with you."

With great joy, Jill lay down against the young man and sighed. She would not only study under him as a student Druid, but she would be with him in passionate love, in her bed, for many nights. She could not be sure which decision made her happiest, but she also did not care. For her, just to be a part of his life satisfied many needs in her own. She looked forward to the days ahead.

As they slept together, the foresight showed Mitch a scene from his future. In the gray hues of his vision, he floated above a large assembly of people. In the midst of this group, he saw himself, and Jill. They both had grown old, but time had not touched their minds. He saw them both addressing a group of not less than thirty white-cloaked Druids. Around them were hundreds of other people, watching in wonder as Mitch taught the Druids. Were the others students? He did not know, and the vision did not answer him. He did learn, however, that far into his own life, Jill would still be by his side. They would become leaders of their own order of Druids, and it looked as if their ancient religion would be accepted by people from all walks of life.

Nevertheless, it did not matter to Mitch if the Druids were accepted or not. All that he cared about slept in his arms. He would hold her close, and love her deeply, all the days of his life.

The End

From the Author

Credit where credit is due:

As a writer, I look for inspiration from a number of sources. The story of Druids Dawning is no exception. While it is true that people, who know me, will see my personality in several of the characters, I need inspiration for my characters to help bring them to life. In this first story of the Druids, the character of Jill Reese received a helping hand from a very beautiful model, which I have many pictures of.

I would therefore like to thank Isobel Wren for being my muse when it came to writing this story, and helping to make Jill Reese a more three dimensional character to me. Isobel has an incredible smile, and very bright, intelligent eyes. She has posed for a number of photographers and appears in a few adult films. As with any of the muses in my life, it is not so much her body that inspires my work, but the expressions that I see in her lovely face. Whenever I would get stuck, or write myself into a corner with Jill, I would pull up the pictures of Isobel, and concentrate on her smile. I usually found my way out of tight spots after only a few minutes.

I also find it a strange coincidence that I wrote Jill as a technologically intelligent woman, before I ever discovered that Isobel calls herself a nerd. Jill is a tech writer for the NeoTech Company, and Isobel has worked jobs in web design and maintenance. To me it is rather funny that the character I envisioned as Jill Reese actually has a great deal in common with the living Isobel Wren. It makes me wonder if my other characters will have traits of living people I have not met. I don't do research on a muse until I'm almost finished with a story. I like the surprises I get when I actually learn about them.

Jill Reese is not Isobel, nor would I ever assume to make her as such. I have never met Isobel, and I doubt seriously if I ever will. However, I believe in giving credit where credit is due. Moreover, without her willingness to let people photograph her, I don't think the character of Jill Reese would have come out so well. Thank you Isobel Wren, you've been a big help, even if you didn't know it at the time.

Lark La Troy