

Golden Heresy

The Introduction

116 OR, Snapice 15

It is indeed a great task that the High Priestess of Elle has charged me with, to record the truth of what happened in the Rennon Heresy ten years past in an acceptable form. Future eyes will gaze upon this book, future hands will hold it, and they must not be clouded or smudged with the stain of the Heresy's evil. They must, of course, be warned against it, must see how evil it was, but if they know too much about the Heresy's path...

They might follow it, and their souls would be lost to Elle.

Therefore, I come before this task in all humility, charged by the Light and the Cycle, Destiny and the Goddess, with not failing. I will not fail. My heart is humble in its pride and strict in its dedication. I will not turn aside from preserving as much of the truth as I think those future eyes should see, and displacing all of it that might cause harm to their souls. When I am in doubt, then I will pray to Elle, and She will tell me which should be cast out, and which preserved.

I am in no doubt that I will do this task well.

This history has been assembled from the journals of one of the Heresy's most prominent leaders, as well as an account of another of them from an unknown eye, by an unknown hand. However, this second history expresses the inner thoughts of the woman then known as Rilleta with such confidence that we may trust it is true. Nearly all of this history will be presented, and where I cut out passages, I will explain why. The person who wrote this must have been sympathetic to the Goddess, knowing that Her grand design would be fulfilled, in the end, even by the priestess who was most opposed to it.

The journals, on the other hand, present a problem. We cannot simply ignore Klessa of the Nine Wonders, whose name has spread so far that even from Ilantra the tales of her come back, and whose fame will soon cross over the mountains into Rivendon and Arvenna. Therefore, I must present her journals. But they will require more severe editing and explanatory commentary than the other history. They present much of Klessa in the truth of all her heresy, but they cut out other parts of what we know is true Darkness, and sometimes they present her in a very flattering light. Of course, Klessa was a Mage of the Star Circle, and must have had some sense of history. We can assume that she knew her journals might fall into someone else's hands someday, and that her vanity prompted her to write many glowing things of herself. Luckily, her evil ran so deep that she did write much of the testimony later used to condemn her. Wondrous is the Cycle, that turns even those determined to triumph over it back against themselves! They are all servants of the truth and the Light, whether they know it or not.

It is my hope that by presenting these journals and this history in their current edited form, I will set the pattern of tales of Klessa for all time to come, and teach everyone around me the truth of what really happened. May the Light of Elle pour forth through me, and shine upon these words!

-Sealed by the hand of Lusirimonalata, Priestess of Elle, Temple of Elle in Queen Twydon's court, this fifteenth day of the month of Snapice, in the hundred and sixteenth year since the founding of Orlath by the glorious Queen Aneron.

The Journal of Klessa of the Nine Wonders

17 Greenborn, 106 OR

*"When the wind is in the bough,
And the bird is in the nest,
Then I will say in my heart: 'Now,
Now of all times, I love her best.'"*

No one is ordinary.

But some people do their best.

The composer of this song must certainly have done his best. It comes into my head only because it is so relentlessly mundane. It stirs up echoes in my brain because I cannot rid myself of it by wishing it. It makes the bards harp and sing, and even the Masters in the corridors hum it under their breaths, only because it sounds as though it should mean something, and thus we seek under the childishly simple words, searching for some deeper meaning, like children trying to see the whole of one of the great wars between Light and Dark.

It is very annoying.

My students are annoying as well. I showed them today how to reach out to the Scarlet, and perhaps three of them did it well. The others fumbled, and cried, and said they shouldn't reach out to the Scarlet, because there was a chance that Elle wouldn't approve.

I took aside the most sniveling of them, a young girl whose natural affinity is for Dust—Elle help me—and asked her why she didn't at least try calling fire.

"It's a sin," she said. "My mother said so."

"Your mother has probably never been out of the cottage in which she lives," I told her. "And if you listen to her rather than a teacher of the Nine Wonders, you will become as stupid as she is. Do you want that to happen to you? You're already struggling against the

natural disadvantage imposed by her blood.”

The girl stared at me, gaping foolishly. Then she began to cry.

I do not believe for one moment that she understood what I *actually* said to her. These children of the peasants don't show enough intelligence to do so, and this girl in particular does not. It is talent for all nine elements that brings them to the Star Circle, and not intelligence.

I take a great pleasure out of insulting and belittling them, I must admit. When they gape at me, I know that my worst suspicions were confirmed.

Someone has begun to lower our standards.

Once, only children who could read and write and were passionately interested in learning to control all nine elements were accepted. Then it was children who might not be able to read or write, but at least had the native intelligence to realize that the Cycle is the Cycle, and unconnected to either Light or Dark. It is there. One reaches out to it. There is no such thing as a sin in doing so.

And now we are accepting children so stupid that I am surprised they can find their way to the classroom each morning.

If I were fair, I could say that so many of our nobles and their heirs died in the last war with the Dark—only over for five years, after all—and so many more are wrapped up in this latest Heresy in one way or another that we are compelled to accept peasant children, and that our future Masters will come from among them.

But I do not particularly wish to be fair.

When I left the classroom, I made my way to Lyissa's room. She has perhaps the best chamber in the castle, placed in a tower so that it commands a view of Ozue, and high enough to catch both light and breezes. Of course, she complains constantly of having colds from the breezes, but I tolerate her company enough that I do not mind it. She at least has the intelligence to complain, instead of smiling as the Council lately wishes everyone to do.

I opened the door to see her lying on the bed. Her hair was spread all over her face and was...not its usual color.

“Did a rat strew its feces across your head, Lyissa?” I asked, taking the chair near the window. “Or did you perhaps slip and fall in it? I would have thought the smell would have warned you.”

Lyissa rolled over and glared at me. “I tried to turn my hair from blonde to brown, using Dust magic,” she said. “It did not work.”

“Of course it didn’t work. You can’t use Dust magic to do that.” I settled myself more comfortably, prepared to give another lecture. At least there was the chance that Lyissa, unlike my students, would actually understand it.

Her glare sharpened, but she wasn’t striding out of the room; I knew she would listen to me. “Why not, Klessa?”

I shrugged. “The hair is of pure Crop magic, Lyissa, particularly when it’s blonde hair like yours, the natural color of the earth. You would have to be a Crop mage to have any effect. Or at least have a stronger grasp on the Crop than I know you do,” I added.

“Dust is part of the Crop—“

“Mingled with Gust,” I interrupted her. Elle, how did she become a Master of the Star Circle? Much as I adore her, I wonder about that sometimes. She doesn’t pay attention to the most elementary links between the elements in the Cycle. “You can’t change something that is purely of one element with a mixture of two.”

“I have seen Tyder damp a fire using Steam magic.” Her eyes narrowed again. “And I have seen you, come to think of it, make it stop raining by calling on the Mist.”

“We are strong. You are not.”

Lyissa made a low sound and rolled away, turning her shoulder to me. “You are hateful, Klessa. I don’t know why I continue to be friends with you.”

“You know I will tell you the truth, of course, which all the others won’t,” I said easily, standing. “You would never have mastered the Azure if it wasn’t for me. You would never have come to the Star Circle, for that matter, if I hadn’t seen your talent and told you what it was. Your mother was ready to stone you, do you remember?”

“I remember,” said Lyissa. “I owe you my life, and many more debts.” The one hand I could see clenched into a fist. “But that does not mean that I am happy about the price I have to pay.”

I laughed. “Concentrate more, and see the links between the elements more easily, and you would not owe me so much.”

Truly, the more I think of that, the more annoyed I am by her. She should know that. I should not have to tell her.

“Not everyone is you.”

“Ah, but they should be,” I said. I stared at her, trying to will her to turn back towards me. That didn’t work, but she couldn’t escape my words, save by stuffing her fingers into

her ears, which would be too childish even for Lyissa. “I do not have much native talent, Lyissa, and it took me a long time to learn the connections between the elements. I know that others have the chance to be much better than I am. You could be much better than I am; you could sit on the Council. But you will not try.”

She did roll back towards me then, her cheeks aglow with rage. I smiled a little. When she is angry, then some life comes back into her, and in particular her green eyes glow as if it lit from within. “You know nothing about what my life is truly like, Klessa,” she said. “Nothing.”

“Then tell me.”

“You would not understand.”

I laughed. “That is not one of my problems. Far more likely that you would like to hug your treasured secret, whatever it is, to yourself, so that you can pretend you are much better than I am.”

Lyissa gasped as if I’d punched her. “How did you know?” she asked, in a voice so low I could hardly hear it.

Well, I didn’t know what she was talking about, but I was hardly going to let her see that, was I?

“The signs have been obvious,” I said, taking the chair again. “You avoid those whom you used to speak to, and spend much of your time with Tyder. You snap at odd times when we mention the Scarlet. You tried to change the color of your hair using Dust magic, which you should have known would not work.” I made a lazy gesture of disdain. Those were the signs I had noticed, and I had no idea what they added up to, but I also knew that if I presented them this way, she would tell me. “You are distracted, Lyissa, and this grand secret that you’re hiding—“

“You won’t give me to the priestesses, will you?”

And that question answered everything. She was part of the Heresy, of course. She had to be.

“No, of course not.” I smiled at her, and she looked relieved. “I saved your life in that backwards village for a reason. I don’t want to see you throw it away for nothing.”

“Thank you.” Lyissa studied me for a moment. “You know what the priestesses of Elle are trying to do, don’t you?”

And now she was trying to convert me. My amusement went to some backwards village, and I narrowed my own eyes. “Of course I do. But they cannot touch the Star Circle, and so it doesn’t really matter.”

“They are burning Scarlet mages,” Lyissa persisted.

“Not real ones. Real ones would be able to control the flames.”

“Then they are burning innocents. Isn’t that even worse?” Lyissa rose and began to pack back and forth across the room. Her hair dangled down her back, and I couldn’t resist sniffing it when she went by, just to see if it really did smell of rat feces. No, just dust, which was perfectly reasonable given the magic she’d been using. A pity; it would have given me more faith in her intelligence, if not her grace. “I joined the Heresy because I want to make sure that the Scarlet mages are recognized for what they are, just users of the Cycle like everyone else, who can’t help the way they’re born.”

“Ah. Of course,” I said, and yawned.

“It’s *important*, Klessa, don’t you see?”

“Everything’s important to someone, Lyissa,” I said, and stood. “I’m glad you have something that fills your heart, though I think you should concentrate more on the Cycle than this—Heresy. Do as you please, but the magic is still waiting, and it will take time and concentration to improve your skill.”

I was halfway to the door before she gave the call that, of course, I was expecting. This wouldn’t be a history-tale without one, and Lyissa thinks that she’s living in a history-tale most of the time.

“Wait, Klessa!”

I turned around to see her holding out her hand to me, eyes imploring and passionate, as if she had just had a sudden, wonderful idea.

“Will you come with me?” she asked. “I have a meeting with the Lady Rilleta tonight.”

“The leader of the Heresy?” I asked, interested in spite of myself. My little Lyissa must be rising fast in the ranks if she has made her way to meeting the leader already.

“Yes.” Lyissa stood straight, her head thrown back as if she were facing a strong wind. I looked around, wondering if someone was practicing with the Gust magic, but not really surprised when I felt nothing. Lyissa has just always had to look like that, that’s all, dramatic as a ship in a storm. “She has expressed an interest in meeting me for some time, and I am sure that she would want to meet you, as well. We always need more agents in the Star Circle.”

That cheered me up, though I doubt it was really the way Lyissa intended. This confirmed they didn’t have many agents in the Star Circle. At least some of my fellow mages, Masters of however many Wonders they might be, were paying attention to what

they were supposed to be paying attention to.

“I might go with you,” I said. “When are you leaving?”

Lyissa gave me a scandalized look. “I cannot tell you, of course. I wait at my contact’s discretion.”

I bit my lip to keep from snorting aloud. Of course she did.

Ah, my Lyissa. How like a history-tale.

“Then come and fetch me when you do,” I said. “I am sure that you know some secret way into my chamber.”

Lyissa nodded. “I do.”

“Of course,” I said, “since you make use of it so often.”

Lusirimalata’s Commentary

Then comes a passage in the journal that I feel tender eyes should not see. Under the Light, there are many things the Goddess sanctions, and many things She does not. The corruption of an innocent is an unforgivable crime, and though some who have read this along with me argued that Lyissa was, in truth, the emissary of evil to Klessa, I do not think that Klessa could be corrupted by anyone. She has corrupted Lyissa, and the details of that corruption do not need to come to a reader’s eye.

At this point, I believe this particular journal entry has yielded all the truth it can. One can see how evil Klessa is, how cruel. However misguided, Lyissa’s passions were at least sincerely felt, and all Klessa can do is mock them, and repeat the lies in her own private words that she must have known were not true. The priestesses of our gentle Goddess never burned anyone to death. Scarlet mages were gently reformed, brought again into guidance with the Cycle, and have now come to live with us as brothers and sisters under the auspices of the four true elements.

We have never burned anyone.

There are many things that could be said, of Klessa’s mockery and disbelief in even the possibility of hope—despair, which Elle knows is one of the worst of sins—and of her blasphemy, but these are too obvious to deserve comment. This commentator will pass over them in silence, and pray that Elle shine through her words, so that one might come closer to a glimpse of the divine and turn, with a shudder, away from the wrong road, which twines through the black thickets with no end in sight.

That road does have an end, of course. It leads in the end to the Dark, and evil, and so

many things that will damn one's soul I should be the whole day in writing them.

I feel that this contact with Klessa's journals has dirtied me. A moment, while I wash my hands.

Ah, that is better. I have come back with clean hands, and also with a clean heart, since I have prayed to Elle as well.

Now, as I said, I will put aside the monster Klessa's journal for a moment, since the recent engagement with it has stained my objectivity, and turn to the history of the woman who is much more forgivable, Rilleta, called by the heretics a high priestess of Rennon. Of course, this is impossible since all know the so-called sun god is a demon once worshipped in the jungles of the north, but still, they called her high priestess, and so the following pages will call her.

I present this history, as I said earlier, mostly without commentary, since I believe it is a true look into the heart of the woman once so terribly misguided, who in the end came to rest in the peace she truly deserved.

A History of Rilleta, High Priestess of Rennon

Chapter 1: Obedience

"Thou canst never do something right, only what thou knowest is best."

-Saying of the Green Isles.

"My lady, are you well?"

Rilleta turned, smiling, and snapped out her robe. "Of course, Panim," she said, examining the garment closely before she wrapped it around herself. It had been gray once, of course, but she had dyed it in the blood of the dead priestess, and now it was already starting to take on the bright rosy color she preferred. The Heretics had some weavers who could create red cloth with ease now, but Rilleta had always preferred the true blood. She knew it meant that at least one more enemy of the Heresy was dead.

They are all enemies of the Heresy, she thought, as she lifted her gaze towards the distant battlements of the city of Ozue, and they will all die.

"Then, my lady, there is someone who would speak with you. The young mage of the Star Circle. She gave her name as Lyissa, and she brought a companion with her?" Panim trailed off, ending his sentences with a question, as he had a habit of doing.

Rilleta gave him an indulgent glance. *Not truly intelligent, but he does what he must, and*

he is devoted to Rennon. He will do. “She told me that she might. I will see them in my cove.”

She turned and strode back among the waving grasses of the Corlirin Plains, down into a small valley that would probably have been invisible even to a dragon on the wing. It wound and twisted, the walls of grass and earth rising higher and higher as it plunged further and further. Rilleta continued walking until she reached her cove, a small hollowed-out hut of earth. The walls had steel supports, of course, courtesy of one of their secret weapons, but otherwise it looked completely natural.

The Heretics used the natural features of the Plains themselves to hide in, which was one reason their enemies had so much difficulty finding them.

Not, Rilleta thought as she pushed herself back into the cove and felt the comforting walls press around her, *that we have trouble finding them.*

She chuckled as she thought of the startled expression on the face of the priestess of Elle. The woman had died without thinking she could. She had thought that her prayers to her Goddess would protect her.

Not when the sun rode the sky. Then it was Rennon’s time, and Rilleta gazed towards the sun with true love and awe. The god might be the one she truly worshipped, but his great symbol of heat and light, burning Elle’s moon out of the heavens, also deserved all the reverence she could give it.

“My lady, the visitors.”

Rilleta stood, hearing the footsteps start a moment after the guard’s voice announced them. She could always tell when someone new was coming down the valley. There was much hesitation, careful feeling with the feet, as the visitor gaped. She would never have suspected that this valley wasn’t here, if someone hadn’t told her, Rilleta knew. She smiled, hoping the new recruit would be as star-struck as all of them were. They were easier to handle that way.

But something was wrong, Rilleta thought as she listened. Two pairs of footsteps were confident and sure, and only one hesitant. The priestess shook her head in mild annoyance. Panim must have gotten things wrong, as usual. Lyissa hadn’t brought a friend; instead, two guards must be escorting her. Only guards could walk that confidently in this valley.

Then they rounded the final corner, and Rilleta narrowed her eyes, suspecting for no reason that things had suddenly changed. Perhaps that was the god, or Destiny, whispering in the back of her mind.

Lyissa she had seen before, and the young woman looked as awed and comfortingly worried as ever, though there was an odd brown mess in her hair. But the other woman

whom Rilleta did not know walked strongly and confidently. She wore the green robes of a mage of the Star Circle, signifying devotion to all the elements and none, and she had thick brown curls that stopped just short of her shoulders. She had green eyes, too. Rilleta could see that, because they were focused straight ahead and on her face, meeting her eyes more intensely than Rilleta was accustomed to seeing anyone do. This, then, was the woman who had walked so confidently down the valley.

“Who are you?” asked Rilleta.

“My name is Klessa of the Nine Wonders,” said the stranger.

“And have you come to join the Heresy?” asked Rilleta, regaining her poise. Sometimes people entered the worship of Rennon out of simple friendship for those already bound in it. This Klessa would learn her place soon enough.

“No. I came to see what made Lyissa try to use Dust magic on her hair, when she should have known better.”

Rilleta sighed. *This woman needs to be put in her place.* “Did you know you are standing before the High Priestess of Rennon?”

“Did you know that you’re standing in a pool of mud?”

Rilleta glanced down automatically, and saw nothing but dirt beneath her boots. Looking up, she said, “What are you—“

Klessa grinned at her. “Do you always take the word of complete strangers?”

Rilleta’s hands clenched, and then she willed herself back to calm. *She is annoying, and that is all. She cannot hurt the Heresy. If I speak the word, she will never leave this valley alive.* “Scarlet mages are dying in the flames in southern Orlath,” she said, “and the madness will spread to Ilantra and Doralissa, too, if we let it. Are you inclined to joke about that?”

“Not when I don’t believe it’s happening,” said Klessa. “Have you actually rescued any of these Scarlet mages?”

“We have many among us who managed to escape the flames and come flying, yes.”

“Hmmm.” Klessa didn’t sound convinced. Rilleta reminded herself that she was the one who led here, and not Klessa.

“You do not have to commit your strength to this Heresy, if you don’t want to,” she said. “You can remain in your towers, studying your elements, and never confronting the injustice of the priestesses of Elle. But then you will be nothing more than the rest of your shallow colleagues.”

“You tried to become part of the Star Circle and were turned down, weren’t you?”

“No, I was not.” Rilleta held up a hand and let the Scarlet shimmer to life on her palm. “The fire was always there, waiting for me to call on it, and I am so glad that I found it at last; it was like coming home. “

“So you’re a Scarlet mage?”

“Yes.”

Klessa shrugged. “Then you have a natural interest in this. But I don’t. I speak to all of the elements, including Azure.” She spread her hands, and a small waterfall sprang into being between them, the drops nearly jumping out far enough to quench Rilleta’s flame. “I don’t think that you would want someone who could call on the Azure fighting on your side.”

Rilleta took care to breathe slowly and deeply. This was the reason they didn’t have many converts among the Star Circle—and the reason they needed some so desperately. If the common people could see those who called on all the elements fighting on their side, then they would flock to the Heresy like rabbits running from hawks. Rilleta knew it. So far, they saw this as the fault of Scarlet mages who shouldn’t have been born with a connection to the deadliest element in the Cycle in any case. But if they could take mages from the Star Circle, and let the common people see that wielders of Azure and the other four elements that had nothing to do with fire fought among them...

“We do,” she said. “We are interested in building a coalition of all the mages, and casting Elle out of power.”

“Why?”

“She is not fair,” said Rilleta. “She bows the spirits of our people down to earth, and not only those who were born with the Scarlet singing to their minds. She must be stopped, or at least Her priestesses must be, and Rennon given equal worship with Her.”

Klessa studied her thoughtfully. Rilleta thought she had scored a point, but she had no idea which part of her words it had been.

She decided to ignore Klessa for a moment, and turned back to Lyissa, who was almost wringing her hands with anticipation. “You are ready to become part of Rennon’s faithful, Lyissa?” she asked softly.

“Yes, my lady. Oh, yes!”

Rilleta smiled gently, and held out her hands. Lyissa took them, and knelt before her, and began to recite the ancient words.

Lusirimalata's Commentary

This is one of the few places where I feel I must intrude on this History. The account of the great lady known as Rilleta is faithful, but no one need know the oaths of the Rennon Heretics—or the faithful of Rennon, as they were pleased to call themselves. Such words are not for the faint of heart.

There may be some, of course, who *wish* to hear such words. But such a desire can be forgiven, as long as one takes the proper penances into consideration. Below, for the comfort of those misguided souls who might have found such a black thought stealing into their minds, I give the Prayer of Contrition to rejoin them with Elle.

*Ah, Elle, my Lady who rides the night sky,
Who looks through the moon and abounds in flowers,
I come before You, a humble supplicant-I,
Who have been broken by the weight of the hours,
And know now that what I did was utterly wrong,
I come before You, and sing the penitent's song.*

*Ah, Lady, my Lady, broken before You am I,
And cowering, I implore You to heed my prayer.
I am the least of all things beneath Your bright sky,
And I do not deserve to breathe Your pure air.
And I know that what I did was utterly wrong.
I come before You, and sing the penitent's song.*

*Ah Lady, my Lady, I huddle here, and will give
Whatever You want, whatever price You demand,
So that I may continue to both love You and live.
Pray, stretch out to me Your grim and punishing hand!
`I know now that what I did was utterly wrong.
I come before You, and sing the penitent's song.*

*Ah, Elle, my Lady who hunts the high hills,
And as the Huntress kills those who would do harm,
Protecting us even as sadly She kills,
Protect me, shelter me, keep Your child warm!
I know now that what I did was utterly wrong.
I come before You, and sing the penitent's song.*

*Ah Lady, my Lady, nurture me through the dark,
And teach me what it is to love and to obey You.
Trample out in me even rebellion's small spark,*

*And teach me the way of the strong and the true!
I know now that what I did was utterly wrong.
I come before You, and sing the penitent's song.*

*Ah Lady, my Lady, receive my humble confession,
And, if it will not trouble You, my small devotion.
I will fall into You at the slightest profession,
And become no more than a drop in Your ocean.
I know now that what I did was utterly wrong.
I come before You, and sing the penitent's song.*

*Ah, Elle, my Lady, my pride is all gone from me,
And on my back beneath Your clear moon,
I lie, and yield my soul up, and am so free
That I might be a harp to play back Your bright tune.
I know now that what I did was utterly wrong,
And I pray that You accept Your penitent's song.*

Now that our souls have been cleansed, we may turn back to the History. I have chosen to leave in some material that may burn eyes sensitive to the slightest light of blasphemy. I must ask my readers for patience, as this was at the direction of the Goddess; I pray Her that they may see what I mean in good time.

A History of Rilleta, Priestess of Rennon

Chapter 2

Camps

“The people of the Rennon Heresy are skilled at hiding in the Plains themselves. This is at least one reason why we have trouble catching them. And they have strange allies, including ones who should naturally belong to the Light.”

-Intelligence report submitted to King Seldon of Orlath by the Captain of his Guards.

Rilleta looked deeply into Lyissa's eyes as she stood, and smiled a little. *Yes, the girl is devoted to Rennon in her heart. We need not fear that we will lose her.*

“Why did you do that, Lyissa?”

Rilleta ground her teeth as the girl's exalted expression faded, and she glanced towards Klessa, licking her lips. “I wanted to swear my life to Rennon and the cause of the rebels, Klessa,” she said.

“Why?”

“It’s important,” said Lyissa, and Rilleta was proud of her. The girl had some steel in her voice now, opposing a woman she obviously wasn’t used to opposing. *Such strength does faith give.* “They’re burning Scarlet mages alive—or innocents, at least. We have to do something about that.”

Rilleta looked back at Klessa, in time to see her shrug. “I still don’t really believe that these people are Scarlet mages,” she said. “Might I meet some?”

Rilleta nodded curtly. She didn’t like this mage, at all, but if they could win her support, it might be the key to winning more tolerable supporters among the Star Circle, and Rilleta would risk much for that. Lyissa was passionate, but she wasn’t very well-trained yet. “Come with me,” she said, and turned to the guard who had accompanied the women down the valley. “Vañade, will you run ahead and tell the Burned One that I have some visitors for him?”

Vañade flicked his glance back and forth between her and Klessa. It was just a small motion, but Rilleta saw it.

So did Klessa, she saw with some exasperation, and the mage tightened her lips in what looked like amusement.

“I will be well,” said Rilleta. “I am sure that our visitors understand my status and how important it is to please me.” She narrowed her eyes at Klessa, who simply shrugged gracefully and bowed.

“Lead on.”

Vañade at last seemed convinced and slipped out of the valley ahead of them. Rilleta followed, listening to the footsteps of the women behind her. Lyissa already sounded more confident, and Rilleta was not surprised. Such strength had her own swearing to Rennon given her that she had felt as if she were walking on pure flame for days to come.

“Do you treat everyone who follows you like that?”

Rilleta started. Somehow, she had become so involved in listening to Lyissa’s footsteps that she had forgotten Klessa was there as well. The mage walked beside her now, that same too-direct gaze as before fixed on her face.

“Like what?” Rilleta asked, since she didn’t know what Klessa could have found objectionable in her treatment of Vañade or Lyissa.

“Do you smirk at them, and nod as if you were thinking of their usefulness in battle?”

Rilleta relaxed. She had heard objections like this before. She had made them herself, before she came to Rennon's faith and realized just why they failed. "I am thinking of their usefulness in battle," she said. "I cannot lie. The only way the Heresy will every triumph is by people fighting and dying, and I am willing to sacrifice their lives to that."

"Are they?"

"All of them. No one goes through such an oath unless she is ready and willing to do so."

"And what do you see as Lyissa's fate? Do you want her to become a priestess of Rennon, as you are?"

Rilleta shrugged. "I think that she has the talent, and she certainly has the devotion to do so."

"But do you want her to become so?"

"I suppose you will tell me I should let her choose?"

"No," said Klessa. "She is a mage of the Star Circle, on her way to becoming a Master of the Nine Wonders. That has always been her fate. Better that you had never crossed her path than try to turn her from it."

"Klessa."

Klessa turned at once. Rilleta had the feeling that she wasn't used to being spoken to in that tone, and stood back to watch the show.

Lyissa stood with her head up, her oddly spotted hair tumbling down her back. "I have sworn of my own free will," she said. "You always taught me to do what came most naturally."

"I was talking about learning the connection between the elements," said Klessa. "Not adopting the faith of a rebel god."

"I have followed my heart," said Lyissa. "I have chosen the place that I have. And if you truly cared about me, you would honor that choice, and perhaps even follow me into the Heresy yourself."

Klessa wheezed as if something were caught in her throat, and then began to laugh. Rilleta narrowed her eyes. *Is this one mad? I have heard that efforts to master all nine elements can sometimes do that to a woman.*

"I don't care that much about you following your heart," said Klessa, when she finally managed to stop laughing. "I do know that you are making a mistake, Lyissa, no matter how you try to portray it. 'Following your heart' is all well and good as a child, when you

first begin to dream of the great deeds that you might do in the world. But when you are grown, and know the magic that burns within you...can you say that becoming a priestess of Rennon is more important than becoming a Master of the Nine Wonders?"

"They are burning mages."

"Yes, I know that. Do you have any new crimes to mention beyond that?"

Lyissa lifted her chin. "If that isn't enough to convince you, Klessa, I don't know what is. I am listening to the voice of my heart, and there is nothing that you can do about that." She folded her arms and turned her back.

Klessa watched her for a moment. Then she turned back to Rilleta and said, as if nothing had ever happened to interrupt their conversation, "You were saying that we should see one of these Scarlet mages?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Here."

Rilleta took great pleasure in pointing out the camp, which no visitor ever saw before they were walking through the middle of it. Small, hollowed-out coves occupied the walls of the valley, and here and there stood huts built of grass, which would look like nothing but natural hillocks to anyone flying above—if the one flying above saw them at all. It was one reason why the gryphons that the Light constantly sent to seek them never found a trace. Rilleta nodded to herself. *That is yet another sign that Rennon's is the natural faith, that we fit in much better with the land than the priestesses of Elle, with their great stone buildings.*

Her people moved everywhere, tending their horses and the small goats that gave them clothes and food, or nursing children, or sharpening weapons, or fletching arrows. They looked happy and free and natural, moreso than any people Rilleta had ever seen in her days in the castle. These were the people who would take over Orlath when it was free, and teach everyone to live in harmony with the elements again.

"Very nice," said Klessa, with no expression in her voice. "But where is the mage?"

"Here."

The voice was a horrible, harsh croak, and Rilleta was pleased to see that not even Klessa remained unaffected. Of course, while Lyissa started and blanched, Klessa only raised an eyebrow and turned in the direction of the voice.

A cloaked figure hobbled towards them; the Burned One always wore a cloak, even when

it chafed against his burns, so that the children of the camp did not have to see what their enemies were capable of quite yet. He reached up a hand as he drew near, though, and looked at Rilleta. "There are more new recruits here to see me?" he asked in a voice like the scrape of scales.

"One new recruit, and one who does not believe that the Light has been burning mages," said Rilleta, with a nod.

The Burned One threw back his hood.

Rilleta had braced herself, and she still winced; the sight still hurt her. His face was seamed with burns, not a patch of skin left unmarred. Most of his skin was red and shiny, as if he were a lobster broiled in hot water. One eye was gone completely, no hair grew on his head, and his hands trembled as if they could barely hold things, which they couldn't. The eye that was left was a bright, feverish blue, and stared at them so compellingly that Rilleta found herself unable to look away, even though she had seen his face often before.

"Enough."

Rilleta blinked and looked around, to find Lyissa on the ground retching. She went to the girl and put a sympathetic hand on her shoulder. Lyissa finished, but didn't immediately look up, staying with her head bowed.

"I'm sorry," said Rilleta. "I should have warned you. But the marks of our enemy's terror are always hard to see." She knelt down beside Lyissa and clasped her hands, ignoring the smell of vomit between them. It was a familiar smell in the camp, when the burned mages came staggering in for the first time especially. "Never forget that they do this, Lyissa. Whenever you are tempted to falter, then remember that Elle would kill us all if she could, for the sake of being different, for the sake of destroying the faith of Rennon."

Lyissa, her face pale but her eyes almost as glossy as the Burned One's skin, nodded and squeezed her hands back. "I will never forget that they are capable of such heinous crimes, my lady," she said.

"Wait a moment."

Rilleta glanced back in annoyance. Klessa was standing in front of the Burned One, and her hand was actually resting on his skin.

Rilleta scrambled up with a hiss. "How dare you? Do you know how sensitive his skin is —"

"I have touched burn victims before," said Klessa. "And I know the lingering trace of elemental fire. This is not the lingering trace of elemental fire." She stared at the Burned One, no longer flinching. "He wasn't burned by anyone calling on magical or natural fire,

at least not in the way that humans do it.”

“What was he burned by, then?” Rilleta challenged her, fighting the impulse to spring forward and rip Klessa’s hand from the Burned One. He didn’t seem hurt at the moment, and she didn’t want to spoil the possible chance that Klessa might change her mind and join them.

“A dragon’s breath. Had to be. No other creature in the world uses the Scarlet magic in quite the same way.” Klessa smiled a little. “Except a Master of the Star Circle.” She reached out, put her hands on the Burned One’s shoulders, and closed her eyes.

Rilleta felt her reach out to the Scarlet, and reacted instinctively, trying to burn Klessa’s gift out of her. She wouldn’t let the mage torment the poor Burned One more than he already had been.

Her grasp on the Scarlet was knocked away as easily as though a parent had swatted a child’s hand, and Klessa turned and glared at her. “*Must* you make this difficult? I’m trying to help him.”

Rilleta just stared, and even as she watched, Klessa reached out again. It wasn’t quite in the style that Rilleta was used to; she seemed to reach just slightly to the left of the Scarlet, if that was possible—

And then a bar of steel appeared in her hand.

Rilleta scrambled backwards, eyeing Klessa carefully and already wondering if she should call someone else who might be able to deal with this, perhaps the Master of Metal. Most Metal mages were dangerously crazy.

Klessa did not turn around and start laying about with the steel, though. She passed it over the Burned One’s skin instead, all the while reaching out yet again. Rilleta could only catch the corner of her magic, though. She didn’t know what Klessa was doing, and that frustrated her.

When she glanced at Lyissa, she saw the woman had an intent, listening look on her face, as if she were trying to follow what Klessa was doing. But then Lyissa blinked and shook her head.

Rilleta could only look back at the mage and the Burned One, and hope that Klessa would not slay him.

Abruptly, the Burned One’s red, shiny skin writhed and flexed like the carapace of a beetle someone had just stepped on. Rilleta started to lunge forward, and then stopped.

Wherever the metal bar passed, new skin was emerging. The red skin turned to dirt that fell off and joined the soil of the Plains as if it had never been separate from it. Klessa

passed the bar over his face, the expression of concentration intent on her own face, and in seconds dirt fell from his scalp. Behind it, like grass, new hair began to grow and sprout.

At last Klessa stepped back and swatted her hands together, as if she were trying to wipe off the last of the dirt. “There,” she said. “Simple enough, once you had a Master of the Nine Wonders to help you.”

The Burned One looked at his new hands in disbelief, and then began to cry.

“Oh, please don’t do that,” said Klessa, picking up the cloak he had worn and wrapping it around his waist like a loincloth. “I hate it when patients start crying. Yes, it happened, isn’t it miraculous. You can weep about it all you want, but only when you’ve taken the measures you’d have to take anyway, even if it *wasn’t* a miracle.”

She led him over to one of the huts, and ducked inside. A moment later, a woman came stumbling out, trying to take Klessa’s hand from her arm and not quite succeeding.

“You’ll take care of him?” Klessa asked, gesturing at the Burned One—no, Rilleta had to think, he who had been the Burned One.

“I—yes, my lady.”

“Good.” Klessa nodded. “Then you’ll need to bathe him and be patient with his nightmares; it’s probably going to be a while before he can sleep through the night without dreaming of the Scarlet and awaking with a scream.”

The woman just nodded dazedly as Klessa recited more instructions, and then turned and walked back to Rilleta and Lyissa.

“No mere priestess of Elle burned him,” said Klessa to Rilleta. “And no Scarlet mage, either. It was a dragon or a Master of the Star Circle. No one else could have done it.”

“What did you do?” whispered Rilleta. She had never seen such a thing, and she was sure she knew all the stories of the Star Circle’s power.

“Lyissa. Explain it to her.”

Rilleta looked at Lyissa, who now resembled a student caught out by a teacher. She opened her mouth, then closed it again and lowered her eyes. “I don’t really have any idea,” she said.

Klessa stared at her. Then she said, in a voice that made Rilleta think she was going to spring forward and wrench the younger woman’s limbs off, “Even if you can’t mimic it, you must know what I did. The theory behind it.”

“No.”

Klessa went on staring at Lyissa as she said, “Well, my lady, since it seems that only one of us here is truly of the Circle, I will tell you that I reached out to the Scarlet that still hung around him, used that as a conduit to the Metal, and then passed the Scarlet through the Metal to the Crop.”

“I still don’t understand,” said Rilleta.

“Metal is the blending of fire and earth, isn’t it?” asked Klessa.

“I suppose so, but—“

“I channeled the fire through the metal into the Crop, and the traces of fire turned to dirt and fell from him.” Klessa shrugged her shoulder with an odd motion, moving the sleeve of her robe back so that it bared her arm. As Rilleta watched, she plucked a hair from it and tossed it into the air. It seemed a gesture of mere annoyance. “How many times do I have to explain it?”

“I have never heard such a thing before,” said Rilleta as calmly as she could, while her heart beat and her head filled with dreams, imaginings of the things that could happen, if they could only keep Klessa and harness her power.

She could heal our people, terrify our enemies, and repair the hearts of our friends all at once. We must have her.

Even if that involves some persuasion I would rather not use.

Lusirimalata’s Apologies

I do hope that my readers will forgive me for the passage of blasphemous material included here. Though the History of Rilleta is true to the facts of the Heresy in so many things, there are times when the author wanders into fancy, as here. It is obviously impossible for any mage at all to reach through the conduits of the elements as Klessa is described as doing here. After all, each mage is born to one element and one alone. The Masters of the Star Circle made a bargain with the Dark to be able to perform their wonders; they were not linked to the nine elements.

There are not even nine elements; there are only four. Truly, the author of this History should have known that. If it was true that the elements of the Cycle could blend, then the Masters of the Star Circle would have called themselves the Masters of Ten Wonders and not Nine. They always said that there was no element that blended Azure and Crop. Was that not a sign, or should it not have been a sign to those who heard them, that they were lying and laughing up their sleeves when people believed them?

I left it in to show what Rilleta believed, one of the reasons that she forsook the service of Elle for the false worship of Rennon, and the truth behind the matter of the burned mages. Klessa is right, one of the few times in this History that she will be so. The Scarlet mages were burned by dragons or Circle Masters, by creatures of the Dark who defied the Cycle, not priestesses of Elle. Indeed, the whole of the Rennon Heresy was founded on such a misconception. Fire did not go unrecognized as a true element, no matter what the people who brought the jungle-demon from across the mountains said.

Forgive me for my outburst, Elle! My hand is shaking as I write, and I fear that these pages will be blotted. Let me take a moment to compose myself, and then I will turn back to work.

Very well.

I must now go with the reader, asking the Goddess's indulgence and the reader's own, back to the journal of Klessa of the Nine Wonders. There is here a passage that, with much editing, must after all be allowed to stand. It expresses Klessa's villainous character and disdain for truth and love better than almost any passage in the journals.

Take a moment to purify yourselves, my readers, before continuing. Please. Do it for the sake of your souls, and the Light, and the Goddess.

The Journal of Klessa of the Nine Wonders

19 Greenborn, 106 OR

There is a little saying that I believe fits my disapproval of Lyissa and the "Heresy" she has sworn her heart to:

"Well might the stones lying on the bottom of a river glitter, but that does not make them gold."

Or, to put it in terms that her mother might have used in her home village:

"Because it doesn't stink as much after a time does not make it less a cowpat."

In truth, her mother probably would not have put it in such eloquent words. But I will no longer waster my time pondering such matters, and pass on to true consideration of the matter at hand.

I tried to reason with Lyissa, and she only repeated more proverbs to me about the truth of her heart. I tried to reason with Rilleta, but that was futile—something I should have recognized at the start. No one so determined as a fanatic. I make no excuses for my stupidity in not knowing what she was. Had I known it then, Lyissa and I might have broken free a good deal sooner.

The afternoon wore towards evening, with Rilleta showing us around the camp and speaking of the “natural” way that her people lived “in harmony with the land,” and were not the destructive Scarlet mages of the stories that the servants of Elle told. Lyissa drank it with shining eyes, and so did Rilleta’s people who pressed around her. Simple peasants, most of them, but all of them can wield some form of fire magic. I even found a few who might have been candidates for training in the Circle’s school, if they did not look so strongly towards Rennon.

This god, or jungle-demon, or whatever it is that he is, interferes with the concentration needed to call on the elements. I felt the magic of a child playing with a Metal bar skim out towards the Crop, a natural passing from conduit to conduit that might have led him to learning Terwent’s Pattern simply and easily in our classrooms. But then he thought of Rennon, and his mind turned back towards the useless thoughts of the people around him.

And in Rilleta’s presence, Lyissa was losing that concentration as well. She didn’t even know the working of Denne’s Pattern when she saw it.

I had made my decision, and never mind all that natter about following the heart.

We ate with Rilleta, mostly root vegetables and some tough and gamy meat from a beast of the Plains, and I thought longingly of the feast I was missing in the Circle’s castle. No one would wonder where I was. They know that sometimes I have to leave, lest the stupidity of my students drive me to suicide.

That only saddened me further.

Rilleta continued to try and woo me. I was amused. Did she not see what she was doing, all the ways that she gave herself away? She used over-obvious flattery, poured the best wine for me, and told me over and over again of the plight of Scarlet mages in the south. I am truly beginning to believe that this Heresy was founded on nothing more than a few dragon-burnings and the dislike of this woman for the priestesses of Elle. She was one of them herself once; I recognize the cut of that robe, gray under the reddening of blood. And now she has run away, and imagines herself to be a formidable opponent to women who have learned intrigue in the Court of King Seldon himself. So might a child play with Dust and imagine that he will build walls of earth out of it.

I listened, and drank the wine, and was amused. I must admit, the amusement it afforded me was almost worth my annoyance over the loss of Lyissa’s concentration.

But not quite.

At last, Rilleta showed me to one cove for the night, and Lyissa to another, and told me to think about what she had said and give her my answer in the morning. She seemed

smugly confident. She really thought she had wooed me to her side and won. I didn't bother telling her that it would have taken either a great deal more wine or some truly fancy gifts before she could be sure of that.

I waited until I heard the breathing of most of those around us fall quiet, and then stepped out of my cove and went to Lyissa's. She was curled with one arm thrown over her face, sleeping as I have often seen her sleep, as if she were a child dreaming of her name-day presents.

I sighed. She might be annoyed at me. But that would pass quickly enough, when once I could point out to her all the obvious problems with this Heresy. Even her remaining annoyed for a while, and then learning to work Denne's Pattern again, would content me.

I closed my eyes and called to the Azure. At once, a small shower of rain fell on me, and I held my hands up to it, weaving Selide's Pattern in my mind from memory. Then my hands moved in response, and they formed an exact copy of the Pattern. A link between mind and hands was established in seconds, and I passed from the Azure to the Gust, and then mingled the elements. A cloud of mist rose and spread across the valley, shielding us from sight.

So simple are the "wonders" and "miracles" of our Circle, when one thinks about them, and concentrates on them, and does not go chasing after rebel gods.

I stooped and shook Lyissa's shoulder.

She came awake after a few muffled snorts and coughs into her hair, and said anxiously, "Klessa? Is that you?"

"Yes. We have to get out of here."

"What? Why?"

"Do you see the mist?" I nodded over my shoulder to the thick cover spreading outside the cove.

"Yes. What's happened?"

"The priestesses of Elle are attacking," I said grimly. "Or it could be someone from the Star Circle, I suppose, or even someone from Doralissa, if their Queen has decided she's nursed her dislike of the King long enough. Rilleta gave the order to scatter. None of these mages can fight Mist magic."

"And she told you where to take me?"

"I know the way there."

Lyissa yielded herself to me as trustingly as a child, of course. Why should she not? I have always been her guardian, and I have always had her best interests at heart, and that remained true then.

I guided her down the valley, following the remembered course we had come, and back to the level Plains. We had come out of a tunnel that led beneath the walls of Ozue, opening on a hillock distinguished from the others by its white flowers. I had rolled my eyes at the thought of a secret tunnel, but it was fairly well-concealed, and would be useful for going back inside the castle unseen.

Halfway to the hill, Lyissa finally woke up enough to figure out what I was doing. She started to struggle.

I hit her on the head, and then called on the Gust. The wind carried her for me back to the hillock, and then it was easy enough to duck beneath the hill and enter the tunnel, coming home.

That was last night, and Lyissa's door has been locked since I brought her back home. She has refused to acknowledge me at all, my knockings or my callings. I know it is only childish pique, and she will surmount it soon enough, but it still troubles me. I did what was best for her, and I must admit that I wish she would see that without having to pass through the useless phase of tears and complaints first.

It might have helped if she hadn't awakened just as we came out on the other end of the tunnel, and I called on the Crop to collapse stone over the entrance. She went silent then, and glared at me with accusing eyes, and slammed her door in my face when I tried to follow her into her room.

I truly do not know why she is so angry at me. This is a Heresy, and that makes it a religious war. That means the mages of the Star Circle, who have always worshipped Elle but never fanatically, should not become bound to one side or the other. Some of the priestesses consider us heretics for our views about the Cycle, but most do not. The High Priestess is a reasonable woman. She will crush these Heretics, and pardon most of the survivors, and life will continue as it always has. Lyissa will learn the Patterns and at last arise to become a Master of the Nine Wonders.

With that kind of life lying ahead of her, I don't know why she would choose to run about with fanatics, live in houses made of grass, and eat gamy meat. It makes no sense of any kind.

If she would only answer her door when I knock on it, perhaps I could get her to see that.

Lusirimonalata's Comments

I—I must not listen to the screaming.

The screams of my Ilantran sisters are filling the Temple, and I must not listen to them. I cannot listen to them. The Goddess must comfort them, save them from their fear, as is Her right, for we are all Her children.

And yet I, too, am filled with fear, enough to distract me from my task of compiling this History and insuring that future generations of my sisters will know the truth.

The Traitor Prince of Rivendon has been sighted in Ilantra.

Rumors about what exactly he did there are confused. Some are saying he killed the Queen; others, that he turned the Crown Prince to stone. There are even some who say that he declared his intention to come to Orlath next, and topple the Queen from her seat of power.

Fear makes my hand shake, ink blotting its way across the page. It is true, then, what the High Priestess told us. This Traitor Prince is not part of the Dark; the next war between Dark and Light will not arise for another ten or fifteen years. He is simply crazy. He kills his victims with clubs, though some claim it is in truth a bar of steel, and that he can call such bars to his hand.

I must pay no attention to that. It only shows that the old heretical beliefs have not quite died as yet.

I must keep my mind fixed on the History, and know that I have nearly as important a task as those of my sisters who are looking into the flames, desperately trying to foresee the Traitor Prince's next move.

I...

This History...

I have just looked back upon what I have written, and realized what it shows about me. I consider my fear, and even my sisters' fear, more important than putting down the true History of the Rennon Heresy. I am weak, and mortal after all, and the strength of Elle that I thought was in me is not in me.

I have thought of blotting these words out with sand and starting again, but the Goddess speaks powerfully in me, and makes me bow my head to Her will. Let future generations know of my weakness, the mortal in me that rises to destroy the Goddess-looking mind. It will remind them that even the historian can be wrong, and that we must all depend on Elle's strength rather than our own.

It is a good lesson. I am better now, and ready to turn back to focusing on this section of Klessa's Journals.

As one can see, these pages prove the hardness and essential inhumanity of the "Master of the Nine Wonders." She did not respect Lyissa's faith, but tried to get her to change it. When speaking of her, she used terms such as "child." That might mean that Klessa looked as a mother on Lyissa, but I do not believe it. She could not do what she did to Lyissa if she truly thought of Lyissa as a daughter. True mothers imitate the Goddess, and protect their children unless they have done wrong. Besides, the pages of Klessa's journal that I may not place in this History, so rank and hideous is their blasphemy, make it very clear that she did not think of Lyissa as a daughter.

Claiming that she had Lyissa's best intentions is a lie, something told to deceive herself. This is a place in which Klessa must have had some sense of history, some premonition that her journals might someday be seen by outside eyes. She lied to make herself look better, when a single glance into her heart would have revealed all her evil to her, and sent her begging for forgiveness to Elle's altar.

Of course, very few heretics have the power to look into their hearts and see their own evil, or else they would not be heretics.

I must ask my readers for patience as I give them a little more of Klessa's journal; there is matter here that gives the lie to some claims about the Rennon Heresy, such as that it did spring of a natural faith long-nourished in secret by the Heretics. It did not. It was pure political manipulation, and Klessa's testimony proves it.

Sometimes truth comes out of even the mouth of someone unworthy to tell it.

The Journal of Klessa of the Nine Wonders

20 Greenborn, 106 OR

If they do not stop playing the "Song of the Sea-Queen," I truly will kill the bards. Perhaps turning their blood to fire would help.

Ah, good. They've stopped.

I wouldn't mind the "Song of the Sea-Queen" so much—it is played for a diplomatic reason—but they are confusing the chorus with the "Song of Queen Rizzeros," which though quite similar is *not* the same thing, and confusing the tune with apparently three other songs, as they have done all evening.

How do I know this?

Our Lord gave me permission to sit in the Moon Hall all evening, of course, with the

emissary from the Queen of Doralissa.

I will explain how this came about, since I still cannot believe that I was so incautious as to assent when the Lord asked me to come down.

I had turned away from Lyissa's door for the last time this morning when I heard the clashing of hooves below. Curious, I looked out one of the windows, and saw the Doralissan retinue riding up. Even without the banner of the striking hawk, furred at that moment, there is no mistaking Doralissans for anything else. Their elven features and fine horses reveal them enough for anyone who is not like my students and has had some education in the world.

So do their sneers, and haughty expressions.

I turned, hearing footsteps behind me as well, and found the Lord there. He was clad in silver formal robes, but they were the robes of teaching that he uses when he works with the students who actually show potential to master all Eleven Wonders, and not the robes that a welcoming emissary would wear.

He held out a set of robes to me.

"Lady Klessa," he said. "Would you mind dressing and going to meet the emissary? He brings little more than tricky words couched in lies, I am sure, and he might more easily say them to you than me."

I smiled a little, and took the robes. The Lord has a reputation for intimidating emissaries. I believe this stemmed from an Ilantran assassination attempt on him. When he had finished calling on the Dust, the emissary herself was dust. Since that time, he has almost always assigned the task of dealing with emissaries, ambassadors, or anyone else who wants something from the Star Circle to me.

"I will be happy to do it, my lord."

And thus I wound up sitting through the welcoming feast, and the "entertainment" that came after it, not bothering to conceal my yawns by the end. Of course, the Doralissan emissary showed himself to be impressed, or as impressed as anyone from that Kingdom ever looks, and applauded politely when the "Song of the Sea-Queen," chronicling Queen Rizzeros's first coming to the shores of Doralissa, was finished. He would probably have been more impressed if the bards had managed to play it correctly, but he did the polite thing and clapped.

Then he turned to me, and said, "Where is the Lord of Star Circle?"

I raised my brows, and stared back at him. It is extremely unlike a Doralissan to be rude. “My lord, is there something specific you need to speak to him about? I had not known. I thought you came only bearing Queen Memoryrose’s greetings. Of course, you may want to—“

“I only want to know where he is.”

“Teaching a class,” I said, feeling my bile rise at the man’s blank expression. Where do they think Masters of the Nine Wonders come from, rising out of the elements themselves? “I do not think he will come near the Moon Hall tonight.” Of course he wouldn’t, I told myself. He had placed me with this ambassador, smooth and polite and a bastard like all of them, and then gone to his class.

“Ah, good.”

Good? I could feel my eyes narrow, and was pleased to see the man look slightly uncomfortable. One glare from me can set students sobbing, when I time it right. I was glad to see that it had an effect even on this arrogant man. “What is it, my lord? What is your name, by the way?”

“Galdon.” He inclined his head.

I studied him more closely, now noting that his blue eyes really weren’t that elven. He could have passed for human if he had covered his ears and that strange silver-white hair.

And his name was Orlathian.

Come to think of it, he spoke his Doralissan with a bit of an accent, one I hadn’t noticed so far because I had been wincing at the bards.

“Did you come here for a specific purpose, my Lord Galdon?” I asked, feeling my heart speed up for no good reason.

“I did. I came to speak to you, my Lady Klessa, when once I learned that you were the one I must see. I am glad that the Lord of the Star Circle assigned me to you. Of course, I don’t think it was luck at all,” he went on, lifting a glass and sipping from it, while I stared at him. “I think it was Rennon.”

“Are you truly from Doralissa?”

“Oh, yes. I am.”

“Then why do you speak of Rennon?” I demanded. “This is an Orlathian heresy.” Of course, I had thought of another possibility: that he was a spy for the priestesses. My first thought was to protect Lyissa. They could have anything they wanted about Rilleta and

the others, but they would not take her from me.

Galdon smiled, the first time I had ever seen a Doralissan ambassador truly do so. “My lady, might we speak more comfortably in private?”

“Away from these bards who butcher the song?” I let my voice rise, and the bards flinched. “Yes.”

I stood, and left the Hall, Galdon only finishing his wine and bowing to everyone else before he followed me. I waited just outside the door, and so the Doralissan ambassador stepped out and hesitated for a moment when he did not see me.

I came up behind him and wrapped one hand firmly around his neck. He started to struggle, but stopped when he saw me holding up my other hand in front of his eyes.

“You must know something about our training,” I said. “With our hands and our minds we can wreak more damage than any Scarlet mage.”

Galdon nodded as much as he could, given my grip.

“I will call fire and set it boiling in your veins if you don’t tell me the truth,” I said, Renet’s Pattern burning just beneath the surface of my mind. “It is a painful way to die, very painful. I have worked with the priestesses in the pits beneath the Temple of Elle before; I have seen people die from it, and I know what I am talking about.”

“My mission might be hopeless, then, if you have worked with the priestesses,” said Galdon, his voice edged with bitterness.

At least he was dealing with me, and not one of the other Masters—Yelena, for example. She would still be blinking now, and might have even let him go while she tried to figure it out.

I sometimes feel I am cursed with intelligence in a world where everyone else is so blind, but on this occasion I was very glad for the quickness of my vision.

“You have come from the Heretics.”

Galdon nodded, and reached up as if he would remove my hand.

I switched my thoughts from Renet’s Pattern to Anacra’s—I didn’t want to kill him now, only warn him—and moved my hand over his face. He gasped as I called on the Azure and abruptly dehydrated his mouth.

“Don’t try to move, or I will take the rest of the water from your body and leave you a withered husk,” I murmured. “Now. Tell me exactly why you have come from the Heretics, and what a Doralissan is doing involved in an Orlathian heresy.”

He coughed and choked. It was hard for him to speak with a dehydrated mouth, but I waited for him to bring more saliva into it. Let no one say that I am not a patient woman.

Galdon croaked at last, “It is not an Orlathian heresy, not originally. You have heard the tales that Rennon came from over the mountains?”

“Of course.”

“And do you know that some of the Orlathian heretics have had to emigrate to Doralissa, so fierce has been their persecution here?”

“I understand your family history now,” I murmured. It would explain his accent, and his impulse to throw his life away for the sun-god. “But how can you be truly an ambassador for the Queen of Doralissa?”

“Four years ago,” said Galdon, who now seemed to have gotten his voice back, “King Seldon insulted Queen Memoryrose.”

I waited for more. Then I realized that he was probably waiting for me to respond. I was tempted not to do so, and just to stand there until he gave up, but someone might find us.

And there was Lyissa.

“Yes?” I asked.

“She wants him off the throne,” said Galdon simply, as if an insult were enough reason to encourage something like this. “And so she has encouraged the spread and flourishing of the heresy. But it has not risen as we hoped.”

“You speak so freely of this to me?”

“We know that you were with the Lady Rilleta—“ the reverence in his voice was obvious, and made me grimace with disgust “—as late as the night before last. We had hoped that we could trust you, that you were becoming committed to the Heresy. And if we could not find you, then we were prepared to throw ourselves on the Lord’s mercy, and ask for his help.”

I would swear before Elle Herself that I knew what he meant soon after he spoke, but I was so disgusted and shocked that it took me a moment to speak it. “You would ask the Masters of the Wonders to help you in a political and religious struggle?”

“Yes.”

“We are neutral. We have always been neutral.”

“Not this time.” Triumph and fanaticism made Galdon’s voice nearly as hot as the elemental Scarlet. “This time, Rennon will rise and unseat Elle. This time, the very face of the land will change, as it did when Queen Aneron marched down from the mountains. King Seldon has gone too far, and threatened and tormented the Scarlet mages and the God’s worshippers long enough. We will take his throne, and set someone else in his place, perhaps the Lady Rilleta—“

“I won’t let that happen.”

“If you don’t let it happen, Klessa, then you will have to live without me.”

I turned sharply. There stood Lyissa, her head tilted back, bits of the brown mess still in her hair.

“I have chosen my side,” she said.

“Lyissa, *why?*”

A faint smile tugged at her lips. “You should know, Klessa. You’ve had some of the training of me. You know that my affinity is to the Scarlet, and Metal, and Lightning, and Steam. I can’t really master any of the elements that don’t involve fire. It is time to admit what I am, and go to the Heresy, the natural protection for people like me.”

“The Star Circle would never turn you out.” I am still baffled as to how she could think this. “We have Masters of Four Wonders among us, and you know that, Lyissa. You don’t need to leave.”

Lyissa shrugged. “I have also felt the God burning in my mind.”

“Like the Goddess?”

She gazed deep into my eyes. “I have never felt the Goddess so, Klessa.”

“You’re going back to them, aren’t you?”

“Yes,” said Lyissa serenely. “By morning the castle will be taken, Klessa, and the people of Ozue will rise and go over to Queen Memoryrose. I am afraid that you will be caught in the middle, unless you choose a side now.”

“I will not.”

“Klessa—“

“I will not.” By the Goddess, there is *nothing* I hate more than being told what to do by someone who does not have a shred of authority.

Lyissa's eyes dimmed with tears, but she looked away from me before I could see any of them fall. "Then you have lost me forever, Klessa," she whispered. "I am gone to Rilleta's side. That is where my heart belongs."

And then I made a decision that I have sat in my room cursing myself for, for the past hour.

"I will choose with you, Lyissa."

At once she swung back towards me, not smiling. The look of hope in her eyes was too solemn for a smile. "You mean that?"

"Yes. If you choose this Heresy, then I will choose it too, rather than see you lost to me forever."

She smiled. How much more radiant that smile will be when I have at last freed her from the clutches of this foolish Heresy!

"Thank you, Klessa. Now, let the Lord Galdon go, please. He has arrangements to make before morning."

I let him go. I had to stay true to my pretended allegiance, for now.

He rubbed his neck and looked at me. I expected a glare, but he only nodded a little, as if commenting on my dedication.

"You are strong, and determined," he said. "You will do well in the ranks of the Heresy."

"Thank you," I said, as graciously as I could.

He left, and Lyissa left with him, lingering only long enough to touch my arm. "Thank you," she said, her voice thick. "You don't know what it means to me, that you've chosen me over the old tradition of neutrality."

I smiled at her, and let her think what she wanted about what I had chosen her over. When the time comes, then I can reveal the truth to her.

And now it is near morning, and I am sitting alone in my room, and I hear the first clashes of scattered battle.

By the Goddess, I hate—

No. I do not hate Lyissa. I never could. She is the reason that I chose to go along with this at all.

By the Goddess, I hate these stupid wars.

Lusirimonialata's Commentary

There. There is proof, in the journals of someone who had no reason to lie, even though she hated the Heresy. This would be an elaborate story to create, and the Heresy would not reward her for it if they won.

Queen Memoryrose of Doralissa was intimately involved in the rise of the Rennon Heresy. It was a result of political and emotional manipulations, of the kind that Klessa's friend used on her to make her join the Heresy.

But infinitely more important, of course.

I have just reread that sentence, and realized that it might seem as if I had some sympathy for Klessa. That is not true. She had no right to join the side opposite from her rightful Goddess, no matter what the incentive. She should have gone at once to the Lord of the Star Circle, and told him the truth, and then the Queen could have been defeated and the war disrupted from the outset.

Perhaps then the name of Klessa of the Nine Wonders would be honored in all nine Kingdoms, instead of cursed as it is.

We must now turn back to the tale of that admirable woman who was corrupted by the kinds of forces that Klessa should have resisted, though of course not in the same way, and though of course she found her way back to a purity of heart that Klessa never could.

My Ilantran sisters are still shrieking outside the walls. I shall ignore them. The Traitor Prince of Rivendon did not slaughter the Queen or the Crown Prince of Ilantra, and no one knows where he is now. It is useless to worry about him until he strikes again.

A History of Rilleta, Priestess of Rennon

Chapter 3

Master of Metal

"Did you know that no one knows the future but Elle? The priestesses are only Her tools in learning it."

-Rera, High Priestess of Elle.

“Lyissa, my lady.”

Rilleta turned as the young woman entered the room, and was gratified when Lyissa all but flung herself to her knees, sobbing.

“I am so sorry, my lady! I would never have left if I had a choice. Klessa took me through the mist, and I never knew what was happening until we were almost to the tunnel under the walls.”

“Hush. I know.” Rilleta came to Lyissa and chafed her hands. *Poor child, thinking I will punish her. Rennon will do that, if it needs to be done at all.* “I know that you would never have left on your own. Where is Klessa now?”

“In her room, as are most of the other Lords and Ladies of the Star Circle.”

Rilleta nodded. They had taken the city very swiftly, since they had so many sympathizers in Ozue; the city was so near the Doralissan border that most of her people felt they were more subjects of Queen Memoryrose than King Seldon in any case, and the Doralissan embassy had taken easy command of the towers of the School. The Lords and Ladies of the Star Circle were shut in the rooms. They had refused to take part at all, excluding one Master of Two Wonders whom a Steam mage in Rilleta’s following had at last quelled.

“And has she now joined the Heresy?”

Lyissa smiled through her tears. “Yes, my lady. She knew about the attack before it happened, and did not tell the Lord.”

Rilleta arched her eyebrows. “I am indeed surprised.” And she was. *I would never have thought that Klessa would show loyalty to anyone but herself. Still, if she has come to our side, we can use her.* Rilleta had almost given up on the Master of the Nine Wonders after finding out that Klessa had left the camp, and Lyissa had gone with her, but she could be useful now. “But we shall have to teach her some things.” She glanced up at the man who stood behind her, so quiet that it was easy to forget he was there. “Lyissa, I would like you to meet our Master of Metal, and one of those who will instruct you in the mysteries of Rennon, since his memory is so good. Klessa will attend your lessons with you, if you would not mind that.”

“Of course not.”

Rilleta took in the shine of her eyes with a frown. *There is still a bond of loyalty between them, and that will have to be broken if it begins to interfere with Lyissa’s dedication to the God. But I shall wait and see what happens.* She gestured, and the Master of Metal stepped forward.

Lyissa gasped, and seemed to fight the urge to shield her eyes. Rilleta smiled. Many

people felt that way on seeing the Master, at least when he moved out of the sunlight while he was looking like this and they could see that the golden tinge to his skin was not just the light.

“Welcome, young Lyissa,” said the Master. “I would be happy to begin your instruction as soon as possible.”

Lyissa took a moment to look shyly up at him. “I—you’re an elf,” she said.

The Master tilted his head and smiled a little. His eyes were blue at the moment, and the light caught in them and flared as if it were shining off the surface of water. “Why, yes, I suppose I am.”

“Why are you fighting with us?” Lyissa asked, doubtless thinking, as Rilleta had when Telemoranion had first come to her, that he belonged with his people in the southern Elfwood.

“My people are corrupt,” said the Master firmly. “They do not remember anything true of what they were before Aneron came, the terror and the glory of it. I want to make sure that they remember.”

“You remember what it was like before Aneron came, then?”

“Of course. I am immortal, as are all my kind.”

Rilleta had to hide a chuckle at Lyissa’s discomfort. “Telemoranion will tell you the truth of Rennon’s rising,” she intervened. “He it was who heard the first worshipper of Rennon to come across the mountains, the prophetess Alaria, speak, and he has instructed most of our young.”

“Should I fetch Klessa?” asked Lyissa, as she stood up at last.

“Not just yet,” said Rilleta. “I would prefer that you take your first lessons alone, without the distraction.”

“Klessa wouldn’t be a distraction,” Lyissa protested innocently.

Rilleta snorted lightly. *This girl does not see her as I do.* “I am not yet sure of her loyalty to the Heresy, and would speak to her first.”

Lyissa looked as if she might object, but then obviously remembered whom she spoke to, and settled for bowing her head. Telemoranion’s presence might have something to do with it, too. Rilleta herself felt inclined to be quieter in his presence, closer to the God.

The Master of Metal glanced at her for a moment, and Rilleta nodded back. He existed the room, Lyissa stepping at his heels, unable to stop herself from sneaking awed glances

at him.

Rilleta turned to look out the window again.

She stood in one of the high tower rooms, looking out over the city. One might easily become too high here, and start thinking that one was better than the people who danced and feasted and sang in the streets. But Rilleta knew that she herself would never fall into that trap.

I am no better than the lowest worshipper of the God. I will not become a leader so detached from the concerns of her people that she drowns in the ocean of her ignorance. No, I will truly lead.

And, since it was up to her to lead, she would have to figure out what to do about the Star Circle.

Rilleta sighed, and sat down at the table that dominated the room; she supposed this was probably where some of the Masters regularly met for conference or council. It was a long, fine table, made of sleek brown wood, and Rilleta supposed she should admire it more than she did. But then, since she was a Scarlet mage, it was hard for her to think of wood as anything other than fire-food.

She had hoped that not all the tales of the Star Circle were true, that they were not neutral. She had thought at least one would come to her, professing love for Rennon in open or in secret, and that she would be able to convince the others to join her through that one.

But, save for Lyissa, she had found none of the Masters, though many of the students, who were eager to see her. And Lyissa was too young to appeal to many of them with any authority.

It would have been best if the Lord of the Star Circle would have seen the truth and come to her, but he had not. They had all locked their doors and sat still, neither resisting nor helping.

Rilleta sighed.

I hate to do this, but I must use the one weapon I have. I know that Klessa is one of the more powerful Masters, if not the most powerful one. I must convince her, and the others will bend.

Rilleta stood and walked from the room. Most of her people were involved in the celebrations still; they would not approach her for advice about a minor problem now. She had time to seek out Klessa and make her bend.

Do I not hold in all my power what she loves and values, what she stole from my camp

and followed there in the first place? I appreciate Lyissa and hope that she stays with us, but all lives must be given up for Rennon, if circumstances demand it. And if threats alone will make the stubborn Master bend, then no one need die at all.

She reached Klessa's door at last—she knew which it must be, given that it had her name deeply inset in the wood—and rapped on it.

Klessa opened it. “Lyissa? Is that you—“

And stopped when she saw Rilleta.

Rilleta smiled gently. *This will be easy. Lord of Flame, prevent me from having to kill anyone in Your service!* “Greetings, Lady Klessa. May I come in?”

Lusirimalata's Comments

116 OR, Snapice 17

The Goddess has said, and often says again, to Her servants, “Sometimes, kindness is couched in cruelty.”

That has been so, and always will remain so. Some of the priestesses who remember those days better than I do have wept tears and said that they are sure Klessa could have been saved by less extreme measures, that threatening her with either Rennon or Elle was not needed. They could have spoken to her, they insist, and gotten her to change her mind, to come with them.

But sometimes that is wrong, and the Goddess is right. The Goddess is always right, of course, but sometimes we understand Her words better than we do at others.

For example, take the Ilantran sisters still praying outside this room. It would be kind to ask them to stop screaming, so that others can work and pray in peace. The words might seem cruel to them, when their homeland is in danger from the Traitor Prince, but it would be a true kindness to others who are not Ilantran, and a kindness to them, in the end. The Traitor Prince will strike, or not, as the Goddess wills it. In the end, everything will work out for the best.

This next section of Klessa's journals presents much difficulty, and I must wait a time before I tackle it.

Anassra, the priestess assigned to help me with any minor tasks that might need doing while I work on this History, has just brought me water and a light repast, and I am feeling much better now. I present the edited section of Klessa's journal with a warning comment.

Much of this might make Klessa seem sympathetic to the reader, but it should not be construed that way. In truth, I presented it only because I thought it important that the reader see how bonds to other mortals overwhelmed Klessa and turned her to evil. She should not have yielded so easily. The Goddess is the most important thing in anyone's life, the core and center of it, and Klessa should have remembered that and trusted in Her. But she yielded, and we all know the consequences of it.

May the eyes that see this radiate Light from a pure heart and mind, and may the blessings of Elle be on all that I am and all that I do!

The Journals of Klessa of the Nine Wonders

21 Greenborn, 106 OR

Smirking bitch.

For so she is, this High Priestess of Rennon who came to me, all smiles and soft, tender words, and tried to persuade me to her side. When she found out that she could not persuade me, she—

But best to tell it in my words, rather than jump ahead too far.

I opened the door, and saw the smirking bitch smiling at me. Then, she still thought me one of the soft Masters of the Star Circle who would yield out of sympathy for her blighted cause. "Greetings, Lady Klessa," she said, in a voice soft with victory. "May I come in?"

I stood back, and let her come into my chambers. She glanced around, and nodded slowly, as if appreciating my tapestries, or my carpet, or the small wooden carvings of dolphins that I keep by my bed to remind me of home. "You have a very rich chamber," she said.

"Not so rich as some others," I said, closing the door behind me with every assurance. No one would be so stupid as to attack a Master of the Nine Wonders in her own chamber, not even a Heretic. We have such protections here as are found nowhere else. Our Code says that we shall not take part in wars, but it says nothing about not defending ourselves if we are attacked.

"But very rich to someone who has spent the last few months sleeping on grass and eating tough meat." The smirking bitch turned and faced me.

I met her gaze, and this appeared to make her blink. Of course, I couldn't know for

certain that I was the one who had made her give that tiny flinch. It could have been something that she said or thought. But I like to think that I was the cause of it, and therefore I am writing down here that I was the cause of it. “I don’t really care about what you did,” I said. “You chose it, and you somehow convinced Lyissa to choose it, and that second is far more important to me.”

“Ah, yes. Did you know that Lyissa has joined us now? She knows where her place is, where her heart leads her.”

“She told me so.”

“She has sworn formal oaths now, though, and she is receiving instruction in the faith of Rennon from one of our very best.” The smirking bitch smirked. “I think that you will soon join her in her lessons.”

“I won’t.”

“Come, Klessa,” said the smirking bitch, and she tried to make her voice gentle. It only came off as condescending. “You should know that she won’t yield, and won’t turn aside.”

“I know that. Neither will I.”

Again, she blinked as if uncertain of me, and this time I truly claim the victory for myself. At last she said, “If you have joined Lyissa, then you won’t oppose what we intend to do with the Star Circle, will you?”

“To my dying breath. Accepting her decision to join you isn’t the same as fighting on your side.”

“Oh, but you will,” said the smirking bitch, who was now a grinning bitch. “You will, and you will learn to fight for us and to accept the faith of Rennon into your heart as your own faith.”

“No. I won’t.”

I think it was the tone of my voice that befuddled her. I wasn’t screaming or shouting or exclaiming, just calmly saying the truth. She frowned at me as if she had expected something else, and said, “You must know that none can serve us who do not serve the God with all their hearts.”

“I don’t want to serve you, or him. The Code of the Star Circle forbids such a thing.”

“Ah.” The bitch sighed. “I am afraid that the Code of the Star Circle is about to come to an end, Klessa, one way or the other. If we did not end it, the High Priestess of Elle would.”

“You lie.”

“Would that I did,” said the smirking bitch. “You have heard no news from the Temple of Elle in the King’s Court in recent months?”

“They have sometimes asked us for Masters of the Wonders in order to correct those who have strayed from the path of Elle. We send them.”

“And you have not wondered why none of them came back?”

“The chance to stay on at Court—“

“They are dead.”

I narrowed my eyes. “How do you know?”

The bitch looked pleased with herself, oh yes, very pleased. I had to stop myself from attacking her by considering what she might look like with the air fleeing from her lungs, and then by concealing my snort of laughter.

“We have spies in the Court,” she said simply. “They bring us tales of the burnings there, and the traitor’s executions.”

“The Masters of the Star Circle have done nothing wrong,” I said, and I knew that I sounded defensive. If there was even a chance that this was true, though...

The Lord had to have known, and why he hadn’t done something to stop the Masters from being burned or impaled was a mystery.

“That is not the way the priestesses of Elle see it,” said the bitch, and clasped her hands in front of her, staring at me earnestly. “Is it true that you don’t see touching any part of the Cycle as a sin?”

I shook my head.

“They see touching the Scarlet as a sin,” said the bitch quietly, “unless they can break the Scarlet mage to their will, and change her mind to a slave’s mind. Some of them have turned so, I am unhappy to say, because they think that they will have better lives than their sisters.” Her eyes flashed. “They will not have the kind of lives they could have had, if they had come to us of their own free will.”

“Sleeping on grass and eating gamy meat?”

She became a narrow-eyed bitch. “That is not what we shall have when we are established at last.”

“Ah. So that part about living on the Plains and in harmony with the elements was only recruiting rhetoric?”

That bolt struck home. I grinned at her while she struggled to keep from screaming at me. Scarlet flickered about her, but I was not worried. What she would have found had she called fire inside my room would not have been pleasant. I have seen Deathweaver spider bites do less damage.

“You don’t understand,” she said at last, tightly. “The castle will be pulled down, and the Temple of Elle. The torture pits will be exposed to the sun’s cleansing light, and then destroyed. The Temple of Rennon will be in the open air, and He will watch all that we do, to judge it.”

I shrugged. “It doesn’t sound much different from what the priestesses of Elle say about the Fair One when She rides the night air.”

The bitch turned away from me. “You don’t know what it means, to know that you at last are rising towards your victory, after years of struggle,” she said. “You don’t know what it means, to starve yourself of the life you know you deserve, to bring justice to those who deserve it.”

“Yes, I do.”

She raked me with a glance.

“That describes Master training for the Star Circle perfectly,” I said, and decided to try reason. I should not have, but perhaps, standing there in my room, she did not look so like a fanatic. I was almost becoming convinced she could not be. My bolts still had power to strike home to her, to pierce the armor of her certainty, and that should not have happened were she the great leader they all believe her to be. “That is the kind of training I went through, and that is the kind of training that you will keep Lyissa from, if she joins your Heresy.”

“What would she bring justice to?”

“Her talents.” I moved towards the bitch, seeing her narrow her gaze and fix her eyes on me in a way that told me she was wary, angry, but still listening. “She could become a Master of the Four Wonders at least if she kept on, and perhaps all Nine.”

“We could use that.”

My patience blew away like dust on the wind. “Not for you,” I said. “For herself. That is what we do. We train Masters of the Star Circle to use all their talents. And faith in Rennon or Elle blocks those talents.”

This time, she did look shocked. “You lie.”

“I do not. I felt children who could have been Masters in your camp, and they could only reach towards one form of magic. Whenever they tried to weave Patterns on their own, they started thinking about Rennon and couldn’t.”

“That is ridiculous.”

I shook my head.

“What is your faith, then?”

“I worship the Goddess.” I shrugged at her stare. “I don’t really care about what She does or how just Her priestesses are. I don’t really care about all the wrongs you’ve imagined —“

“These are not imagined wrongs. They are real. And you should care, if the priestesses of Elle are wronging those who are your fellow Masters of the Star Circle.”

“I would have to see proof of that first.”

The bitch made an impatient gesture and turned around to face the window. “Tell me,” she said, staring out at the city. I had been hearing the sounds of celebration for some time, but had not gone to look. I knew the sight would only reinforce my faith in the stupidity of humanity, which is already as solid as steel. “What do you live for? Have you never gazed down at Ozue and thought about improving it? Perhaps you could build new houses for those who have none, or use your magic to heat the water so they don’t have to do it for themselves.”

“I think about the sunlight, and the Patterns that I’m currently studying.” I spoke in bewilderment. I have no idea what she was on about, and still don’t. I record her words here in the hope that wiser eyes can understand them.

Ah, Klessa, how you must chide yourself! There are no wiser eyes than your own.

“You must do something.”

“We do. Study the elements and learn how to master the Wonders whose abilities lie in us.”

“But you must do something more! Heal people, help the priestesses of Elle, go to Court and advise the King!” The bitch spun on me, her eyes very nearly aflame. Very pretty, red hair and blue eyes, and I might even have thought there was a brain behind them if I hadn’t seen the fire that was eating her mind. “You must do those, any and all of them. I have heard of the miracles that the Masters could perform. You healed the Burned One as if you were used to patients.”

“I am.”

“Then you must go when you are called.”

“When someone calls us, then, of course, we go.”

“Ah!” The bitch straightened and resumed her smirk. “Then you must understand me when I say that the Heretics practice the natural faith of the people, and that the Masters of the Star Circle should help us.”

“No,” I said.

“We go about helping people,” said the bitch. “We don’t wait for them just to come to us.”

“Why not?”

“That’s not what one should *do*.”

I shrugged. “The Masters of the Star Circle do not play politics, not outside the School. It’s not our Code.”

“That Code will have to change,” said the bitch firmly. “You will help me, or I will hurt Lyissa.”

I winced. “You don’t like subtlety, do you?” I said, when I had gotten my breath back from that blow.

“I tried to be subtle. I tried to persuade you to our side. And you stand there and gape at me as if you don’t understand the art of living for others and helping them to live a better life.”

“I don’t.” I fought the urge to bolt from the room. I wouldn’t have fought, before. I would have run, or I would have choked her to death with Dust, or scalded her with Steam.

But she had Lyissa. She would hurt Lyissa if I didn’t do exactly as she said.

I narrowed my eyes. I dislike taking orders from someone like her, but if I must do it, so be it. When my blow came, then would I strike all the harder. I held my hand up to her, and spread my fingers in the simplest pattern of all, Tener’s, the pattern to call an element but not use it.

Fire flickered around my fingers, and the bitch’s tension melted. She smiled at me. “You can learn an allegiance to fire, after all.”

“Yes. I have always been able to call it.” I lowered my eyes, trying to look properly humble. It wouldn’t work if I showed just how terribly amusing I found all this, amusing like a knife in the back. “I could learn allegiance to the Scarlet, and even you. Just give me time.” I looked up and met her eyes again. “It is a strange alliance.”

Her gaze softened, and she actually reached out, calling on her own Scarlet, looping her fingers around mine. “All of us, in our time, have been forced to make strange alliances.”

I nodded. “That is true.”

There was more chatter that I won’t bother to repeat, and then she called in a guard named Siñen and told him to make me comfortable in whatever I required. She turned to me. “You will be ready to speak to the other Masters, and even the Lord, and require them to bend to my wishes?”

I nodded. “I can only speak to them, my lady, not force them.”

“I know.”

She turned and left the room, and Siñen asked me if I wanted anything. I told him more paper, and that got rid of him.

It is sunset now, and I listen to the noise of the crowd and the cheer and chatter of the Doralissan soldiers and the bitch’s followers. They think they have won. They think they have won us all over with their tales of Scarlet mages and Masters of the Star Circle killed in the Court.

They have not won us all over.

If I find out that what the bitch said is true, then I will fight to the last breath. No priestess of Elle has the right to do such a thing to an elemental Master. I will fight until they think I am dead, and then I will stand and come back in. They will drown, and burn, and freeze to death, and fall to their knees clawing for air.

But I do not forget or forgive, either, the threat that the smirking bitch used against me.

The moment that Lyissa is free—and only until then will I play her game—I will strike at Rilleta.

Let her die, and Lyissa be safe. That is all I really care about.

Lusirimonialata’s Commentary

One can see here the fire and spirit that Klessa carried within her, though of course it was not the fire and spirit of the Goddess. Nor yet was it the fire and spirit of a Heretic. She cared only about her own friend, only about her own involvement in the war.

Of course, that does make her selfish, and not someone any right-thinking priestess of Elle should imitate. Nor yet does it make her someone the reader should follow. Not many people have that kind of fire and spirit, and not many people would vow vengeance on the leader of a powerful Heresy simply because their friend had been taken captive.

It is just not right.

The Goddess is just, no doubt, and in the end everyone got what they deserved, including Klessa. But what that is, you will have to read on to find out.

And pray the Goddess guards your souls from the cleansing taint!

Lusirimalata's Commentary

That was—quite strange. I came back to myself, and found my hand stained with ink, and a paper that I do not remember writing in front of me. Yet the lingering traces of the Goddess were in me, and I think that I know what must have happened.

Elle has seen my weakness, and She knows that I cannot continue such an important History alone. She has chosen to oversee my work, and if that means that She must on occasion infuse my body with Her presence and fill my mind with Her Light, then I welcome the intrusion.

In truth, it is not an intrusion. Looking over the paper in front of me, I can see that many points have been made that I might have missed. I would not have thought to emphasize Klessa's fire and spirit. It is true that she had them, and one must not deny the enemy's virtues, lest one decry also the darkness that made them evil in the first place. It is precisely that spirit which made Klessa forsake the holy virtues of obedience and calm. She became caught up in her own passion, and as the Goddess has directed my hand to write, she paid the price.

And the last invocation is quite correct. Simply reading the words of a monster like Klessa is enough to corrupt the soul. I have writhed for long hours, caught between the decision to leave the unfortunate word she uses to refer to the good and holy Rilleta in place, or to sand it out. But the reader is only too apt to guess what the word is, or to waste her time in guessing it. Sometimes, censoring a word only makes the eye linger on it rather than skim past it.

The word stays.

Of course, there are things within the journals that I cannot and will not share. Simply

gazing at them has made me need to spend nights within the chapel, praying to Elle that She will protect me. But one more short snippet from the Journals can, I think, be given, if only because it shows the description of Rennon's holy profanity so perfectly. Klessa is properly critical, if only because she is not strong in either faith, and therefore I think it will warn anyone who might be tempted to perform similar ceremonies out of the path of temptation.

The Journals of Klessa of the Nine Wonders

21 Greenborn, 106 OR, Near Midnight

They are holding a ceremony to Rennon beneath my window. Actually, I suppose that there are many similar ceremonies all over the city, but this is the only one I can see, and therefore it is the only one I shall describe.

I could use the Gust to see others, if I wished, but I think that my anger and despair are quite thick enough without adding more to them.

The dancers below are leaping and cavorting around a great fire. The flames flicker with their movements, and I think that Scarlet mages are moving them, and not just the wind of the dancers' bodies. They wave their arms and shriek, and sometimes for no apparent reason the fire will reach out and touch one of them, setting her hair on fire. She rolls on the ground to quench the flames, but soon is dancing with the others again, face shining with reflected adoration.

Sometimes some of them run through the fire, dancing on the hot coals and then hopping to ease the pain in their feet. Some of them are already so badly burned they can dance no longer, and watch from the stone benches that are meant to view the ceremonies of Elle, speaking softly in ecstatic voices.

Mad. All of them.

They are singing now, and the strains of the song make me grimace. They did not have to do much fighting today, and yet it is a war-song, as if they had won a great victory against someone.

*"Like lightning I will come upon my enemies,
Like thunder shiver their defenses to pieces,
Like rain slash their ranks into shreds,
Like a mudslide roll down upon their phalanxes!"*

*"Like metal hard I will crush them at will,
Like steam boil them and scald them of life,
Like mist hide my brother's and sister's attack,*

Like fire burn their minds into morning!

“Truly, like fire!

*“Like dust I will swirl down and choke my foes,
Like earth overwhelm them with beauty,
Like the wind blow my truth into their minds,
Like the dawn awaken them to wild glory!*

*“Let them join me in the womb of time,
And rebirth the world into fire and Light!
Let me sing and thrill in their veins like song!
Let my fire burn their minds into morning!*

“Truly, like fire!”

And then they are off again, singing and repeating the chant over and over. They sometimes call out the name of their god, as well, and they are praying to him, though I cannot imagine what for. When the bitch came to me, she made it seem as if they had taken the city without trouble.

Perhaps I will slip onto the Gust, after all.

Ah! I see. They are still fighting a small group of resisters, tucked into the back of a building near the center of the city. I believe it is a warehouse of some kind. The people there seem to be mostly Azure mages; rain keeps falling around the building, and quenching the fires that the Heretics try to light. I must admit that the sight amuses me.

Much more amusing than the fires that burn around the city, and the singing and the wild chanting that rises to my ears. There is something very strange about it all, and perhaps thrilling, compared to the sedate ceremonies of the Fair One or the other names of the Goddess, and yet this performance frightens me as well. I could almost believe they are as fanatical as—

Sweet Elle!

I can barely write. My hand is still shaking, and I shall have to send Siñen after more paper yet again. Now I must record, as best as I can, the sight I just saw, that someone will learn the truth when the Heretics take over Orlath, as I suppose they might.

I was watching the fires and the building both at once. Then I saw fires spring up that could not be quenched, and the rain stopped, and the first Azure mages staggered out of the building, waving their hands in sign of surrender.

The Heretics held out their arms.

The Azure mages burst into flame.

I could do nothing. Were I in my body and physically flying, yes, of course, but without my hands and my mind both to form the patterns, I am helpless. I wish sometimes I had never learned the trick of casting my mind upon the Gust. A Gust mage can call on the wind when she is watching something like this, but I cannot. I could only hang there, and watch.

Let me do that, then. Let me be a witness to their agony.

I saw the Azure mages stagger, screaming, the sounds of their screams muted by the chanting and singing of the Heretics. Yet I could hear it, riding as I was. I rode lower, in desperate hope that a cool wind might ease the pain of the burning death, and I saw one mage looking straight at me.

She opened her mouth as if she had sensed me there and would beg my help, but then she, too, burst into flames, the terrible unquenchable Scarlet that burns within and will not stop until all flesh is consumed. I hovered there, and the wind carried the scent of roasting flesh.

I hovered above the Heretics, and heard them shouting. They were to kill the Azure mages, apparently, because water is the opposite of fire, and those who wield water cannot be trusted.

Their flames put up a very bright light, and thus I could see their faces clearly. I stared for a long time, until I was sure that I had every feature memorized, and then I turned and flew back to my mind and body.

I opened my eyes, and looked down at the fire burning in the courtyard below. And since then I have been watching them, and wondering if those dancing Heretics have any idea what their fellows did.

I am fairly sure that they do.

My hand shakes with anger, and what do I do but blot the page? I will sleep now, and dream of a time when Lyissa and I can be free, and the Star Circle restored to what it was before, the Code untainted.

I will dream, too, of those Azure mages burning, and the decidedly unholy joy on the faces of the Heretics who burned them, and the dancing limbs weaving their way round the fire. The chant to the sun-god is still echoing in my head.

Finally, I will dream of those faces lit by the fire, and carefully hold the images before my mind's eye.

Lusirimonialata's Commentary

This is not a desire that is sanctioned by the Goddess, this desire for revenge. Klessa did not make this vow with Elle's knowledge or approval, and she should have known that.

Of course, she paid for it later, in such a variety of ways that one may be tempted to look upon her with soft eyes and excuse her. But paying is no excuse for making such a monumental mistake in the first place. She should have realized what it meant, this anger burning in her like the flames of the Scarlet mages, and sought out someone who could have given her the help she needed, spiritually and physically.

But that is something that comes only from hindsight, from the knowledge that one is safely on the other side of the chasm and can look on the other with that knowledge. In the middle of the chasm, few make such choices, and even fewer make the choice and then give it to Elle or a priestess or someone else who may be able to tell them how wise it is.

Klessa should have knelt at Elle's altar and subjected her heart to the Goddess's judgment. If she had, perhaps many things could have been avoided.

But she did not, and that means that many things were not avoided. Klessa went down the path she went down, and not all the meditation or mediation in the world will call her back now.

Here I present another section of Rilleta's History. The hand that composed this is the hand of someone who knew her well, and nowhere is that more evident than in this next section. The very details of her heart and her mind are revealed, and it is my hope that the reader may come to understand her as few, even now, ten years after the end of the Heresy, understand her.

She made many unfortunate choices. In some ways, the most unfortunate choice is her last one, the one that won her the most fame. But the reader shall learn how it is and give up the preconceptions he may have of Rilleta when he sees her in this next section.

She was as she was, and may what she was dwell in peace with the ideas that people have of her.

A History of Rilleta, High Priestess of Rennon.

Chapter 4

Queens in Strife

*“If thou wilt not ask, I shall not tell.
Until the end in silence I dwell,
Until waked by a voice given me,
And then only nonsense I speak to thee.*

“What am I?”

-Children’s riddle from Doralissa.

Rilleta turned at a light step behind her. She knew that she would not have heard it if Telemoranion had not seen fit to give her notice, and she was glad that he had. She did not want to look undignified next to elven silence, and he had always known and respected her wish.

“The young Lady Lyissa will do, Priestess,” he said. “She learns fast and cleverly, and she still wanted more information on Rennon when I told her to go to sleep.”

Rilleta chuckled. “I think that she will probably want more when she wakes. But it is very good to have such an eager student, is it not?”

“It is. I have not had such a one since Alaria first spoke to me of Rennon and the truth that lay behind him. The voices that I heard then I shall not hear again, but sometimes I might find their echoes in other mouths.”

Rilleta tilted her head. The Master of Metal sometimes spoke like this about the prophetess who had carried the truth of Rennon into Orlath, with sorrow and flickering humor laced side by side in his voice. She had never been sure what was so humorous about Alaria, whose whereabouts were now unknown. It was widely assumed that she was the first martyr to the angry flames of the priestesses. “And do you think that Lyissa will become a prophetess herself?”

The Master of Metal shook his head, gazing into the distance. “She loves the truths she discovers, but she will not find new ones. She is too in love with what is and what has been.”

Rilleta accepted that. Not every woman was a prophetess, and not every generation could have one. It was well-known there had been no prophetess of Elle for long years before Queen Aneron brought the faith across the mountains from Dalzna, and even the records of Doralissa, which led back much further, had never spoken of a woman inspired by the Goddess as Alaria had been inspired by Rennon, speaking many words that made sense.

The faith of Elle has long been an academic one, thought Rilleta, and sneered as she drew

the wind into her lungs. *They hide in their Temples and forget the simple truths of the world, the heat of the sun and the sweetness of the grass, the cleanness of the wind and the opposition of fire and water.*

“Are the Azure mages dead?” she thought to ask then. She knew that Telemoranion would know. The elf seemed to know almost everything that happened around the camps. It made him invaluable for spotting traitors.

“They are, my lady.”

“Good.”

Rilleta looked again to the north, and fought to keep herself from stirring impatiently. She knew that Queen Memoryrose would be arriving soon. And if she didn't, Rilleta had no right to complain about it. The Queen of Doralissa would take her time and come in her own way.

Yet, if she did, it might imply that the chaos that ran wild in her blood was again winning out over the settled order that their war needed. Rilleta might not complain about that, but she was nervous.

Just then, though, the sun flashed from metal, and again, blindingly, from metallic shapes awing in the air. Rilleta smiled. Those were silver eagles, friends of the Doralissan royal family from time out of mind.

Even its less-than-dutiful current monarch.

Yes, here they came, riding towards Ozue with far more speed than befit a monarch. Of course, this couldn't look like an invasion. Queen Memoryrose was now Queen of Ozue in the most important way, by the consent of its people, but it was quite possible that King Seldon of Orlath might have something to say about that.

The Queen's horse came into sight first; she rode ahead of them all, even her Guardian. Her laughter traveled down the wind, and Rilleta found herself smiling even as she bowed. Her Majesty laughed often and riotously, and it was almost impossible to avoid joining her.

That, of course, was part of the problem.

She pulled up her fine horse in front of Rilleta, and sat straight and tall as it crow-hopped, chuckling a little. She had skin literally the color of molten copper, the way that Telemoranion could change his skin to a literal golden color. Queen Memoryrose did not have the gift of changing her skin color, though, for which Rilleta was duly grateful. It would only make her even more disconcerting.

The Queen shook out her dark hair and fixed her golden eyes on Rilleta's. “Is the city

ours?”

“It is yours, my lady.”

The Queen smiled. “Nonsense. You are as much responsible for this victory as I am.” Her gaze rose to linger on the towers of the city. “You were the one who reminded me that once we won this city, we would have won the war. Seldon might still fight in the field against us, but he cannot withstand the might of the Star Circle.”

Rilleta winced. She had been hoping the Queen wouldn’t ask about that. Of course, that was like hoping that the moon wouldn’t wane from the full again, or that the sun wouldn’t set. “In truth, Your Majesty, it seems that the Masters of the Circle have chosen to resist us.”

At once, the laughter vanished from the Queen’s face, and she turned her head to fix her eyes on Rilleta. Rilleta shuddered. That wild changefulness was one of the things that made it so hard to look at the Queen. She flowed from the human in her to the mizan in her, and back, without warning. “How many did we lose?” she asked, in the quiet voice of a Queen hearing tidings of war.

“A few only,” said Rilleta, and realized then that Queen Memoryrose had thought she meant that the Masters had fought back. “No, my lady, only one Master of Two Wonders fought us. The others have simply locked themselves in their rooms and refused to come out.”

“Why?”

“Their Code, not to take part in wars or religious strife.” Rilleta sighed. “I am sorry, Your Majesty. I thought that they did not take it as seriously as rumor said they did, or else that they would see the justice of our cause and come over to our side at once. But Rennon has not yet seen fit to light His fire in their hearts. He leaves them in their rooms, and they will not hinder us, but neither will they help us. We had to rid the city of Azure mages by ourselves last night.”

The Queen was still for a moment, gazing at the walls of Ozue as if she could not knock them over by the power of her eyes alone. If it was possible, Rilleta thought, it would come from her. She was a marvel.

“They will starve at last,” said Memoryrose, and pricked something into her horse’s side that made it hop and dance again. “They must come out of their rooms sooner or later.”

Rilleta bowed. “Forgive me, Your Majesty, but it seems that they intend to remain in their rooms until we are gone. I have put the kitchens under guard, but no one save the two Masters who have come over to our side has even tried to request food from them. They are stubborn, and they are silent.”

She looked up to see the Queen's face shift again. Rilleta swallowed and looked away. Memoryrose was half-mizan, thanks to her father marrying a female mizan who had disguised herself as an elf, and the mizantai were the wildest of the chaos-fey. The Doralissan training usually made a monarch loyal to people and country above all other things, and loyal to the Light, the perfect ruler.

Both the training and the mizan blood seemed to be equally strong in Memoryrose, and they fought each other all the time. At the moment, the blood was winning.

"Follow me," the Queen murmured, with a smile in her voice, and again touched her horse with something sharp, making it hop and then charge forward, bearing her through the open gates of the city.

Rilleta followed slowly, wondering if she was going to regret following before all was over. The Queen was in a wild mood, and that was never good, at least not for anyone else.

Then she felt as if a strong, warm hand had gripped her. Sighing, she tilted back her head and surrendered herself to the comforting presence of Rennon. The sun-god was in the sky, and showering down His light and thus His blessings on the world. She could relax, and give the whole matter over into His hands. He would not allow anything bad to happen to His devoted children.

"What is the matter, my lady?"

Rilleta looked over at Telemoranion with a smile. She had never been sure that he worshipped Rennon; she was almost sure he didn't, since he never seemed to understand or feel the god's presence. But he fought on their side, and given that and his elvish blood, Rilleta was prepared to forgive him.

"Nothing," she said. "The god came to me, and reassured me that all would be well. It was a reminder to trust in Him."

"Ah." Telemoranion turned and faded down the street with that, and Rilleta let him go. He was going to do something of benefit to the Heresy, whatever it was.

Rilleta turned forward again, and saw the people crowding along the edges of the streets, which were broad and presented almost no obstruction to Memoryrose's gallop. They tossed flowers to their new Queen, and she smiled or caught them or ignored them as she saw fit.

They fell around her like a soft rain, and Rilleta felt her heart ease again as she heard the sound of petals falling. This was a gentle omen of the Queen's entrance to her newest city. Surely she would do nothing too terrible, guided as she was by the God's hand. That could counteract the mizan blood.

The Queen rode straight to the towers of the mages, though so far as Rilleta knew she had never been there before, and leaped off her horse, which shook its head as if happy to have her gone. Memoryrose soothed it with a touch, still staring at the towers intently, and then turned her head and looked at Rilleta.

“The Lord of the Star Circle. He has not spoken to you, and you have not tried to see him?” she asked.

“I did try, my lady. I was turned back by the powerful wards on his doors. Azure, they were, and meant for the destruction of Scarlet mages.”

The Queen nodded. “Then I shall try to speak to him myself, and hope that he may see reason.”

She turned towards the building again, and then halted. A note of amusement came into her voice. “That would be one of the Masters you said came over to our side?”

Rilleta looked past her, and blinked to see Klessa striding towards them, her green robe bunching out around her. Yet even as they watched, Klessa lowered her eyes and assumed a more humble posture. It fit as badly on her as the robe would on Rilleta.

“Not a very knowledgeable Master of the Circle,” said Memoryrose, and stepped forward. “Ah, well. She shall learn better.”

Lusirimalata's Commentary

Once again, the Goddess has chosen to visit me, and this time She has given me not only a commentary on the section, but included a section of Rilleta's History I might have chosen to omit.

Well, the wisdom of the Goddess outshines mine; I have always known that. I only need gaze at the section She chose—and place it in the History of the Rennon Heresy, of course—and see why She might have chosen to place it in the book.

Of course, She used my hand to write that this section reveals the very details of Rilleta's heart and mind. I have a hard time seeing that. This part of the History does not seem very relevant to me, since it only concerns the arrival of the Queen at Ozue. There are many accounts of that, and anyone who wishes can read them, or listen to the bard-songs about it.

But perhaps there was something in Rilleta's sight of the Queen's arrival that supersedes them all, that makes her wisdom the one we should listen to, and should have been listening to all along.

Very well. I will gaze upon the words, and try to see what my Goddess has seen and

written in them.

Rilleta speaks of the Doralissan Queen's mizan blood. It is quite true, though the tale itself is even more tragic than what she relates. A mizan did indeed disguise herself as a female elf, and in that form win the love of Doralissa's King. Many of that royal line have married elves, or loved them, and borne or sired children who later ruled on the throne with honor. There were no objections to their marrying, therefore, and for a few years they lived in peace.

But then the mizan gave birth to her child, and revealed herself to be what she truly was. In this case, Rilleta's words are indeed the best ones that I have heard for the truth: "wildest of the chaos-fey." She laughed in the face of the heartbroken King, and vanished, leaving him to raise their daughter alone.

It did not work. He tried to train his daughter to follow him in the mold of a proper Doralissan Queen, but all know the results of that. She resisted and fought with him as her mother would have, had he tried to tame her, and when he passed and Memoryrose took the throne, then the Kingdoms trembled. There were even some Kings and Queens who were so apprehensive of her that they sent their sons and daughters to ride in her train. They were spies, and couriers to their parents. If Memoryrose had won the war between herself and King Seldon in the way that she long spoke of, then perhaps she would have spared the monarchs whose sons and daughters rode with her. At least, so the thinking ran.

Or perhaps she would have turned on them and ended the pride of many a royal line. There is simply no way to know. That is the problem with having a Queen who is both wild and tame, chaos and ordered, who does not answer even to the dictates of her own Destiny. The Doralissan King should never have married his mizan lover, or should have quietly killed his daughter instead of keeping her as the legitimate heir to the throne. There is no other way for it to be done.

But our own weakness, our own mortality, our own pride, have ever made us cower before what we know should be done, and yield up our innermost selves to the sins the Goddess warns against.

Even the holy Rilleta did so, and even the Doralissan King did so. Perhaps that is the true message of this section of the History, and the reason that the Goddess has let it stand. There are weaknesses in everyone, and not only in the wild ones who openly stride the world and laugh at the Goddess.

I will continue after a time; Anassra is here, and I must rest and eat and drink what she has brought.

This next section of Klessa's journals will require little comment from anyone who is familiar with her character, or lack of it. She has made her choices, as the Goddess used

my hand to write, and she was by this time walking down the path that led her to her end. As Rilleta thought, she should have learned humility.

Here is yet another step on that journey.

The Journals of Klessa of the Nine Wonders

22 Greenborn, 106 OR

“Never face a Queen of Dragons in the fullness of her anger.”

Good advice.

Of course, mortal Queens can be quite intimidating in their own ways, and I knew that I walked to confront a monster this morning. She had taken the city without raising a hand, and she was said to be in possession of wild blood and some strange magic. I would have to tread carefully around her.

But I did not.

I walked out of the school, and saw them standing there, the half-mizan Queen and the woman who imagines that she leads heretics who are somehow different from the worshippers they fight against.

They are not. They are only in Ozue instead of the castle of Orlath. For Elle’s sake, they did not even scruple to burn their victims alive, when they seemed to scruple at the right of the priestesses of Elle to do so.

I bowed before them, nonetheless, and waited until Queen Memoryrose stopped looking at my green robe and actually met my eyes.

“So you are the Master who has joined us,” she said.

“Yes.”

“What is your name?”

“Klessa.”

I saw Memoryrose’s eyes widen, and I was startled. I am one of the few Masters of the Nine Wonders, yes, but my name has not traveled outside Orlath, so far as I know. I am sure that I would know if it had. I have always sought such fame—

But here is not the proper place for panegyrics on myself. I was confronting the

Doralissan Queen a moment ago, and I am sure that anyone reading this is breathless for the account of it. I am breathless for the account of it, and I have lived through it. The wonder is seeing in how I shall reduce it to words, the tension of that moment.

“You are a Master of the Nine Wonders,” said Memoryrose. “And you come from Dalzna originally.”

“My parents did,” I said. “I have spent all my life in Orlath, my lady.” I bowed before her again. “Though I have learned to speak Doralissan fairly well, I think.”

“Yes, you have,” said Memoryrose. “But I have heard of you, and I am glad that you have joined our side.”

I could not forbid myself from looking up with narrowed eyes. “Forgive me, Your Majesty, but I did not think that my name had traveled so far.”

“It did, when once you called the Mist that watered the Guarded Fields.”

I nodded. Ah, yes, of course. Since I had done that nearer the Doralissan border than I usually worked, feeding parched Plains with Mist when the Azure could not come to them for some reason, it was more likely that the Queen of Doralissa would have heard of it than some of the things I had done.

“I had hoped that you would join our side,” said Memoryrose. “Tell me, what persuaded you?”

“Your ambassador, Galdon.”

The Queen blinked as if she had not been expecting this. “And what arguments did he use?”

“He told me the truth.”

She studied me. I studied her back. I am not afraid of her mizan blood. It is not true that the mizanai can see the future. Only the priestesses of Elle can, and even they only imperfectly.

“And there was something beyond that, wasn’t there?” she asked.

On the other hand, it is true that the mizanai sometimes have sight beyond the common, and are particularly adept at seeing into human hearts, perhaps because they share so little of the emotions that crowd them.

“I cannot deny that,” I said. “My friend Lyissa has joined your side, and I knew once I saw her faith in Rennon that it would not break. It was join the Heresy or lose any chance of knowing her truly.”

“That is not a good motive.”

“For whom, Your Majesty?”

Memoryrose smiled at me. “For anyone. But we shall persuade you with the love of the God Himself, never fear.”

That was something I did not expect. “You are a worshipper of Rennon yourself, Your Majesty?”

“Oh, yes.” She stepped forward before I could avoid her and placed her hand on my hair. I tensed. There have always been many strange rumors about what kind of magic the Doralissan Queen had, whether it was elemental magic or mingled with her mizan blood to create something strange, though fair.

But what I felt was Scarlet.

I was bathed in searing heat, the kind of heat that I would not normally have expected to feel here for another few months. I did not sweat, though, or experience any discomfort from it. I stretched out my arms, trying to embrace the sweetness, and then it fled and Memoryrose was watching me with a small smile.

So was the smirking bitch, though of course her smile more resembled a smirk.

“Did you feel that?” asked the Queen. “That was the God. He is the pure Scarlet, the heat that we get a glimpse of in the sun, and yet even there do not see the truth of. He is heat and life and clarity and laughter. All of those are His principles, and they are what have lured many of his worshippers to love Him.”

“And is that your catechism?”

The Queen shook her head. “I can recite a part of the true Creed for you, if you would like.”

“I would like to hear it.” I had to admit to some curiosity. I had assumed that Rennon was a delusion or a demon, but that touch of pure Scarlet was like neither of them.

The Queen closed her eyes, and an expression of rapturous delight that could have been amusement took over her face. “The Scarlet dwells in every human, at least a little. Where else does the heat of our passion come from?”

I waited for more, and then said, “Is that it?”

Memoryrose grinned at me, but the smirking bitch did not look so amused. “Of course not!” she exclaimed. “There is much more, prayers and chants and living songs. Of

course that is not the whole thing.”

I sighed. I would have to trick them into believing I was truly part of their Heresy if I was to get anywhere, and so that meant I would have to do something I would much rather not have to do. “Will you call the God again?” I asked Memoryrose. “I would feel Him once more.”

Again she touched my hair, and again I was bathed in that pure, sparkling heat that, yes, was like passion and laughter and everything clear and wild I have felt in my being. I lingered there, sparks flying through me, fire licking and dancing, and actually thought about giving in to it.

For all I know, that may become more of a temptation as time moves on.

Yet I felt cool and calm things lingering in me, such as the Azure magic that I touch at all times simply by being a Master of the Nine Wonders, and such as the desire that had sprung up in me when I saw those Scarlet mages burning the Azure ones. I could not kill them with Mist; that was too well-known. It would have to be another weapon, a weapon that none of the Heretics wielded and yet one that could kill.

It came to me, blowing across my mind as if summoned. I smiled and opened my eyes.

Both of them were looking at me.

“I cannot begin to worship Rennon right this moment,” I said. “But I have rarely felt anything as powerful as that.”

Rilleta smiled. Memoryrose said, her voice simple and quiet and probably from the human blood in her, said, “I am glad. If it would help, come to a ceremony of Rennon’s we will hold tonight. It is the full moon, and we hold the Burning to counteract the power of Elle, who is Rennon’s deadliest enemy.”

I will be a deadlier, not that they know.

“And will I leave alive?” I asked.

Memoryrose laughed. “Everyone survives the Burning who has some of the fire in them, and you do.”

Then she turned to Rilleta, and said, “Acquire me an audience with the Lord of the Star Circle. I care not how you do it, but do so. He must see that there is nothing to gain from this reckless opposition of the truth, that the Heresy can and must win the hearts and minds of everyone in Orlath. By turning back to Rennon, he only rejoins the natural order.”

And it was as if Mist lifted from my mind, showing me a clear fire burning there—

No. Showed me a clean wind blowing. Let that be my language.

“My ladies,” I said. “I can speak to the Lord of the Star Circle. He will listen to me.”

Memoryrose turned back. “Why should he, if he thinks that you go against the Code?”

It was a reminder that I did not know how much my enemies knew, and that was one of their greatest advantages. But I did not panic. I met her eyes and held them. “I have felt the power of Rennon, Your Majesty, and I have always been a persuasive voice. The Lord has almost given over the duties of dealing with emissaries to me. If I tell him that this is the way that things must be, he will listen. You have taken the city, and he would not oppose you if he knew that. We worked with the priestesses of Elle when they ruled the land. We will work with you now that you do.”

“Not all we could have hoped,” said the Queen, watching me intently. “All hearts must come to Rennon in the end.”

“They may. Only give me time.”

At that, she nodded.

“But go to him only this evening, before the Burning,” she added.

It was the only thing she could do, the only way she could limit me. She must know that the Lord would not speak with me if there was someone else in the room, but she didn't want me speaking alone to him for hours, either, and plotting who knew what. For all I knew, she could even have someone in the hidden tunnels, listening to me and whatever I was plotting.

So I came back to my room and have written this, with my desire shining like a clear drop of water in my breast.

It will take no plotting. It will take no whispered words. I only need convince the Lord of the truth, that I will join the Heresy at all but the deepest level of my heart and mind. Let the Rennon Heresy take me to their breasts, and cradle me against them, and coo to me.

They will know not that they hold a serpent.

And when I have turned on them, and bitten them, and the body of the Heresy falls, then Lyissa will be free.

Lusirimalata's History

The wailing of my Ilantran sisters has stopped at last. It is confirmed that the Traitor

Prince did not kill anyone of the Ilantran royal family, nor has he devastated the countryside in any other way. Of course, this is good, and we should thank the Goddess for Her protection over the land.

Yet, at the same time, our priestesses cannot see this Prince moving about, whether they look into fire or into Light. They see instead strange visions of a half-articulated future: an open book, a drop of water on a fire, a woman plunging a knife into her heart. The woman looks strangely like Queen Twydon, which of course has inspired the priestesses to speak with her. But the Queen, in the fullness of her Destiny and preparing for war with the Dark when it arises, is not concerned, and thus we shall have no reason to be.

But we shall watch, and wait.

I feel the Goddess has inspired me to put more of my own words on these pages, so that someone who reads the History in aftertimes may know more about the one who compiled it as well as the ones who acted in it. It is perhaps mortal weakness, but I have heard Her voice speaking so clearly to me that I do not think it is. It is simple mortal weakness that makes us long for someone human in a tale, perhaps, rather than fixing all tales where they belong, on Elle.

Be that as it may, I shall speak a little of myself so that the reader may know me.

I was born in Ozue, and all my life I have felt Destiny moving in my heart. It guided my parents to our home Temple when I was four, and the priestess there saw such great potential in me that she paid to have me sent here to the Court. I thank Elle that She did not leave me long in Ozue. The corruption of the Rennon Heresy and the Star Circle happened only five years later. I might have become caught up in it then, an innocent young woman believing the same thing that her parents did, but damned for it all the same. Innocence means nothing in the face of such corruption.

Since then, I have lived in this Temple and served the Goddess, and the High Priestess has seen such a passion for history in me that she has set me the task of copying out and compiling this History of the Rennon Heresy. I am excused prayers, since I pray to the Goddess so often now, and Anassra is here to tend my needs. Soon it will be finished, and the truth bound in finished form for all time.

I seem to have spoken more about myself here than about either Klessa or Rilleta. That shall soon be remedied. In truth, the last section of Klessa's journals that I presented can stand alone. It gives more than enough of a picture of her evil.

This next section of Rilleta's history, however, paints her in true if glowing terms, and shows just how this brave woman could face the darkness in her heart and see the true Light at last.

A History of Rilleta, High Priestess of Rennon

Chapter 5

Light and Flowers

“Many and strange are the customs of celebration in the Kingdoms; some will sing, some will dance, some will conduct long solemn ceremonies with droning atonal music that do not seem celebratory to those who do not live in that Kingdom. But perhaps the most common way of celebrating, at least among those Kingdoms that have yet escaped the dominion of the Dark, is with flowers. The flowers used in the days of the [illegible word] were often [rubbed-out words], but in the time of the Light they are often daisies and violets, the shyest and most innocent flowers of the field...”

-Fragment of an ancient history, sections of it looking to have been deliberately destroyed.

“To the Queen!”

Rilleta smiled as the toast rang through the courtyards, and beyond it into the streets. The people of Ozue danced, and sang, and drank, and madly cheered. The fires were still burning to Rennon, though they had not yet begun the great ceremony of the Burning that would take place tonight.

Ozue was taken, and soon enough the Masters of the Star Circle would see reason, and then Rennon would rule in Orlath and His faith spread to the other Kingdoms.

All was right with the world.

Rilleta turned away from the scene of drinking before her. The cellars of the Star Circle did indeed hold some fine wines, and her followers had broken them out and were sharing them. She could have had the sweetest share, did she stay. But she was inspired to go and do something else.

Literally inspired. She could feel Rennon breathing in her, moving her. Her inner heart was smoldering, filled with the presence of the God.

She moved through the courtyards, pausing to smile and sometimes talk with those who hailed her. All recognized the signs of incipient exultation on her face, though, and let her go almost as soon as they had approached her. They knew what it meant to halt a priestess of Rennon who was about to pray in the fire.

She would burn them if halted, through no fault of her own.

Rilleta stepped from the school into the streets, and looked along them for a moment

towards the bonfires burning. They spread along the earth like a constellation of fallen stars, but infinitely brighter and more alive. She stood still for a moment, the light in her like a second heart.

Fire stirred.

She turned her head again, and saw great piles of flowers that the celebrants had gathered for the Ceremony lying ready. Daisies and violets were most common, but here and there were roses brought from Doralissa, tended carefully by Azure and Crop mages, and bluebells, and even the shy sweetness-in-the-grass, a delicate pale flower that grew so close to the ground Rilleta usually didn't know it was there until she stepped on it and smelled the sweetness. Light and flowers, beauty and color and sound and motion that would not and could not stay.

The fire in her heart leaped up from the embers.

“Rennon is the god of the mortal!” she cried.

They all heard her, and while not all the singing and chanting ceased, many expectant faces turned towards her. Rilleta lifted her arms in triumph towards the night sky. The sun had set, but that did not matter. Its God's power was with her, and He would make sure that her voice floated everywhere, just as the sunlight stretched from one end of the horizon to another.

“Rennon is the vastness of the open Plains, the sound of the wind in our hair, the laughter on our lips, the fire in our blood!” Rilleta sang the series in a descending cadence, eyes fixed on the face of a man who had been about to jump across the fire. He stopped, staring at her, near slack-jawed. But that didn't matter at this point in time, though ordinarily it might have signaled idiocy. Rilleta's God moved through her, and He loved everyone, including the idiots.

“Rennon is the God of everything natural, of the earth between our toes! He goes beneath the world and sleeps as we do, as the priestesses of Elle claim their Goddess does not do. Then He arises again, having fought the darkness and regained His strength. And His watchmen, the stars, remain to us in the night.” Rilleta lifted her face to the sky, pointedly ignoring the huge, hanging full moon. “They fill the night sky with fire and His followers with delight!”

A hoarse yell broke forth from some of the celebrants, a sign that her words were taking effect. Rilleta smiled and continued.

“The priestesses sit in their stone Temples, distant from the concerns of the common folk, and shake their heads over what they call ‘sin.’ Rennon says that it is far more a sin to sit in your Temples and shake your heads and despise those who share breath and being with you!”

Another yell, this time mingling the God's name and hers in a passionate prayer. Rilleta again stretched out her arms, this time in a motion that linked sky and ground for anyone following her with their eyes.

"Light and flowers are His symbols, and it is only fitting that we celebrate with them," said Rilleta, and she made a little dance step, simply unable to contain the overpowering sensation of Rennon's approval. "He makes the light of the fire move, and He burns the flowers, and He makes them grow. God of mortality and beauty and change, God of nature and fire and passion, hear me now!"

She cast herself forward, hardly knowing what she was doing. Faces blurred past her, gaping with the dark holes of open mouths. Teeth flashed in the firelight. Voices yelled at her, and hands grasped her arms, and the wind tugged her robe around her. But she was fleetier than them all, fleet as fire, fierce as flowers.

She leaped into the air, and soared over the largest fire, which only a moment ago had been down the street from her. Or perhaps it had been more than a moment ago; Rilleta was counting time by the pulsebeats of her blood now, by the roaring in her ears more than any outside measurement of it.

And then it caught her.

Magic and faith flared around her in a perfect, ecstatic commingling, and Rilleta hung suspended in the air above the fire. There were gasps and cries from everyone who had never seen a priestess Burn before, and even louder chanting and singing from those who had seen it and knew what it meant.

The God is with us tonight, Rilleta thought as she hung there, head tilted back, hair not hanging towards the ground but streaming around her in the shape of a corona. *He fills me with power, and His people with power. Let everyone know that we will win this war!*

A yell broke from her own throat, and then she was back in the leap as if she had never come out of it. She could hear the drawing in of a few breaths; there were some who set great store on the way a priestess landed after the Burning, taking it as an omen.

Rilleta landed as gracefully as a cat, and again a hoarse cheer rose from those around her, mingled in a moment with the sound of flutes and drums. Rilleta bowed and retired towards the back of the crowd. Others were lining up to leap, and would Burn now. She needed a moment to herself.

In the shadows cast by the fire, she leaned on a stone column carved to mark something or other, and took a series of deep, gasping breaths. Her throat stung as if she had swallowed smoke. Her nose twitched as if sniffing it. But her eyes were clear, and when she glanced at the fires, she saw a colored and ever-shifting radiance moving above them. She stood still in passionate awe for a moment; those were the true colors of fire, the shades of which the flames one usually saw were only pale reflections, or the echoes of a

tune when the song has stopped playing.

Then the sight faded, but the clarity of her mind did not. Rilleta stepped forward, swaying slightly, but with the fire relit and burning within her. By all that was holy, she felt good. Once again, she had been made fiery.

She glanced up towards the moon and shook her head. *Can Elle ever give one a feeling such as that, the feeling of flying into fire and flying out winged again?*

Lusirimalata's Comments

This section of the History of Rilleta is another of the rare ones where I must express my disapproval. Rilleta here goes off into blasphemous thoughts about Elle, thoughts that I am quite sure my readers will not want to read.

This account of the priestess, however, may show my readers that she was not irredeemable, unlike Klessa. She had still something of the priestess of Elle in her, before she turned traitor and ran away. She still had the same passionate faith, the longing for a guiding hand that makes the mortal mind turn heavenward and fix on the truth with all appropriate zeal. It is simply unfortunate that her chosen object of devotion was a jungle-demon instead of the Goddess. Had she stayed true and fixed on the objective her soul sought with so much passion, she might have been a priestess all her life of the kind we sing songs about, and the Rennon Heresy need not have happened.

Ah, Goddess; I weep, and the ink will run. Forgive me a moment while I pray in silence for what might have been.

All those lives destroyed, all those hopes shattered, because of mortal weakness that cannot find its proper point of anchoring...

But at least Rilleta is like many another man and woman in this flawed, world-turned world, where the Children of Elle do not think enough of the Cycle and the Destiny, or what they owe their Lady. Many another loses her path and flounders, and even causes destruction because of it. There is a difference between weakness, which is forgivable, and evil, which is not.

Evil is what Klessa was, and while of course we must see what could have been good in her and pity that, we cannot pity the woman. The Goddess chose to create her and allow her into the world, stirring in just enough goodness to alleviate some of the suffering she would cause. But we pray for the goodness of her soul and not the evil, separating them in our minds as we must separate them in the world.

Rilleta is good. Anyone can see that in her passion, in the way that she enters even the sinful rituals of her God with a full and honest heart. Klessa, who entered the ranks of the Heresy coolly plotting to destroy them, was evil.

Here is yet another glimpse of the Darkness. Do not close your eyes, my readers, but hold the Goddess firmly within your mind, shining like the moon to light your path, for here is evil as you will never meet outside these pages.