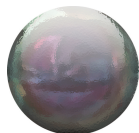


THE CHILDREN OF THE ORB SERIES



**A JOURNEY OF MAGIC AND MYSTERY
THROUGH THE REALMS OF THE CRYSTAL ORB**

BOOK THREE:

**DANIEL LIGHT AND
THE CIRCLE OF LIGHT**

**BY
C. MICHAEL PERRY**



Newport, Maine

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**To the imagination of countless writers who taught me,
in my youth, that anything is possible.**

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DANIEL LIGHT AND THE CIRCLE OF LIGHT

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PLACE: Planet Colabos, The Realms of the Crystal Orb

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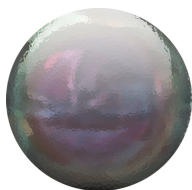
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**DANIEL LIGHT AND THE
CIRCLE OF LIGHT**



**PART ONE:
THE CIRCLE GROWS**

CHAPTER ONE

GROWING AND LEARNING

Daniel had wanted to do this for ages. He took Elias' hand, for Elias had never been where they were 'popping' to and so, could not get there on his own, but Daniel had!

Pop!

Elias found himself on a huge open platform, sort of, at the bottom of a steep hill. The hill was of terraced cement and it almost surrounded them except that there was a high, painted wall on one side, kind of behind them. Daniel went over to the wall and pushed against a part of it and it moved – turned – opened. He saw how it worked now, and he used his magic to rotate all six panels there to an outdoor scene painted on one of the three sides of the triangular columns.

"This is the theatre!"

"Very good, Elias."

"Why are we here?"

"I've always wanted to play on the stage. I think I want to be an actor.

Elias giggled. "You just want to kiss the girls!"

Elias wasn't far from right!

Daniel looked mock-insulted, he was getting into his part now. "Why do you say that, you cur? Acquire swords!"

The fine steel blades appeared in his hands. He quickly tossed one to Elias, who almost bobbed the catch. "Prepare to defend yourself, you dog of a fisherman."

For Elias, the curse or the blessing of having a father who was a Harborton fisherman was real. It depended on Daniel's mood – playful or sulky.

"You're not serious?!"

Daniel waggled his eyebrows and 'popped' his shirt to the

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stage floor as an answer. Elias began to worry about the amount of muscle he was facing. Daniel had grown! Again.

“Find someone else to fight!” and Elias’s sword clanged to the floor of the stage. “You’re just angry that Princess Rose married Emerson and not you!”

“I’ve got Tilly. I never needed Rose.”

Daniel slashed the air. Elias backed up.

“Daniel!”

“You dropped your sword, silly!”

“Why do we have to do this? There’s no war!”

“You never know... there’s got to be someone out there you could kill.”

“I don’t want to kill – just rend and maim and tear...” The unspoken part of that statement was, *you, sometimes, Daniel!*

Elias screamed and ran in a circle as Daniel laughed maniacally, to add to his brother’s terror. Somehow, Elias managed to bend down while at full speed and scoop up his sword. “I want to be an uncle, too!”

“Have at you, pretender!”

Daniel chopped down and Elias’ sword rose to parry.

“You can’t hurt your own brother!” Elias was pleading.

Daniel slashed left. *Clang!*

“Who’ll help take care of Boncaster?” Elias was desperate.

“Tilly!”

Daniel slashed right. *Clang!*

“How about the new Prince in Aradon?”

“Rose is pregnant?” How had Daniel missed that tidbit?
“Miraden foretold a Prince?”

“They announced it last week. Where were you?”

“In Laketon!”

Elias laughed. “You and Tilly aren’t pregnant are you?”

Daniel stopped, all the pretend mania drained from his face and was replaced with a shocked and hurt look, his sword dipping toward the stage floor.

Elias, grateful for the stayed sentence of death, had known what it would do, but regretted his remark, and dipped his sword down, also.

DANIEL LIGHT AND THE CIRCLE OF LIGHT

“Sorry, Daniel. I didn’t mean it.”

A very slow smile crept over Daniel features. Elias didn’t see it until it was almost too late. Daniel lunged at Elias’ belly with his point. Elias just managed to parry it aside.

“Aha! Lucky son of a fisherman!”

Daniel advanced and Elias backed up, madly defending the crushing blows of his best and much stronger friend, the real pretender. Both boys had smiles on their faces, now. They were thoroughly enjoying the mock battle, imagining cheering crowds in the seats; Tilly and Nancy swooning over their super-masculinity as they battled each other. Elias was up against the wall. He leaned hard and the wall revolved to an open position and he looked at it and slipped through. He then pushed it closed quickly and ‘popped’ up to the top of the seats to watch Daniel for a second. Daniel hewed at the wall.

“Coward – rascal – defend or face eternal shame!”

Daniel loved acting.

Elias laughed and applauded from the top of the seats. Daniel saw him and ‘popped.’ Elias got his sword ready and back into his hands, but just barely, as Daniel arrived and slapped Elias’ rear end with the flat of his sword’s blade. So, Elias ‘popped’ away. Daniel was alone again. Elias was now onstage. Daniel ‘popped.’ Elias ‘popped.’ Daniel was alone onstage. Elias was halfway up the audience aisle, Elias ‘popped.’ Daniel ‘popped.’ They had traded places. Daniel in the aisle and Elias onstage.

“No more ‘popping’, Elias!”

“Okay! No more smacking me with your sword!”

“Okay! Want Nancy to kiss it better?”

Elias ‘popped’ to Daniel’s side and spanked him on the butt with the flat of his sword. “No, I don’t! How do you like it?”

Elias’ eyes went wide as Daniel grinned from ear to ear. Elias backed up and thrust and parried along the row of seats, down the far aisle and back onto the stage. Daniel, sweating profusely, continued to crash down blows on Elias, whose body, on the defensive, was also drenched with sweat. Then Elias cried out.

“Ahhhh!”

Daniel stopped – taking his sword out of play. Elias giggled

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and thrust his sword point to Daniel's throat.

"Yield, dog of the West?"

Daniel's eyes were wide! "Yield," he nodded, "dog of the South."

Daniel hung his head in mock defeat. A planned defeat, but Elias had still beaten him. Yes, it had been a trick, but Daniel still acted like it was a loss to him.

"Why do I fall for that?" was Daniel's query.

"Cause ya love me?"

"Not a chance – yak-breath!"

Daniel bopped Elias on the top of his head with the fleshy part of his closed fist and then picked him up over his own head and swung him around. Elias was screaming and laughing and flying through the air at the ends of Daniel's strong arms.

Around and around Elias went, whooping and hollering, until suddenly Bianca was there, standing before them. In an instant, Elias was suspended near the ground, at the ends of Daniel's arms. Daniel let go of one hand and then the other. Elias settled to the stage floor, arms folded and legs innocently crossed. Bianca did not look happy. Elias smiled. Bianca still did not look happy. Daniel stifled a giggle. Bianca really did not look happy.

Both boys stood together, looking properly repentant for whatever it is that they were supposed to have done wrong.

"Do you know what time it is?" And just think, Bianca had only been a mother for six months. Hmm! She was good!

Oh – we're out too late! they thought. "After midnight, I guess?"

"You guess correctly. Who was asleep?"

Oh no – we were too loud. "You were?"

"And?"

"Valerius?"

"And?"

"The girls."

"And!!?"

"Boncaster?" was finally, meekly, squeekily offered.

"Correct. Put those swords away, put on your shirts and 'pop' to the nursery and walk him until he is asleep again. Do not do this unless he is awake during the day! Or unless you want me to

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call your grandfather!”

“No sister. Uh... Yes, sister... Bianca...Queen...”

Bianca stomped off. Daniel ‘returned’ the swords. They shrugged into their shirts and ‘popped’ to the nursery. Only to meet with another angry face – Nurse Callista’s – as she was walking the crying Boncaster. She handed the infant to Daniel, smacked both of the boys on their backsides and walked out. Daniel placed Boncaster against his shoulder, facing back to Elias. Elias played with the now quieting Boncaster’s tiny hand. Nurse was just outside the door, listening, then reentered at the sudden silence. She saw Boncaster leaning on Daniel’s shoulder and Elias playing finger games.

“Well, I’ll be...” was whispered and she went quietly back out the door.

The boys soon had their ‘nephew’ calmed down and on his tummy in his cradle. Elias rocked the cradle as Daniel patted Boncaster’s little back. Boncaster gurgled and was soon asleep. Daniel and Elias tucked him in and ‘popped’ back to their own room, shucked their clothes and hopped into their beds.

“I’m sorry I dishonored you, Daniel.”

Daniel looked at his friend and brother with a deep question in his eyes.

“My remark about you and Tilly. It was uncalled for.”

“Yes, it was. I would never...”

“I know. And I’m sorry.”

“Are we lucky?”

“I’ll say, Daniel. But is it luck?”

“Could be.”

“Or is it destiny?”

Daniel thought long and hard about that one. He never took his eyes off the eyes of his trusted and searching friend until he seemed to find an answer in them. “There’s a plan, Elias. Miraden knows it. He can’t reveal it to me, yet. But he knows it.”

Elias nodded his head. “What’s going to happen? Are we in for more than we can handle?”

“It won’t be easy, but, we’ll handle it. Miraden told me that much.”

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“How about your own visions?”

“Still there.” Daniel exhaled wearily.

“I’m glad I’m not you, Daniel.”

“So am I.”

There was another silence as the boys turned over in their search for that comfortable place.

“Night – dog of the South.”

“Night – dog of the West! And thanks for letting me win!”

The boys chuckled and rolled over again and fell asleep.

• • •

The following morning found Daniel and Elias in the gardens of Castle Panador with the little pink cherubic vision called Boncaster. As Valerius and Rose were busy with affairs of state, the ‘brothers’ were more than happy to care for their nephew. Daniel talked to him, encouraged him and treated him like a littler brother, exhibiting endless patience. It was clear to most, including Elias, that Daniel was going to be a very fine father – someday. Of course, Daniel had had a very fine father of his own, until he was killed in the War of The Realms.

Elias was maturing much faster than he ever wanted to admit. If we were in his place we would want to put it off as long as we could, also. What is the use in growing up too fast? Childhood should be held onto as long as it can be cherished by the one who it is passing by. That time of wonder and discovery; that sense of play, should be enjoyed until the last possible minute and then relinquished, only regrettably, to the responsibilities of adulthood.

Daniel was at that door. Even though still young, still age-wise young at fourteen, he seemed twenty at times, physically, emotionally – mentally he was way beyond thirty. The potion had changed him; was changing them all. In a sense it had stolen some of their childhood from them. The responsibilities of an Immortal being in the Realms of the Crystal Orb were demanding sacrifices from them all, especially from those being Immortalled. Look at Miraden if you ever need to ponder of sacrifice.

As Daniel lifted the child up in the air in front of him, the sleeves of his own chemise wrapped tightly around his biceps.

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Elias' jaw dropped again. All he could do was shake his head.

"What?" Daniel exclaimed.

"Tilly likes your muscles."

Daniel froze in lifting Boncaster half-way up. He looked to the sides, at his own arms, and set Boncaster down on his lap.

"It makes me uncomfortable. I...I'm... I don't know..."

"You're just as strong in magic as you are physically."

Daniel was quiet because it always unnerved him as to how quickly it had all happened. "I'm a freak!"

Elias shook his head violently. "No, but you can beat men six years older than you!"

Daniel looked at Boncaster and not at Elias. "Yeah, a freak."

"It's all about you being The Prophecy."

"Sometimes I wish I wasn't."

"Daniel, you've got everything. Why can't you just accept it?"

"Because I don't deserve it." Daniel had always felt undeserving. Part of that was because of the loss of his family; something he also felt guilty about.

"If you don't, who does?"

"You."

Elias was silent. A tear gathered at the corner of his eye. But he held it back; kept it from dropping onto his cheek.

Daniel hugged Boncaster to him and then let the child rest against his widening shoulder, playing with the bushes behind The Prophecy. "You have everything I have and more."

"I'm not of the right lineage."

"Details."

"I can't really beat you in a fight. No one can!"

"Luck."

"No, skill! Talent – born into you! You're the leader, Daniel, not me."

"You do just as well..."

"I prefer following. Helping."

Daniel smiled. "You're the best help."

"Even better than Tilly?"

Daniel smiled again. "Tilly helps in a different way."

"I'll bet!" and Elias giggled.

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Daniel smirked at his friend's remark. "No one can do for me what you do, Elias. You have always been there for me...ever since we met. Our meeting was no accident either. It was all a part of the plan."

"You really think so?"

"I know so."

"But there are things that Tilly can do that I can't." Elias was smiling.

"That's why I need both of you. You both complete me."

"She sure is pretty. A lot prettier than you!" Elias rejoined with an elbow-jab.

Returning the favor, "So's Nancy."

Elias shut up and blushed. He still hadn't gotten used to the inevitability of his connection with the FitzMichael sisters, one of whom he was engaged to marry in two years. The other whom Daniel would marry in less than six months.

"Are we too young?"

"I'm not. I'm 15."

"Almost."

"Yeah, almost. By the time many boys in Mirador are my age they have children already. And a wife, of course."

"Of course."

"And most boys are betrothed at the age of 12. You're not too young."

"I feel too young."

"So do I. But we're not. I wonder if they all feel too young?"

"They'd have to, hunh? Or else they'd feel like freaks!"

Daniel made a move to playfully go after Elias, but the little bundle of promise on his shoulder made him stop and think. "Tilly has everything that mother and father taught me to look for in a wife." He scoffed. "I'd be stupid to pass her by."

"Ungrateful."

"Yeah, I know what you mean."

There was the sound of a 'pop' nearby as Tilly and Nancy were dropped off behind the boys by Lily who vanished quickly again.

"What do you mean, ungrateful?"

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The boys fell off the bench, Boncaster landing on Daniel's chest. The girls giggled. Nancy ran around and stole the baby from Daniel, then grabbed Elias' hand and took him off into the maze toward the center of the garden. Tilly stood there watching the tall, strong, handsome, white-haired, blue-eyed Daniel regain his feet and his dignity.

"Sorry. Nancy can be brash at times."

"It's all right."

Their eyes met. Green against blue. It reminded them both of that first time – and the many successive times – they had met. After she had felt of his quiet intelligence and witnessed his gentle manner, she never could have turned down a request by this boy to join with him in a life of love and service to each other and the Realms. Besides, she just plain liked him. (And he more than liked her!) When her parents agreed to the match, Daniel was more than ecstatic. He loved Miraden for arranging it. He had found the person he felt would most complete him, intellectually, emotionally, physically. He hadn't put it into those words – but he sensed it – part of being The Prophecy, no doubt.

For Tilly, Daniel's being the Child of Prophecy (kind of a Child of Promise) hadn't been a deciding factor. It was who Daniel already was that she had fallen in love with, not whom he would become.

"Where will we live?"

"I am heir to the throne of Mirador. Our home must be the Crystal Castle."

"What about before you are King?"

"You mean before you are Queen, don't you?"

Tilly blushed. Daniel loved to see the way her neck flushed pink and then jumped right up to the tip of her nose.

"How about Halla Tarn?"

"I would love that."

"Or Lake Estrella?"

Tilly nodded. She wasn't very concerned over where they would live. After all, if it was with Daniel she would be happy.

He was staring at her again. He had this look in his eyes, a frequent look, the look of *'I know who you are and love you.'* Daniel

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leaned into Tilly and Tilly leaned out to Daniel. His lips touched hers in a soft, sweet kiss. Which became a tender, long kiss. They held each other's hands and enjoyed the soft, fleshy pressure of lips against lips. Then Tilly came up for a breath. She placed her hand gently along side Daniel's never-shaven cheek and lovingly caressed it. Daniel took her hand and held it to his lips, then rubbed the back of that hand against his cheek.

"I hope... no, I wish... will it always be like this between us? I don't want it to change."

"I don't either."

They were still children in many ways – fortunately.

She gave him another sweet peck and held his handsome face in both her hands. Her green eyes gazed deeply into the bright blue, loving eyes that were gazing back at her. She then took his hand in hers and stood up to walk the gardens, dragging Daniel along with her. Their little castle shadow followed at a quiet and respectful distance. Observing them, baffled by the simple purity of the love that was shared between these two young persons. Most others she knew of, or had heard of at this age, let their passions run away with them; a passion that seemed to control and direct them.

But not Tilly and Daniel. They controlled their passions. Not just because they'd been taught to; not just because of their deep respect for each other; but because they knew it was best to do so.

• • •

Daniel and Tilly entered the center of the maze. Elias and Nancy were playing with the baby. Daniel kissed Tilly again.

Elias saw it and was somewhat envious. He was still somewhat of a coward where love and girls were concerned, so he had to comment, "Ugh! I think I'm gonna be sick!"

The kiss of his friends ended in a sputtering laugh. Nancy giggled along.

Tilly spoke out of the end of her laughter. "You're just jealous, Elias."

"Not even close," the confused-but-love-stricken youth replied.

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Nancy balked, grabbed Boncaster and ran out of the enclosed garden.

“Nancy, come back here!” Then he winked at Daniel. “I didn’t get a chance to hold Boncaster!” He yelled, then shrugged as he ran off in pursuit.

Now, Nancy and Elias, although two years younger, were not like most of the other thirteen-year-old commoners who just ran off into the woods or the wilds to start a family. Their union would happen in a little more than two years after they both had completed their schooling and other training. Becoming an Immortal Enchanter was no simple matter. They were learning all the subjects we learn in our world, plus swordsmanship, archery, and the quarter-staff – the arts of defense – and Magic. For they were – all four: Daniel, Tilly, Nancy and Elias – being prepared for a great calling. If the Realms were ever to be unified, according to Miraden, it would not happen until the four of them knew everything, like Miraden did.

Nancy came around the other end of the hedge, having taken the short cut passed the maze instead of through it. Tilly heard her coming. She was there to steal the baby away; much to Nancy’s displeasure. What are sisters for, sometimes? Nancy chased Tilly who ran away laughing.

Daniel and Elias looked at each other after looking after the girls.

“Kissed her yet?” Daniel was all smiles.

Elias ran at him and gave him a shove. Daniel wrapped his arms around the rapidly advancing and cursing Elias and took him to the ground. Against the inevitably successful force of Daniel’s strength, Elias stopped struggling. He just laid there on top of Daniel until he breathed more easily; Daniel still holding him tightly.

Elias had often confessed to Daniel the confusion he had felt when he was around Nancy.

“I don’t understand her.”

Daniel was silent.

“I don’t know if I ever will.”

Daniel quietly agreed.

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“She does things to me.”

Daniel looked shocked, and tightened his hold on his brother, just about squeezing the life out of him.

“No, I didn’t mean that – things happen to me when I’m around her.”

Daniel let him go. Elias rolled off but ended in a position where he could look at Daniel, gain some strength and comfort from him.

“It’s uncomfortable. I think she can see, but she never says anything.”

Daniel nodded. “I know what you mean.”

“It happens to you?”

“It happens to every boy around the girl he likes.” Daniel had been there. “It’s perfectly normal.”

Daniel then proceeded to pass on all of the wise counsel he had gathered from Gregory, his father; Miraden, his grandfather; and Valerius, his brother-in-law. Even the advice of Emeron to Daniel was given up to Elias. When Daniel was finished with his comfort-lecture he just looked at Elias.

“Normal?” commented an unbelieving Elias.

“Yes, normal!”

“Oh.”

“You still have a Da to talk to.”

“I can’t talk to my Da!”

“Yes you can! It’s me who can’t.”

“Oh. Yeah.”

“Who loves you more than he does?”

“No one.”

Daniel nodded.

• • •

Nancy had also been in a confessorial mood, despite, or maybe because of, the presence of the little Prince. The baby brought on sometimes welcomed and sometimes unwelcomed feelings in both the girls. Tilly decided to be a good listener.

“I can’t talk about us. I have to talk about everyone and everything else. I feel tingly if I start to tell him how I feel, so I

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just stop. And he never says a word, or even gives me a hint as to how he feels.”

“I’ve been there. Am there still, sometimes.”

“You?”

Tilly nodded.

“Miss calm-and-collected?”

“Yes, Nancy.”

“He gets embarrassed when things happen. I try to pretend to not notice, and most-times I think I don’t even notice. But he always thinks I’ve seen his embarrassment. I think it’s kind of sweet the way he tries to shield me from it.”

“That proves he loves you.”

“Then why can’t he say it?”

“Because he doesn’t know how to, yet.”

“You think he’s told Daniel? Will you ask him?”

“I don’t tell Daniel about what you and I talk about.”

Nancy looked at her sister and got the message.

The twelve-year-old female mind is so far advanced from the twelve-year-old male mind – even in accelerated and maturing beings.

“He’ll tell you soon.”

“I’ll just ache until the day – or die.”

Tilly almost spluttered, but managed to maintain.

“What do you like about him?”

“He’s quiet and strong – physically, yes, that too – but he’s strong on the inside.”

Tilly nodded, for Daniel was also both.

“He never says anything around me, or does anything near me, that would hurt my feelings.”

“Except that he can’t tell you he loves you?”

“Yes, that.”

“He knows it. He just can’t say it. Love him and be patient. Remember, we met through Miraden. He is never wrong.”

Nancy smiled. Tilly took the hand of her sister as they exited their corner of the maze.

• • •

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The next day, Daniel and Tilly were again walking through the maze in the Royal Gardens of Panador. It was a warm Tenth Month. Tilly loved the gliding swing in the maze's center. As they rounded the curve of the hedge they heard the 'swish-squeak' of the swing moving back and forth. It was Nurse Callista with Boncaster. Daniel and Tilly both rushed forward and the nurse laughed as they took little Boncaster into their loving arms and sat side by side on the swing. The nurse moved to the lawn-hammock to enjoy a little nap in the warm air of another bright Panadorian autumn day. Tilly loved to pretend that Boncaster was hers – well, hers and Daniel's.

They would pass the day by holding Boncaster up to trees, flowers, grass, statues, swings, trellises, garden tools, Emeron's old hut at the back of the garden; they made his little life very tactile, giving him the opportunity to touch and feel the world around him. Each time they presented an object to him they would say its name and talk about what it was, or what it did. Even though he could not speak yet, he could perceive.

They surrounded him with loving, caring experience and they did it instinctively. It seemed natural for any child to be doing what Daniel and Tilly allowed Boncaster to do, let alone teaching a Child of Promise in this manner.

After gliding back and forth for a few minutes, Daniel and Tilly were surprised by the sudden appearance of Elias and Nancy in the glider's seat opposite them. It was clear to Daniel that Elias had not lost his unique ability to 'pop' to Daniel's side.

"Elias you're getting to be a precise popper!"

"Thanks, you taught me."

"I guess I did at tha...Hey!"

Nancy had reached over and stolen the little bundle from Tilly and Daniel.

"Nancy – !"

"You've 'ad 'im all day. We only get 'im for a little time each night."

"We?" asked Elias.

"Yes. Someday we'll have one or two of our own!" (Try four – but that was in the future!)

DANIEL LIGHT AND THE CIRCLE OF LIGHT

Nancy elbowed Elias in the side and she smiled. Elias rolled his eyes and clicked his tongue against his teeth. Daniel giggled when Elias was perturbed. Elias threw him a stare that soon vanished when he saw Daniel's smile. Elias and Nancy were quickly oblivious to everything around them through their involvement in cooing over Boncaster. It's funny how a baby can turn rational, thoughtful adults and youth into fawning idiots. We don't really mind, do we?

Boncaster giggled. The immediate attention of all present was on the cherubic little face. Smiles grew all around. If you would believe it, each of these young people lost it completely and giggled and cooed back. Then, with a sudden look at each other, laughed out loud. Nurse Callista joined in. A year ago Elias would have been sick over the display. Fortunately, no one is today as they were a year ago. Especially these four young people.

"Dinner time, you four. You're expected at the table in five minutes."

On their way back to the castle Nancy and Elias passed the little Prince back and forth to each other while Daniel and Tilly were content to just hold each other's hand, and sneak a kiss or two behind the backs of their siblings.

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As the boys awoke the next morning they realized what day it was. They sprang out of bed, washed, dressed and ran to the top of the stairs to await the girls. Girls were always late. Not a criticism, really. Just an observation. After all, girls have more to do in the mornings. Or at least they think that to look beautiful they have to do all that stuff! If it makes them feel better, hey! It makes us feel better, if we're men enough to admit it! We would still love them without it all.

Elias had observed Daniel's relationship with Tilly. There was no better example around and Elias showed great wisdom in emulating Daniel.

The boys had waited for – minutes – by the time the girls arrived. Daniel offered Tilly his arm. Elias offered his to Nancy. Daniel glided down the stairs. Elias glided, too – or tried to. The

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girls sputtered slightly and covered their mouths. Before they knew it, they were at the table with the boys holding out their chairs for them to sit in. The boys then took their own seats and they all feasted on the eggs, ham, potatoes, fruit and breakfast cakes. The boys were still trying to remember that there were ladies present – so they shouldn't eat like yaks. They had never seen a yak, but, somehow they ate like them – or so they had been told.

Valerius and Bianca had made arrangements to take the day off from their courtly duties. Comera and Alidah would cover whatever came up today as the King, Queen and the kids would 'pop' over to Lake Estrella. It was Dragonet time!

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Daniel, and the group, stood in front of a stone outcropping just past the cabin belonging to The Lady of the Lake. Daniel's right hand was at his chest level, palm forward. He made a circular motion up and over his head and around to his opposite hip while chanting:

“Gondomere and Istradar!”

The rocks started piling on top of each other, like a pyramid. As they finished their motion, a tunnel had been uncovered. The party continued down into the DragonLair of Istramere. Last room on the right and then the tunnel led to the hatchery where the little Dragonet still lived. Elias whistled and Istramere scampered out to meet the visitors. He saw Elias and jumped up, placing his forelegs on Elias' shoulders and licking his face much as a dog would do. For Elias and Istramere had a special bond. Elias had, after all, discovered him and awakened him. At six months old Istramere was larger than most dogs. He stood about chest high to Elias and was a dull orange. He would brighten in color as he grew older. He would nearly be as big as a cottage when fully grown.

Rose and Valerius never ceased to be impressed at the growth and progress of the little Dragonet. Already able to understand most Human words, yet unable to utter them, Istramere listened intently and tried to perform the tasks he thought best for himself to do. Through those actions he showed discernment, not merely

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obedience. He thought and acted for himself. He was not a 'pet'. He was a separate, an intelligent, a sentient being. All Dragons were.

His wings had not yet matured but he would be flying within a few years. For now, he was a great leaper.

Daniel and Elias took him out of the DragonLair and let him leap. They sometimes would play a game of fetch with Istramere – he was content to leap after sticks and rocks, much like a dog. In the middle of their game, Tilly had thrown a stick to the meadow and Istramere had leaped after it and Miraden had, just that moment, 'popped' in. He had informed Valerius and Rose that there was a Dwarven messenger at the Palace, and he was there to fetch the young ones. Anna – the Lady of the Lake – appeared and took over the care of Istramere so that Miraden and party could 'pop' back to the Castle.

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