

Prologue: The Three Sisters

"Women have always been sacred to Innatraea. You can see our goddesses, the Three Sisters, in the sky every night, watching over us." – Crilla Sharone

Rhiannon stared at the Asherah grove outside her study window, enjoying a few moments of peace before her sisters arrived. The massive trees had been growing here for millennia, eventually reaching into the sky higher than most others on Innatraea. Their pink and white flowers swayed gently in the wind. Soon their delicious edible seeds would start to ripen. Underneath the towering trees, soft grassy walkways traced throughout the grove. In happier times Rhiannon had calmly strolled those paths, and she wished she were there now rather than waiting to deal with her sisters.

The doorway to her study opened, admitting Selene and Serafina. The Three regarded one another quietly. None of them wanted to be here. Moving to the world pool, she touched its surface gently with her fingertip. Ripples flowed away from it, borne by the tension of her magic. She lifted her finger away carefully, but not far, and the ripples slowly subsided, replaced by an image of Innatraea. She opened her hand, and the image followed the movements she traced above it. When she opened the hand wide, the image became more focused. The face of a newborn baby girl with curly red hair and brilliant green eyes appeared in the image.

Rhiannon regarded her sisters calmly. "I have chosen a seed. This young girl."

Serafina stepped closer to the pool and looked closely at the baby. "She is powerful, almost our equal, nearly unheard of." Looking up at Rhiannon, she added, "Does she have a strong heart?"

"More to the point, does she have the mind?" Selene asked, more interested in the conversation than usual.



Rhiannon smiled. These questions were to be expected and she had the answers. "She is Sophenen; she is of an old blood line. The power she possesses is proof enough of her heart. As for her mind, she can be trained, and we have a unique opportunity." She closed her hand slightly, making the world pool focus onto a larger area around the baby girl. There, in an adjoining cradle, another baby girl lay. "Her blood and power are strong. More importantly, she has a twin sister. This opens up many possibilities."

Selene gave her own sister a cunning smile. "Indeed, very interesting. Do we have a vessel?"

"The vessel would have to be a very strong one," Serafina noted.

"I have not found a vessel yet, but we do have time," Rhiannon told them. "We could make use of the stones."

Selene, like Serafina, appeared mystified. "Do you think the sacred folk will care about our plans?"

"I believe that once we have shown Innatraea's need, they will have no choice but to help us. Especially if we approach the Amarak first."

Selene nodded. "I will do this. They are somewhat more willing to speak with me."

"Finding the vessel will be my task," Serafina offered. "My ties to the people may prove valuable."

Rhiannon looked both her sisters in the eyes. "Then we begin. I will acquire a binding contract with the Siofra."



In the Sophenen noble family's nursery night was settling, however, it was not dark. Small, marble-sized globes of colored lights danced around the ceiling where the two infants could see them from their cribs. Both these baby girls could already weave, and both were expected to change Innatraea in her own way. Yet only one of them was the child the man sought.

"Hello, little one," he said with a smile, touching one of them on her cheek. "I'm going to take you away now, but don't worry. You will see your sister again. Meanwhile, I am leaving Siofra in your place."

The man carefully took the replacement he called Siofra out of his shoulder sling. The strange little creature clung to him with its lithe limbs. He smiled reassuringly. "Don't worry, you will have a family here too. Everything is going to be alright."

The infant siofra made a quiet gurgling sound as he lowered her over the baby girl. They touched briefly, and the infant Siofra started to change, its tiny body slowly shifting to become exactly like the baby girl. The man had been told it would work this way, but it was still one of the strangest things he'd ever witnessed, and for a moment it shook him. He quickly recovered and refocused on his mission. He left the infant Siofra in her new home and took the baby girl with him in his sling. With one last look around, he smiled at his success and left the nursery through the doorway that wasn't really a door.

