

*Author's note from 2012: This story was written 1995 or thereabouts. I present it here unaltered, for the nostalgic enjoyment of my past fans who requested I post it. Please remember, if this reads like a high-schooler with her first Mary Sue, well, that's exactly what I was!*

*Scroll to the end for a special bonus look at the Trina sequel stories that never saw the light of day!*

*Since then Jewel Riders has changed hands a few times; I think Digiview owns the rights at the moment so please pretend I updated the disclaimers. My old email no longer works; I'm now [cupcakedoll@gmail.com](mailto:cupcakedoll@gmail.com) if for some reason you want to email me.*

Starstone, a Jewel Rider fanfic by Stormdance

Disclaimer: Everyone you've seen on TV belongs to Amazin Entertainment and/or Robert Mandell as far as I know. Trina, Silverwind, and anyone else are mine. I'm not making any money off this.

Author's note: Hiya all, I'm Stormdance and I'm to blame for the story you're here to read. There *\*will\** eventually be a Jewel Riders homepage connected to the story, but that'll be in the future when I can get a computer literate family member to help me make it.

While I didn't knowingly contradict anything in the show, there are episodes I haven't seen so I'm sure I slipped up somewhere. A lot of this is me writing the way things *\*might\** have happened, especially Fallon and Tamara's pasts and details about magic and Avalon. This story happens after "Full Circle," an alternate second season if you will. This story could have quite a few sequels, I'll continue it as long as I can think of what to do with it. And as long as I get feedback! Mail me at [mbaring@powernet.net](mailto:mbaring@powernet.net) with your comments, suggestions, ideas, etc. I'd love to hear from you, really. OK, 'nuff out of me. Enjoy!

Starstone

"Join the Jewel Riders they said, see the kingdom they said, " Drake muttered the old line, "Now look what it's gotten us into."

(You're exaggerating) Thunder told him, (and misquoting.)

"Yeah, it's only weird and freaky wild magic like we see every other day of our lives." Drake frowned at Josh, then turned to look back at the problem. The valley in front of them was in darkness, as if night had fallen in only that one spot. It was eerie. There was

a village in there somewhere, whose inhabitants were now camped up on the hillside near where the two Jewel Riders were standing.

Drake sighed in resignation, "Well come on, let's check it out."

The light cast by their four Forest stones was enough that they could walk without tripping over anything, but that was about it.

"What on Earth could be doin' this?" Josh asked the world at large.

(It feels like an enchanted Jewel.) Stormrunner commented.

"A wild jewel?"

(I don't know.)

"I think we've found the problem." Drake called from up ahead, "Look at the Travel Trees!"

The Trees were flashing from leafy to crystalline, obviously very upset.

(Ho Travel Trees, ) Thunder called, (Are you all right?)

"Hello Jewel Riders." The Trees answered, "We have a problem."

"We noticed." Drake said, "So what's the deal with the darkness?"

"Something has gotten caught in our magic, we believe it is the source of this unnatural darkness."

"Want us to take it off your hands, uh, limbs?" Drake offered.

"If you would." The Trees answered. A miniature doorway opened in the air. Drake reached in and pulled out a jewel. It was shimmering aqua blue, in the shape of a six-pointed star.

"I've never seen \*that\* jewel before."

"Me either," Drake said, "But then I haven't studied Merlin's books as much as I could have. We'd better take it back to the palace, and fast."

"Would you like a ride?" the Travel Trees asked.

"We'd better not, not while we're carrying unknown magic."

"Hey Drake—It hasn't gotten any lighter, so if the jewel's doing it—"

"It's still doing it." Drake finished. "We can ask Merlin how to stop it when we get back."

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Gwenevere grabbed the branch and pulled herself up, out of the leaves at the top of the tree. "Ha, beat you, Fallon!" She called down.

"Maybe, but you won't next time!" Fallon yelled back, but Gwen wasn't listening.

"Hey, what's that?" She pointed off toward the horizon, "Sunstar, can you see—"

Sunstar launched herself from the palace roof, where she had been sunning. (It looks like it's getting dark.) she reported, (but it's only afternoon.)

"I think we'd better get out of this tree while we can still see." Was Fallon's opinion.

As the princess and her friend reached the ground, a small crowd of people came pouring out of the palace, babbling questions at the tops of their voices. Fallon sighed.

"Courtiers." She muttered disgustedly, "Gwen, you want to take charge or shall I?"

"You c—wait, Mother's coming."

The Queen was immediately surrounded by a mob of frightened nobles., but she suggested-- loudly—that they all return to their rooms and let the Jewel Riders handle whatever was up. Gwen lit the courtyard with her Sunstone and helped Anya persuade everyone back inside. As soon as the last question had been answered and the last fluttery

lady convinced that the Jewel Riders could do it better without her screeching, Tamara rushed out, a windblown Archie clinging to her shoulder. "What's going on?"

"We don't know!" Fallon answered, "Armor on, people."

The three girls summoned their armor and waited. The tension was verging on unbearable when Drake and Josh rode in through the gates.

"Drake! Guys, what is all this?"

"It's nothing bad!" Drake hastened to reassure them, "We found this jewel, and it makes it dark wherever it is."

"Another jewel?"

"Yep." Josh said, "Drake thought he could fix it on the way back, but. . ." Drake shrugged sheepishly.

Gwen took charge. "Tamara, send a message to Merlin."

"On it." Tamara said. She put a hand on her Heartstone and spoke to the air, "Merlin, we found something strange, can you come see?"

No sooner had she finished speaking than the air sparkled and Merlin appeared in a burst of magic. "Certainly I can come. What is it you've found?"

"This jewel, Merlin." Drake said, taking it out for the wizard to see. "It makes darkness. Do you know what it is?"

"Yes, I do." Merlin sounded surprised. "It is the Starstone, sister jewel to your three." He gestured at the girls. "I thought it was lost in the wild magic."

"It was; the Travel Trees near Twinsprings caught it in their tunnel." Josh explained, "But how do we get it to stop doing this?"

"At the moment the stone's magic is random, undirected. It needs to be given to a Jewel Rider pairing of human and animal. Only then will its magic be fully controlled."

"Another Jewel Rider?" Gwen asked uncertainly, "How will we know who?"

Merlin smiled wryly, "Oh, the jewel will tell you. They are very careful to pick only the right pair."

"I know about that." Gwen said with a smile for Sunstar.

"You should be able to convince it to hold its magic in until then, but do not delay in this!" Merlin said dramatically, and vanished.

"Such a showman." Queen Anya said.

"Oh, Mother! I didn't notice you were there!"

"You were doing just fine." The Queen said, "If there's anything I can do to help. . .?"

The five young Jewel Riders thought for a moment, then the ideas started coming thick and fast.

"Tell the nobles not to worry if they see weird lights." Fallon said, "Persuading an enchanted jewel is a tricky thing."

"Just don't blow anything up." Anya said.

"And we'll probably need the crystal carriage. . . And some maps of the kingdom." Was Gwen's suggestion.

"Can Wintermane watch the babies?" Tamara asked, "I don't know if we'll want them along."

"I'm sure she won't mind."

"Better her than me." Drake muttered, then said louder, "I think Josh and I should stay here since King Jared and Max are away, just in case something else happens."

Gwen nodded. "Yes, we girls can handle this one."

"I'd like a chance to look for stuff about this Starstone in the library." Tamara said.

"That's a good idea, Tamara. Why don't you go now? If Fallon and I can't make the jewel behave, we'll call you."

"I think we have our marching orders." Fallon said with a grin, cutting off any further suggestions. The others went back inside, and Gwen and Fallon started discussing what to do about the Starstone, magic-wise.

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It was a beautiful sunny day in the westernmost reaches of Avalon, or at least it had been that morning when Trina had last been outside.

A servingmaid's work is never done, she mused as she scrubbed the huge pot. When it was clean, she'd have to fill it with soup and take it up to the banquet room where the lady of the house was having some big gathering. Trina just hoped she might be able to listen in on whatever they were talking about; this might be a totally out of the way district, bordering the Thornwoods on one side and a district of rocky hills on the other, but there had to be something interesting going on, didn't there? And the nobles would know about it, wouldn't they?

"Hey, girl!" the cook's voice shattered her reverie, "That's clean enough, get it over 'ere to fill!"

Trina shook the last drops of water off the pot, and brought it over, holding the thing steady while the cook filled it. "OK, you and you, take it up, you take the bowls. . . ." the cook barked orders at the few servants in the room. Trina was the second 'you' he'd pointed at. She smiled and smoothed her hair, trying to look as presentable as possible while wearing the rough clothes of a servant. Trina was pretty, or so she'd heard. Her hair was so pale it was almost white, and her eyes were light blue. Despite this, she looked earthy instead of wraithlike, and stood out in crowds, or at least stood out from among the servants in this kitchen.

A minute later, Trina and Rhis were balancing the heavy pot between them, trying to get it upstairs without spilling too much. At the top there was a serving cart waiting. Rhis saw this and took off, "OK, you can take it in to them, I'm gone." The boy with the bowls, whose name Trina had never heard, seconded that wordlessly and took off. Trina opened the door and wheeled the cart in. The discussion broke off abruptly when she entered, but the last word—she would have sworn, unlikely though it was—had been "Princess Kale".

(But Kale got slurped up by the magic, everybody knows that.) Trina thought as she passed out bowls and informed everyone that the main course would be served shortly, (So why are they talking about her?) Curiosity tempted, and in a moment she had figured out what to do.

A chance comment from another of the servants had alerted her to the fact that the banquet room backed up on one of the guest bedrooms, with only thin plaster and paneling between the closet and this room. Trina finished serving the guests with admirable haste and made for that closet, hoping she wouldn't be missed in the kitchen. She quietly pushed aside the clothes of whoever had this room and crouched against the closet wall. The discussion was muffled but understandable. And very interesting.

"—found a way to retrieve things lost in the wild magic. Even people, I think. The spell didn't say, but with enough power we should be able to do it."

(Are they discussing what I think they're discussing?) Trina thought incredulously.

"Yes, well, charged jewels are not exactly cheap." Said a nasal female voice, and the talk moved to magic, money, how much and how many.

Trina got pretty lost. Kitchen servants weren't educated any more than the law said everyone had to be, and magic had not been covered in the school Trina had gone to. All those years ago when she'd had a real home. . .

"Enough!" The lady of the house all but shouted, breaking into Trina's almost-remiscing as well as the arguments in the banquet hall, "We can cover financing later. What we need now are plans."

"What plans, Lady Delina?" asked a youngish voice, "We summon Kale back and then take the Crystal Palace. Simple enough."

"You nitwit, just because we have the rightful Queen doesn't mean that Anya and Jared will just step down."

(Rightful Queen?) Trina thought, (These people are nuts! Kale used evil magic and tried to take over the kingdom!)

"Are you sure we'll be getting paid for this?" Someone asked irritably.

"Certain." Lady Delina said long-suffering, "With the new taxes Kale was proposing there will be more than enough for rewards to a few loyal friends. And if not, well, she can go right back where we found her, no?"

There was a chorus of agreement.

(They're serious.) Trina realized, (Nuts but serious. And nuts who are quite capable of tanning my hide if they find out I was listening.) She almost went back to the kitchen, but was caught by another voice from the other side of the wall.

"How soon can we begin, magician?"

"How soon can you get the supplies I need?" the magician countered.

"Two weeks at the outside." Lady Delina answered immediately, and Trina could almost see her raking the table with a glare, just daring the people not to come up with whatever magical supplies were needed.

Trina got up to go, then stopped cold. A thought had hit her with the force of a sledgehammer, (I've got to tell the king!)

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Tamara looked up from her book at the clatter of tiny hooves on the stone floor. (Gwen and Fallon fixed the jewel.) Cleo reported, (Did you find anything out?)

"Not a lot. It's only mentioned in a few really old books. One of the old wizards pitched it into the magic, I don't know why."

"Who knows why wizards do anything?" Fallon asked from the door.

"Oh really Fallon, they aren't that un-understandable. Did you learn anything else, Tamara?"

Tamara shook her head, "They took it for granted that all four of the jewels would always be around, so they didn't bother to write much about them."

Gwen pulled up a chair and dropped into it, "There's probably something in Merlin's books, but wouldn't he have mentioned it if it would help us?"

Tamara shrugged, "Who knows?" she said with a grin at Fallon.

"So?" Fallon asked, "What now?"

Gwen shrugged, "We start off? But what did Merlin mean when he said the jewel would guide us?"

"We could always try the obvious." Fallon hopped out of her chair and lifted the Starstone high, "Guide us!" she proclaimed to the jewel.

Nothing. "Well, it was worth a shot." Fallon said.

"Hey look!" Tamara grabbed for a map that had been lying across the table, "It did work!"

On the map was a shimmering blue star shape.

"That's the district near the Thornwoods," Gwen said, "We've got a lot of ground to cover. Jewel Riders—let's ride!"

"You just love saying that, don't you?" Tamara laughed as they gathered up their stuff.

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Trina walked back to the kitchen, her mind churning over what she'd heard. Half of her thought she'd lost her mind. The other half was planning how to get to New Camelot within two weeks. It could be done; Avalon wasn't *that* big, but it would take some thought.

The rest of the evening while she cooked and scrubbed and rushed around, Trina was snitching bits of any kind of food that would keep, wrapping them up and hiding them in her pockets.

The next morning, early, Trina snuck out of the castle with all her possessions, and a few that weren't strictly hers, tied up in an impromptu sort of pack.

It was a fine day to walk across the kingdom, sunny and warm when the morning chill wore off. Trina kept her feet moving and her eyes forward, and tried not to think about all the things that could go wrong.

She had just about succeeded when she heard hoofbeats on the road behind her. Trina dove off into the bushes to one side, and just in time. Two of the castle guards reined in their horses just beyond her hiding place.

"She couldn't've gotten farther than this." One of them said, "If she really did take off."

"If the lady says we search the road, we search the road." The other said with exaggerated patience. "I agree that she's prob'ly just hiding from work, but Delina thinks she somehow listened in on their meeting. Th' lady's gone paranoid I say."

"So we search the forest. Least it's something to do." The first one said meekly. (I'm dead.) Trina thought.

Luckily for her, the two had to go back a ways before they could find a path into the forest. Trina took advantage of their absence to fleet-foot it away.

When she couldn't run any more, she collapsed in the shelter of a boulder to get her breath back. (This is not working out.) she thought, (If those guys catch me I'm serious toast. Can't go back to the road either, now. I'll have to go through the forest, hope I don't get lost or wander into the Thornwoods.) Lady Kale might be lost in the magic, but her lands remained dark and twisted with evil.

Trina's family had lived there once, until the day her father went into the forest and didn't come back. By nightfall, her mother had been worried enough to go out after him. Trina had stayed behind

Trina got up and walked on through the forest. Her father would have approved this mad quest, he'd always been big on duty to your kingdom and to yourself. Her mother had been more pragmatic, she was a teacher and loved the job. Trina had never been able to convince herself they were dead, not when the searching parties came back without news, not when the neighbors helped her close up the house and got her a job in the castle. Maybe she still didn't believe it. While she walked, Trina started to imagine a story in which her parents came and rescued her from the guards. Then she changed it so \*she\* was rescuing \*them\*. The story evolved from there, and Trina walked on towards New Camelot.

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That same morning in the crystal palace, the Jewel Riders were finishing getting ready to go. They'd decided to travel overland, the Starstone still being too unstable to use the Travel Trees "unless we want to be bounced all over the kingdom." As Archie put it.

"Got everything, Tamara?" Gwen asked.

Tamara stuck her head out the window of the carriage, "If we packed any more, there wouldn't be room for me in here!" She said, laughing. "Archie, you watch over everything while I'm gone. Don't let Sugar raid the cookie jars! And make sure Spike gets a bath tomorrow!"

"I'm sure Wintermane can handle them." Archie reassured her, "But I'll remind her."

"Are we going or what?" Fallon and Moondance trotted up.

"Going!" Gwen leaped gracefully into Sunstar's saddle and they hit the road.

Soon they'd left the city for the farlands and towns that covered most of Avalon, and the scenery got pretty boring.

"What do you think the new jewel rider will be like?" Gwen asked Sunstar.

(I don't know.) The winged unicorn replied, (There are so many kinds of people.)

"That's what makes it interesting. Or at least Merlin would say that." Tamara said from the front seat of the carriage.

Fallon had ridden up beside them, "Jewels pick the person that's most like them." She said, "Like Tamara's Heartstone is about friendship."

"So what does that say about you?" Gwen laughed, "The Moonstone does illusion. Are you not what you seem?"

Fallon answered seriously, "I know who I am. You have to know the truth before you can play with it."

(Now who's sounding like Merlin?) Sunstar teased, and Gwen repeated it for Fallon.

Fallon shrugged, "Whatever I mean." She grinned, embarrassed by her seriousness.

"So what about the Starstone?" Gwen asked.

"Don't ask me. Stars are. . . far away and give light is all I know."

Tamara was listening, "Stars guide." She said, "On the ocean people find their way by the stars."

"Cool." Gwen said.

"I don't know if that has anything to do with magic or this jewel, but it is interesting." Tamara added.

"Guiding." Gwen murmured, "But where? And to who?"

(That's what we're going to find out.) Sunstar could be very literal-minded at times.

Gwen was tallying up the time they'd spend on the road, "Tonight we have rooms at an inn, from there we're on our own. It should be three more days to the Thornwoods district, at this pace, then however long it takes searching there. I wish we could use the Travel Trees."

"Don't we all." Fallon said, "But it really is too risky."

"It just seems like too long." Gwen fidgeted, "Like anything could happen between then and now. I just have this feeling. . ."

"My Heartstone doesn't sense anything." Tamara said, "I think you're just impatient, Gwen."

Gwen didn't agree with her, but kept quiet.

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Trina had been traveling for most of the day, now it was getting on towards evening. She was looking for a good place to spend the night. A tree with wide branches seemed to be her best hope, though she was far from excited at the thought of sleeping in a tree.

"But it's safer." She said, mostly to hear her own voice, "I've heard there are direwolves in the Thornwoods, and this is really not the time to see if that's rumor or fact."

This was as close to the Thornwoods proper as she'd ever been. At the moment everything looked normal, but earlier when she'd climbed a tree to get her bearings she had clearly seen the vegetation get brown and bare. "I wonder where her castle is." It was

a fascinating thought, "Not that I'd go there, but. . ." But what kind of cool magical stuff would be in the castle of an evil magician who also happened to be the Queen's sister? Too bad it would all be too evil to use.

She stopped cold; something was moving up ahead. Direwolf? Trina looked around, moving as little as possible, then leaped and caught a branch above her, pulling herself up. Silence. She scrambled higher, quietly, and turned out from the trunk to look around.

The Thornwoods were dully menacing, much closer than she had thought. Trina saw a flash of white under the trees. She'd climbed down and started in that direction before she even knew what she was doing.

It was dark in there, it would be easy to get lost. Trina hurried over to the white shape between the curls of the giant bush that was the Thornwoods. (What am I doing?) she thought as she climbed through a thicket of smaller plants, (I don't know what's over there!) But she had a strong feeling that she needed to get there, to see what it was—and an even stranger feeling she'd \*know\* what it was if she only stopped to ask herself. (I'm going crazy. . . ) The oft-repeated thought trailed off as she saw what it was at last.

A white unicorn with a diamond pattern in its fur stood in a small clearing, the plants hemming it in. As Trina watched, the creature reared up and smashed through a tangle of branches with a silver hoof. Its mane and tail were aqua streaked, almost iridescent in the gloom. (Oh wow.) Trina thought faintly.

The unicorn turned suddenly to face her. Its eyes were wide and afraid.

Unicorns were as smart as people, or so Trina had heard. She'd never seen one, though. "H-hello," she said cautiously, "It's all right, I'm a friend. Are you lost?"

The creature looked at her measuringly, then nodded unmistakably. (Holy cats, they \*are\* smart as we are!) Trina thought in amazement, "The road's over that way. I'll help you get out of here, OK?"

It nodded again, and gestured with its head around the little clearing. Trina climbed on top of one of the curls of wood and looked around, "How did you get in here?" She asked, frowning, "There's no path. Unless you came from the sky." The unicorn sidled away a step, and kicked at another branch as if ducking the question.

Trina shrugged and broke off one of the higher branches. "Can you get through here?"

It was antsy as well as being hard work, but they managed to get out of the Thornwoods into real forest. It was full dark by then, and getting chilly. Trina went and got her pack out of the tree, the unicorn following her quietly.

"What are you doing here?" Trina asked, not expecting an answer, "We're days from anywhere interesting." She was sitting in one of the lowest branches of the tree, digging around in her pack for the food.

The unicorn didn't answer, so Trina kept talking, quietly, "I'm going to New Camelot, to warn the king that Lady Delina's a traitor. Really. That's really the reason I'm out here instead of at home in bed. Where's your home?"

(Far away.)

Trina started, "Did you just—Nah. Unicorns can't talk. I think." She peered at her companion, "Can they?"

The unicorn gave her an innocent look and nuzzled her shoulder. Trina laughed. "Well, it's well known that I'm crazy." She stroked the creature's nose; unicorns might

be as smart as people, but they still looked like horses. Very pretty horses. "\*Are\* there direwolves around here?" She asked more seriously.

The unicorn shook its- her head, surprising Trina again, "Well that's good." The girl said, yawning, "Cause I have too much to do to get eaten right now. I'm going to bed; I walked all day and I'm tired. Good night."

The unicorn nodded and lay down in the grass at the foot of the tree. Trina climbed higher and draped herself over a branch, her cloak tucked in around her. It was hardly a soft bed, but wasn't too uncomfortable.

If there were direwolves in the forest, none bothered them.

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Morning found the Jewel Riders again on the road. There had been a party last night at the inn; there were usually parties where Gwen was staying, much to her embarrassment.

(Well you \*are\* the princess of Avalon.) Sunstar tried to reason with her friend, (They're excited to have you.)

"I know." Gwen said, "It's just. . . weird. Being a Jewel Rider's more important to me than being princess."

(I know that.)

It was a beautiful day again, warm and clear. Gwen was glad, they'd be able to make good time. She still felt impatient, like their time was running out somehow and they had to do something before it did. "Sunstar, can we go faster? I want to talk to Tamara."

Sunstar made a show of it, leaping over the carriage with her wings spread to glide them over. Gwen sighed.

"Tamara?"

"Yeah Gwen, what's up?"

"Can your Heartstone pick up anything? I know it didn't yesterday, but. . ."

Tamara put a hand over her jewel and frowned in concentration, "There is something! It's very faint, but it's there. Hey, Fallon!"

"You found something?" Fallon asked, riding up "Want to link our jewels and see if we can get an image?"

Tamara shook her head, "It's not strong enough." She said regretfully, "Maybe later."

"What exactly is it, Tamara?" Gwen asked, "Just magic or something else?"

"It's. . . not magic exactly, more like. . . I'm not sure." Tamara said. "I'll keep trying, maybe I'll get a clearer signal later. Are either of you getting anything?"

"Not me." Fallon said after a moment, "Gwen?"

"Just a whisper, I think. It's weird. And I really don't think we should fiddle with the Starstone."

"Yeah, it was hard enough to get it to behave the first time."

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Trina woke up with the feeling that someone had spoken to her. She opened her eyes and found herself looking down at a bug-eyed rodent that was looking back.

"Yeeek!" Trina screeched and sat up. Usually it was beneath her dignity to sound so maidenly, but to wake up with a treemouse under your nose would do that to anyone. Then she saw what the treemouse had been sitting on. There was a thick branch armed with wickedly sharp thorns under the branch she'd slept on. It hadn't been there last night.

Trina looked around, seeing more of the thorny curls everywhere. The unicorn was standing under her tree, looking around as if just as surprised and puzzled. "Good morning." Trina called down to her, "Did these things grow here overnight? I'm getting out of here, you coming?" She grabbed her pack and swung herself to the ground—carefully avoiding the thorns.

The unicorn seemed just as anxious to be off, she started walking, and looked back to see if Trina was coming. Trina caught up and walked next to her.

"Can anything grow that fast?" Trina asked, not expecting an answer, "Brrrr. Nothing should be able to do that, it's not natural." The twisted plants gave her a funny feeling to look at, they just weren't right. "Hey—is that how you got caught in there?" No answer, even a nod. Trina sensed, or maybe imagined, that the unicorn was interested, so she kept up her monologue, "Did I tell you my name? It's Trina. I guess you can't tell me yours. . ." For an instant, she looked very solemn and wistful, but a moment later she shrugged it off. "I'm very ordinary except that I'm going on this quest to tell the king about Lady Delina. I still can't believe I'm doing it. At least we won't get too lost. If we keep going this way we'll come to civilization soon, and find someone going to New Camelot with a wagon who can give me a ride."

She stopped chattering, suddenly serious, "I can get there by myself, if you want to go back to whatever you were doing." She asked timidly, the longing look flashing in her eyes for another moment.

The unicorn looked at Trina, and tipped her head thoughtfully for a minute. Then she gave the girl a little push along the way they'd been going, and followed her. Trina's smile of relief lit up the forest.

"Well that's good, I wanted you to come, I like you even if you can't talk to me." She said frankly, "Hey, they've got lots of cool magic at the capital, maybe we could find a magic jewel or something so we could talk. I think the Jewel Riders can do that. They can do all sorts of magical stuff with Merlin's jewels. But magic costs money I bet, and I don't have any. Oh well, we'll think of something, right Silv'rwind?"

Trina stopped, staring, a moment after the word rolled off her tongue. "Now where did I get that?" she asked softly, "Is that your name? Silverwind?" The unicorn, who looked as surprised as Trina felt, nodded her head. Trina looked back at her and couldn't think of a thing to say. In mutual shock, they started walking again.

"Well." Trina said a few minutes and a detour around a fallen tree later, "I don't know how I knew your name, but it's a very pretty one. Suits you." She added with a smile.

Silverwind was pleased. Trina didn't know how she knew that, either. "This is pretty weird, y'know. The girl said thoughtfully, "But I like it. Still, t'would be nice to know what's going on."

Silverwind nodded emphatically, and Trina laughed.

"It's friendship-magic, what I'm sensing." Tamara said suddenly.

"You sure?" Fallon asked.

Gwen had been dozing in Sunstar's saddle, now she shook herself awake to listen.

Tamara nodded, "Definitely. It just got a lot stronger, enough for me to tell. It's exactly like what I got from Gwen and Sunstar when they first met. The Starstone is picking it up really strongly, and beaming it to me somehow."

Gwen yawned, and Sunstar did a little skip to wake her up. "This is good." The princess said, "If the jewels can pick it up that must be a strong bond."

"Yes, it must be. Hey Tamara, want to try linking our jewels?"

"Yes!" Tamara exclaimed, "Your Moonstone might be able to show us who it is!"

"Good to know someone besides me is crazy with curiosity." Fallon grinned and held up her Moonstone. Moondance, Sunstar, and the wolf pulling the carriage all stopped, watching.

Tamara lifted her Heartstone high, "Heart to Heartstone, friend to friend, show us now our seeking's end!" She murmured, calling on the magic. The two jewels glowed brightly, purple and rose light spiraling up to form a ball above their heads. The sphere became a misty image that cleared quickly to show a light haired girl and a silver and aqua unicorn walking through the forest together. The girl was laughing and gesturing as she talked, the unicorn watching her patiently.

"I wish we could hear them." Gwen said.

Tamara nodded, "Me too, but we don't know how to do that yet."

The image trembled and broke up. Fallon and Tamara lowered their jewels.

"Show's over." Fallon observed.

"Let's get going," Gwen said, "We're blocking the road."

There wasn't anybody else on the road to be blocked, but they started moving again anyway.

"We don't know much more now than before." Gwen observed gloomily.

Fallon rode up next to her, smiling cheerfully, "I wouldn't say that."

"What do you mean, Fallon?"

(Yes, what?) Sunstar chimed in, though Fallon couldn't hear her.

"She's younger than you, Gwen, maybe thirteen or fourteen. She's not noble born if she dresses like that. Moondance says the unicorn isn't from any of the families she knows. That's strange, are you sure, Moondance?"

(I'm sure. And I know most of the unicorn families by sight. There was supposed to be a family that vanished when the crown jewels were scattered, but I don't know for sure.)

Fallon repeated this for the others, and added, "And Moondance's mother is Queen of the unicorns, so she knows the families from before we met."

(I wish I could talk to Mother,) Moondance said, (She would know who that was.)

"It's all right, we'll know soon enough anyway." Fallon stroked her friend's mane.

Gwen was thinking aloud, "Vanished? They should have come back now that we've stopped the wild magic outbreaks and set everything right." The princess was worried that they might have hurt the unicorns without meaning too.

"Moondance says it was only a rumor she heard. We'll check it out after we're done with this quest." Fallon promised.

"OK. It's a pretty fascinating idea, though."

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"My feet hurt." Trina announced, "I am not-" she yawned, "-used to this pace." Silverwind whickered; Trina could have sworn she was laughing.

"You don't look so good either, horseface. You've got burrs in your tail. Here, turn around so I can get them out."

It was getting on towards dark again. Trina was sitting on the side of a boulder that jutted up from a clearing in the trees. They had been walking mostly in silence since the strange incident that morning.

Trina was back to her usual self, chatty and a bit bossy, as she combed out Silverwind's mane and tail and got them both a wash in a nearby stream.

"Now I can sleep on top of that rock tonight, anything that can climb this can climb anything. But what about you? Can you climb it too? I don't think so, you don't have hands. Horseface." She repeated the nickname, smiling in a way that turned the word from taunt to endearment. Silverwind nuzzled her, then nodded at the top of the rock.

"What? You want me to climb up anyway?"

The unicorn nodded, her eyes dancing.

"OK. I don't know what you've got up your sleeve, but call if you need me."

Trina climbed up onto the top of the rock and stood, looking into the distance.

(Tri-na!) The voice was full of mischief, and coming from behind her. Trina spun around, and gaped.

"Wind—Horseface, why didn't you tell me you had wings!" She yelped.

Silverwind was hanging in the air above the boulder, held aloft by a pair of transparent and aqua wings. They were a little like dragonfly wings, shaped like butterfly wings, but three dimensional. Trina laughed for joy, her hair blowing around in the wind. The unicorn landed on the rock with a clatter of hooves, and her wings folded until they were flat against her sides, vanishing in the patterns in her fur.

"So that's why I didn't see them! But this is great, you can fly!" she hugged the unicorn around her neck. Silverwind danced a little then nuzzled Trina's back as if returning the hug.

A minute later the girl stepped back, embarrassed by her show of emotion. "Well this is great." She repeated much more calmly, "But we're still here on a rock in the middle of nowhere and it's still nighttime." Trina set about breaking off enough branches to make a bed for herself. "Hey!" She exclaimed suddenly, almost taking a tumble to the forest floor, "I heard someone call me, before. Was it you?"

Silverwind looked hard at her for a long moment, and finally nodded.

"So we *can* really talk- say something!"

Trina listened as hard as she could. Nothing. She looked over at Silverwind, who nodded.

"I didn't hear it." Trina said, baffled.

Silverwind snorted and shrugged her wings a little.

"We'll figure it out-" Trina yawned, "-tomorrow. I'm too tired right now, sorry." She curled up on her bed of branches, which was surprisingly soft. The long days of walking caught up with her.

(Good night.)

"G'night 'Wind." Trina murmured, already half asleep.

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Two days later, the Jewel Riders were traveling as usual when a messenger came thundering up on a horse.

"Jewel Riders! The man exclaimed, "Thank goodness you're here!"

"What's up?" Fallon asked, all business.

"It's the Thornwoods, Lady Fallon, they've gone crazy! There's wild magic everywhere!"

"We're on our way." Gwen assured him briskly.

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Trina and Silverwind were hiding under a bush, watching the eerie red lightning flash by overhead. It had started that morning, and they'd had to run for cover.

Trina squirmed for the umpteenth time. She opened her mouth to say something, and realized that she'd already said everything she could think of.

(Maybe it will stop when night comes. I hope so. This is scary.) Silverwind commented. Trina had discovered the trick to hearing the unicorn, it had something to do with forgetting that you weren't having a normal out-loud conversation. Trina was getting good, though it still blanked out every so often.

"I know. But I wouldn't bet on it. Wild magic is \*wild\* magic, after all."

(How long can we stay under here?) Trina wasn't the only one getting fidgety.

"I don't know, long as we have to, I guess. I wonder if we could make a break for it, stay low to the ground or something 'till we got far enough away to—"

Lightning crashed down, splintering a tree within fifty feet of their hiding place. Trina shrieked as they were pelted with bits of hot wood. The newly made stump smoldered for a minute, but didn't really catch fire.

"I-I guess that puts an end to that idea." Trina said shakily, trying to brush the splinters off her clothes.

Silverwind shook her mane as hard as she could in the confined space without getting it tangled in the branches. (It can see us.) She said quietly, eyes wide.

Trina thought about that and shuddered. "That's silly, how could it? Lightning always hits trees because they're taller." Trina spoke bravely, but Silverwind wasn't fooled.

(This is magic lightning and you're as scared as me.) Silverwind said a trifle arrogantly, and Trina made a face at her.

They sat in silence for maybe another hour, then—

"Hey!" Trina looked up suddenly, "What's that?" A large shadow had passed over their hiding place.

An instant later she heard a muffled voice in the back of her mind exclaim (Hey! What was that?) It was not Silverwind's voice.

The shadow came back and circled over them. Trina could see that it was a dragon, carrying something large and wooden. The red lightning had died down, but was still flashing around enough that Trina wouldn't have wanted to be flying. The dragon seemed serenely unconcerned.

(What in Avalon is that?) Silverwind murmured.

The dragon swung lower, causing Trina and Silverwind to back out of the way. Two small heads poked over the side of the wooden structure.

(This is a dragonwagon.) said one.

(And we are dweasles.) said the other, (What might you be?)

(Isn't it obvious Rufus? They're a unicorn and a human girl.)

(I know that, Twig you moron. I meant what are they doing here.)

"We're hiding from the lightning is what we're doing." Trina called boldly up at them, "What are you doing here?"

It didn't seem to occur to the dweasles not to answer. (We are going to the castle to meet the witchy one.)

(Yes, she is making a grand comeback.)

(And she will be very annoyed if we are not there on time. Grimm--) the one called Rufus yelled to the dragon.

"Hey wait!" Trina yelled.

(What?)

"Why doesn't the lightning fry you?"

(We have magic protection jewels.) a dweasel boasted.

Trina took a deep breath. Her voice was getting tired from all this shouting. "Can you give us a ride? That way, to the nearest town?"

Silverwind suddenly called, (To the nearest Travel Trees!)

While Trina wondered what the heck Travel Trees were, the two dweasles made a huddle and talked. Finally they told the dragon to land. Which he did, taking up most of the clearing and squashing the bushes. The dweasles hopped down from the wagon.

(What will you give us if we take you to Travel Trees?) Twig said craftily.

Trina rummaged through her pack. "Will you do it for a silver fork?" It was the only valuable thing she had.

(Nope.)

The girl wracked her brain for a minute, then grinned. "What about a fork and a secret?"

(Is it a good secret?)

(What kind of secret?)

"It's a really good secret. I'll tell you after we're at the—" What had Silverwind called them?-- "The Travel Trees."

Twig and Rufus huddled again and talked some more, then Twig said, (OK, climb in.)

The wooden thing was like a wagon without wheels, and the back was a room with a barred door across it. "Could they lock us in here?" Trina whispered.

(I don't think they will.) Silverwind replied, (Dweasles love secrets.)

They climbed into the little room, which was just big enough for both of them. The dweasles tied up the door and told the dragon to take off. They lurched into the air. Trina grabbed the bars of the little window and hung on tight. "I don't think this was such a good idea!" She said as the room swung back and forth above the treetops. Silverwind braced her hooves to keep her balance. (I-- agree! At least—dragons are fast!) She said in time with the swinging.

They went higher, and the ride got smoother. A little. (Open your eyes, silly!) Silverwind's rich voice filled Trina's head.

Trina still had a death grip on the bars of the window. "Not on your life, horseface." She said, then cracked one eye open. "Wow!"

The forest was spread out below them like a green blanket. Off to the left Trina could see the Thornwoods beginning. Far away the castle and the town where Trina had spent her life were nothing more than embroidery on the blanket. The lightning had moved off, it was over the Thornwoods, flashing red in the distance. "I wish we could see out the front." Trina said, "So what are Travel Trees anyway?"

Silverwind looked surprised. (They are—magic trees, that can take you from one place to another in the blink of an eye.)

"Magic? Cool!"

The wagon dropped about three feet. Trina gasped and closed her eyes again. They kept dropping, a bit at a time. It seemed an eternity before the wagon landed on solid ground. Trina heard a voice from the front: (Sorry, this was not one of Grimm's three-point landings.)

Trina hurriedly untied the door and hopped out. She saw the Travel Trees immediately: four huge trees, exactly alike, with a circle on the ground between them.

(Those are Travel Trees.) Silverwind confirmed. The unicorn was switching her tail excitedly. (First we have to pay the dweasles.) She reminded her friend.

Trina pulled out the silver fork and tossed it to a dweasel, who polished it on his tail. (OK, what's the secret?)

"What would you like a secret about? I know a couple good ones."

(Do you know the location of any buried treasure?)

"If I did I wouldn't be wandering around in this forest."

(It was worth a try.) one dweasel shrugged to the other; Trina had given up trying to remember which was which.

"I'll tell you one that helped me out." Trina said in sudden inspiration, "In lady Delina's castle, there's a closet that backs up on the dining hall. If you go in there, you can listen to what the important people are talking about."

(That's a good secret.)

(Very useful.)

"Is our business finished, then?"

(Yes. We must be going now to meet the witchy one.)

(Goodbye.) the creatures hopped into the wagon and the dragon took off, vanishing quickly above the trees.

"Not too shabby, eh, horseface?" Trina said a little smugly.

Silverwind had been watching the exchange with amusement. (I think we got the better deal.) she laughed.

"OK. Do you know how to work Travel Trees?"

(Of course.) Silverwind sounded surprised, not stuck up, but Trina bristled anyway.

"Well sorry. I've never seen them before and you haven't exactly told me where you come from."

(Sorry. I will, when we're done with this quest.) Trina smiled to show they'd made up, and Silverwind continued, (Anyway, Travel Trees. Riding the wild magic without protection isn't very much fun, but we can do it. Hmmm, we'll have to stay together. . . Mount up.)

"What?"

(I'll carry you. Come on.)

Trina blinked and felt stupid. The idea that she might \*ride\* Silverwind had never entered her head. "All right, if you're sure." Trina found a rock to use as a step, and scrambled onto Silverwind's back. She felt strange about it; 'Wind was a friend, not a horse.

Silverwind continued to explain as she walked slowly over to the Trees. (Now we ask them for help, with a rhyme. . . can you think of one?)

Trina thought. "Travel Trees, Travel Trees, will you take us somewhere. . . please?" she shrugged, "It was all I could think of."

The four trees lit up, changing from wood and leaves to cut crystal. "Greetings travelers. Where would you like to go?"

"To the Crystal Palace, in New Camelot!" Trina said firmly.

"All right." The Trees said, and a shimmering portal opened in the air.

Silverwind leaped into the portal and suddenly they were shooting through a blue violet tunnel.

"Wow!" Trina yelled.

(Hold on tight!) Silverwind called, and Trina threw her arms around her friend's neck and did.

"This is great! What a ride!"

They heard the deep voice of the Trees, "Warning, you are being pulled off course! This is wild magic! There's nothing we can—" The voice cut off.

It felt like they were going faster, and being blown around like there was a hurricane in the tunnel. The wall was flashing past so fast it was making Trina dizzy.

Then it got worse. Evil red claws started coming out of the walls. Trina screamed; it seemed appropriate.

(They aren't real!) Silverwind cried, (Not solid, just magic!)

"Like the lightning!" Trina had to shout to be heard.

(Yes,) Silverwind dodged a grasping claw, and Trina hung on for dear life. (That was close!)

"We're gonna' get fried!"

(No we aren't! Whoa!)

"Careful!"

Suddenly something appeared ahead of them. Something huge, ice-white, with evil dead green eyes.

Silverwind screamed and fanned her wings. She was trying to slow them down. It wasn't working.

"What is—"  
The monster lashed out.  
(Look out!)  
"Aaaaaiiiiiieeeee!"

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Gwenevere used her Sunstone to create a shield over a house. Just in time; red lightning lanced down, running off Gwen's shield like water.

"It's moving away!" Tamara called from the steps of the town hall.

"It's about time!" Fallon yelled from somewhere off to Gwen's left.

(It really is moving.) Sunstar called down to Gwen, (I think you stopped the last strike to this village.)

"Whew!" Gwen lowered her jewel. She wanted to sit down right here and not move for about a week.

"Don't let the villagers out yet, Tamara." Fallon called, "I want to make sure none of these branches are going to fall." Gwen could see Fallon now, the athletic girl was climbing the huge silverwood tree for which the village was named.

(I don't see any more that look loose.) Sunstar was circling the tree, helping Fallon.

"OK, Tamara." Fallon called a few minutes later. Tamara directed the townsfolk to go back to their homes and start cleaning up.

Gwen walked to the town hall and flopped down on the steps. Fallon dropped from the tree and did the same.

Two minutes later a kid came up, "Jewel Riders? Papa says can you come help put our roof back on?"

"Certainly." Gwen said, climbing to her feet. "I'd be glad to help."

For two hours the Jewel Riders helped the townspeople put things right. The wild magic storm had done a lot of damage. Luckily, no one had gotten hurt.

Gwen and Fallon were helping clean up the barrel maker's workshop when Tamara came up. "Guys, look. The star on the map is gone."

Just as they gathered around, the star shape reappeared—right over Silverwood village. The Jewel Riders looked at each other in confusion, then the Travel Trees at the edge of the village lit up.

"Incoming!" The Trees said.

The portal opened and two very different figures tumbled out. They crumpled on the grass and lay still.

Tamara ran over and drew her Heartstone. She murmured a spell and the jewel shone rosy light down on the pair.

The girl stirred, "Huh, 'Wind. . . Silverwind!" She gasped, sitting up suddenly. (Trina. . . ?)

"Wind, are you all right?"

The unicorn lifted her head and nodded, (I'm fine. Now.) she said in disbelief, (What hit us?)

"Wild magic is what hit you." Said a voice. A young woman in pink and green armor was standing there, smiling. She held out a hand to help Trina up, then went to coax Silverwind to her feet.

A dark-skinned young woman and a white unicorn came over. The way they looked at each other, the woman nodding and the unicorn shaking her violet mane, Trina would have sworn they were talking.

"What happened to you?" The woman's voice was not unfriendly.

"We—there was a monster in the tunnel. It hit us, I think, and. . . that's all I know." Trina was still pretty confused.

"A monster in the tunnel?" The dark girl echoed, "Gwen, do you know. . .?"

"Nope." Trina hadn't noticed, but there was a third person, a girl with yellow hair standing by one of the Travel Trees.

The girl in armor was holding a heart-shaped jewel. The dark girl and the unicorn both had moon jewels. The blonde girl wore a golden sun-shaped stone.

Trina stepped back against Silverwind's side. "Y-you're them, aren't you? The Jewel Riders?"

Silverwind silently confirmed it before the blonde girl nodded. "Yes, we are." She said with a smile. "This is Tamara, Fallon and Moondance. I'm Gwenevere."

"The princess?"

"She's the princess all right." Tamara said. "So who are you?" her 'you' included Silverwind as well as Trina.

"I-I'm Trina. From Last Village, on Long Run Road near the border. This is Silverwind, I met her in the forest. We were going to New Camelot when something happened in the Travel Trees' tunnel."

(A big white magic-monster, really evil.) Silverwind said. Trina got the shock of her life when Tamara turned and repeated Silverwind's words for the others.

"You can hear her?" Trina asked incredulously.

"It's one of the powers of my Heartstone." Tamara explained, "It lets me talk to any magical animal."

Trina was jealous. "It took me a couple days to learn to hear her."

The princess came forward, "We need to talk. Let's all go inside and trade stories."

They ended up in the now-vacated town hall. The Jewel Riders and Trina sat on one of the benches, while the unicorns had the stage. Trina shyly told her story, with Silverwind adding something every so often.

"You really think they're going to try and get Kale out of the magic?" Gwen asked when she'd finished.

Trina shrugged, "They sure sounded serious. I could be wrong, of course."

"I'll tell Mother to check into it." Gwen said, "We might even be the ones to go spy on her." Gwen clearly liked the idea. Trina decided she might like this princess.

"We ought to get on it." Fallon said, "If this is serious then Avalon could be in big trouble."

The princess stood up, "I agree. We can take the Travel Trees back home. Trina, will you come with us?"

Trina let out a breath in relief. "I'd be glad to. I don't really have any place else to go." She spoke casually, covering a sudden worry. She'd never really thought about what she was going to do after this quest was finished.

"Let's go then." Fallon stood up, "Hey Gwen, where's Sunstar?"

"She was helping with the church bell. The ropes had come loose—"

BONG! They all jumped.

"Right on cue!" Fallon laughed.

A minute later there was a clatter of hooves on the front steps, and Sunstar came in. Trina gasped; Sunstar had wings! Feathery wings instead of being kite shaped like Silverwind's, but wings all the same. Silverwind looked very surprised, and hugged her own wings closer to her body.

"Sunstar says she's ready to go when we are. The carriage is waiting outside."

They went out to the Travel Trees, and Trina watched, fascinated, while the others summoned their armor.

"That is so cool." Was all she could say.

"Want to ride with me?" Tamara asked from the carriage.

Trina nodded and climbed in, "Yeah. I don't like going by tunnel, feels like I'm going to get blown away."

"I know. Our armor makes it easier."

"We all ready?" Fallon asked, "OK. . . Great Trees of magic, we call on you. May we ride the wild magic, as is our due?"

The Travel Trees lit up, "Greetings Jewel Riders. Where would you like to go?"

"Back to the Crystal Palace!" Gwen told them, then the portal opened and they were in.

Trina closed her eyes tight and wished she had something to hang on to. That made her think of Silverwind, and suddenly she wondered why the unicorn wanted to keep her wings a secret. They hadn't been talking to each other hardly at all since meeting the Jewel Riders; Trina didn't like the idea of anyone else listening in on them and apparently Silverwind felt the same. But, Trina decided, they were going to have a long talk as soon as they could.

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New Camelot sparkled. That was what Trina thought, anyway. But then, she had never expected to be riding through the capitol city with the princess and her friends.

"This is really cool, horseface." She murmured to Silverwind.

(I agree!) Silverwind pranced, showing off shamelessly. But then, Sunstar was also prancing, and waving her wings.

"How do you like the city?" Gwen called over.

"It's great. Everybody's looking at us, though."

The princess laughed, "We're the Jewel Riders, we're famous!" A kid hanging out a shop window waved, and Gwen and Trina waved back.

"They have the best silks in town, that store." Gwen said, "And there's a good bakery down that street, in on the square with the statue of Arthur. And. . ."

Trina listened to Gwen's tour-guide speech and gawked at everything. She was not used to sights like these. Glass windows glittered in the sun, marble walls gleamed. In the shop windows, displays of clothing, weapons, pastries, pottery, tools, and a thousand other things caught her eyes. The people were dressed in fancier clothes than Trina had seen anybody but lady Delina in. And they all seemed so friendly, waving and calling greetings to the Jewel Riders. Vendors flocked around them, offering their wares. Trina was overwhelmed with the sheer richness of everything, she'd already seen half a dozen things she would buy if she ever had the money. But then she thought how they wouldn't be being half this nice if she weren't with the heroes of the land. It would be hard to keep one's head above water in a city this size. . .

(Don't worry Trina, we'll manage.)

Trina shook off her pessimism and smiled, "Yeah. Together, I guess we will."

"We're getting close! That's the royal library. It's actually connected to the palace, there's a tunnel."

Trina barely heard the last sentence, she was staring openmouthed. \*That\* was a library? It was as big as the dance hall in her village, bigger! How many books must be in a place like that? Trina had read all of her mother's teaching books, and all the ones in Delina's castle until they had started locking up the library.

"Can anyone go there? Just to read, I mean?" She asked eagerly.

"Sure," Gwen said, "You like reading?"

Trina nodded vigorously, "I'm not real good at it, but I love books."

"Here's the palace!" Fallon called back to them a minute later.

"Oh wow!" Trina whispered. They were riding up an avenue lined with flowering trees and graceful statues. The Crystal palace glowed in the sunlight, reflecting rainbows everywhere. Around behind the palace Trina could catch glimpses of gardens, ponds, and what she thought was the famous Circle of Friendship.

"Close your mouth, country girl!" Fallon laughed, but her smile was friendly.

Trina smiled back, "It's beautiful! You're so lucky to be able to live here."

"I'll give you to the tour." Gwen offered, "When Mother's done with us."

"There's going to be utter chaos when they hear about this." Fallon was trying to sound worried, and not managing it.

At that moment miniature chaos erupted out the doors of the palace. It turned out to be an owl, a unicorn filly, a panther kitten and a baby dragon. The owl was yelling, Trina couldn't hear if the others were, but Tamara jumped out of the carriage to greet them, answering their silent questions and hellos.

"Trina, this is Archie." Gwen introduced the owl, "The babies are Spike, Sugar, and Cleo. Archie, this is Trina from Last village, and her friend Silverwind."

The owl flew over and perched on the front seat of the carriage.

"Welcome to New Camelot, Trina, Silverwind." Archie said formally, "I hope you like it here."

"I do, what I've seen." Trina said shyly, then reflected how ridiculous it was to be shy with an \*owl\*, even if the owl did wear glasses.

Gwen called Archie over, and they talked to quietly for Trina to hear. She suspected they were talking about her, though. Tamara and the babies caught up to the rest of the group. Tamara was telling her friends about their adventures. Cleo, the little

unicorn, came over to look up at Silverwind and Trina. (Hello!) She said, (I'm Cleo. Who are you?)

(I'm Silverwind.) the unicorn sounded surprised. Trina could hear them both, she wasn't sure why.

(That's a pretty name. What unicorn family are you from? \*I'm\* from the royal family, so is Moondance.)

(My family doesn't come to the Vale very much.) Silverwind said softly. (I'll tell you about them later, maybe.)

Trina leaned forward and whispered, "You'd better tell me about them, too."

Silverwind nodded.

They were almost at the palace doors when they swung open and a tall blonde woman came out. Gwen called, "Mother!" and slid off Sunstar's back to hug the woman.

"That's Queen Anya." Fallon explained. She dismounted and helped Trina down from Silverwind's back.

"Hello, Fallon." The Queen said, "Is this our newest friend?"

"Yes, this is Trina and her friend Silverwind."

"Hello, your majesty." Trina said, and curtsied as best she could while wearing pants.

"Hello Trina, I'm pleased to meet you. Come inside, everyone."

The babies pushed past the Queen to get through the door, and the Jewel Riders rushed after them. Trina ran along with everybody else. They found the babies sitting two feet away from a table of food, eyeing it hungrily. "You had your breakfast this morning." Tamara told them mock-severely, "Let us have a chance!"

They dug in. Trina was starving; her supplies had been getting very low. The food here was like nothing kitchen servants ever got, anyway. She was surprised to see bowls of grain and water set up for Sunstar, Moondance, and Silverwind.

Gwen was telling the Queen about the strange happenings in the Thornwoods.

Anya announced that she was calling a council, and they all would have to be there.

While the Queen went to gather the nobles, the Jewel Riders talked a little and ate some more snacks. Gwen got out some brushes and began grooming Sunstar.

(Can you brush me, too?) Silverwind asked hesitantly.

Trina smiled, "Sure I will. Gwen, can I borrow a brush?"

"Sure. Here, catch!"

"You look a right mess, horseface. I think some of these knots we'll have to take a scissors to." She giggled suddenly, "I don't even want to know what \*I\* look like!" She turned to look at her reflection in one of the big mirrors in the room, and laughed. She looked like a tramp! Trina alternated brushing Silverwind's coat and her own hair until the Queen came to get them for the council.

The council meeting started in the mid-afternoon. By the time the girls were excused, the sun was down and the street lanterns lit. The Queen and her court would be debating about it for hours more. Trina had told her story, and answered hundreds of questions about it. Finally Gwen had asked if they could be excused to go to bed before they fell over. Trina was glad the princess had done so; \*she\* was about falling asleep in her chair.

"Here's your room, Trina. There's a room for unicorns on the other side of yours." Gwen said, stopping to open a door. "We're in the other three rooms in this hall—the doors are marked with our jewels so it's pretty easy to tell. There are clothes in your closet; if you need anything else come get me."

"I will. But I don't think there will be. I'm beat."

"Me too." The princess said, "Good night then."

Alone, Trina looked at everything in her room, exclaiming over most of it. Silverwind found some oats in her room, and munched on them while Trina chattered. (I could get used to this life veeerrrry easily.) was the unicorn's opinion.

"Me too! This's a weird place, your room's as fancy as mine. I know you're not a horse, but still I'd expect them to put you in the stable."

(Sunstar and Moondance have their own rooms, too.)

"Do they? And that reminds me, you were going to tell me about where you're from."

(All right. Now?)

"Now."

So while Trina got them both ready for bed, Silverwind told the story of her family.

(The Vale of the Unicorns is where it began. That's where everything important begins for unicorns. We were a family of maybe thirty, my mother and her sisters and brothers and their mates and children. We looked--\*were\* like normal unicorns. No fancy fur patterns, and no wings.)

"So how did you end up like you are now? Are all your family fancy like you?"

(Yes, they all are.) Silverwind sounded sad. (We went away from the Vale to live. Queen Thiera asked some of the families to do that, to go and start new homes, new meadows where unicorns could live. We were near the border mist, on the other side of Ravenwood from where I met you. I was just a foal when it happened. Over two days, the land went crazy. Ravenwood turned into the Thornwoods. Creatures of evil magic started appearing. We fought them back, as well as we could with our magic. On the third day, my friend Brightwater brought back a crystal she'd found in the Thornwoods. She said it had helped her escape from a monster. The whole family gathered around to look at it. Brightwater tried to show them how she'd worked the crystal, touching it with her horn and wishing for magic. The crystal started glowing, really bright. When I could see again, the crystal was gone and we were all like this.) Silverwind reared up and fanned her wings open. Trina was washing her hair; she leaned on the side of the tub and watched.

"What's wrong with it?" The girl asked timidly, "Your wings are pretty."

(There's nothing wrong with it, really. But until I saw Sunstar I thought we were the only ones. The grown-ups kind of freaked out, they didn't know if the other unicorns would still like us. Grown-ups are silly sometimes.)

"So's everyone, sometimes. Hey, aren't you grown up?"

Silverwind laughed, (Just barely. I guess I sound older than I am. Anyway, everyone was scared and talking about what were we going to do, what was the Queen going to say, stuff like that. In the confusion, Brightwater sneaked away. She left a note saying she was going to find Merlin and ask him to change us back. Later we found out about Merlin disappearing and the Crown Jewels being scattered. It wasn't Brightwater's fault at all, but she didn't come back. I tried to learn everything about the rest of Avalon

so I could go looking for her someday. Then one day I felt something calling me from beyond the Thornwoods. I thought it must be Brightwater or another unicorn, so I tried to fly over and see. A big bird, \*really\* big, attacked me and I had to hide down in the thorns. I traveled down there until night came, waiting for the bird to leave. Then the bushes started growing out of control and I got trapped.)

"And then I came."

(And then you came.) Silverwind agreed.

Trina was toweling her hair dry, sitting on the edge of her bed. "But why don't you want the others to know about your wings?"

Silverwind shook her head, (Habit, I guess. I really should tell them. Maybe I will, tomorrow.)

"OK, that sounds good." Trina yawned, "I wonder how late it is. Y'know, we're alike. Both from out of the way parts of the kingdom, both just met royalty for the first time. I like them, wonder if they like us."

(I think so.) Silverwind lay down on her bed in her room.

"Hey horseface, you still want to look for your friend Brightwater?"

Silverwind seemed startled, (Yes. I hadn't really thought about it, but I would.)

Trina turned off the lights and got into bed. "I'll help you. When I can. Maybe the Jewel Riders would too. Good night."

(Good night.)

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In the morning, Trina got dressed and went out to see if she could find either the others, or some breakfast. Silverwind had gone out to graze with Sunstar and Moondance. Trina met Tamara coming out the door with the heart on it. "Morning Trina." The Jewel Rider greeted her.

"G'morning. Are you going to get breakfast?"

Tamara was, and she showed Trina the way down to the big main dining room of the palace. This early only a few people were at the buffet getting food. Trina and Tamara loaded their plates and sat down. They talked about their pasts, Trina's in Last Village and Tamara's as a child in a noble family. Then they talked about Jewel Riders.

"So how \*do\* they choose who gets to be a Jewel Rider?" Trina asked, "Are you, like, born into it or something?"

"I don't really know. Everyone seems to come by it differently. My parents sent me to a school here in the city. I snuck out one night to walk in the Palace gardens in the moonlight. That's how I met Cleo. We got to be friends, and I kept sneaking out to play with her and Spike and Sugar. Then one day Merlin came to school and announced that the Heartstone had chosen me." Tamara giggled, "The other kids in my class totally freaked out."

"I bet!" Trina said, "You're so lucky. . ." The words slipped out before she could stop them.

Tamara smiled softly, "I know." Then she broke the mood, "The jewels choose the Jewel Riders, or at least it sure seems that way. Gwen was chosen partly because

she's the princess, but mostly because she's got the stuff that makes a Jewel Rider. Kindness, honor, and compassion."

Trina suddenly wished \*she\* had those qualities, wished it harder than she'd wished for anything except her parents. Oh to be a Jewel Rider, using magic for the good of Avalon and fighting evil and other fun stuff! But she didn't say it out loud; she was pretty sure Tamara would be sympathetic, but it would sound so. . . (And besides.) Trina decided, (Me and 'Wind can do everything we need to, ourselves.)

She was broken out of her thoughts when Gwen and Fallon joined them.

"Hey guys," the princess greeted them, "What's the plan for today?"

"Probably being ambushed by your mother to answer more questions." Fallon said as she sat down, "But if that doesn't happen, hmmm. . ."

"Trina, we have something to tell you." Tamara said suddenly, "Right, guys?"

Gwen and Fallon nodded. "Let's go out to the Friendship ring." The princess suggested. They did, grabbing some doughnuts on the way out.

Trina followed the others through the garden, munching on a chocolate doughnut. She was mystified. What could they have to tell her? The unicorns met them at the entrance to the marble Friendship ring. Silverwind also didn't know what was going on, though Trina heard her think (Where everything begins for Jewel Riders. . . ) and wondered.

"OK," Gwen began when they were all sitting on the marble steps, "We were in Silverwood for a reason besides cleaning up. A few days ago Drake and Josh found a strange magical phenomenon that turned out to be a fourth enchanted jewel like ours. . ."

When Gwen finished her story, there was silence. Trina was gaping. "You mean — You mean the jewel was leading to. . . me?!" she squeaked.

The others nodded solemnly. Tamara at least was trying not to laugh at Trina's expression.

"I get to be a Jewel Rider? Really?" Trina asked in shock.

"Really." Fallon said, grinning. She took the Starstone out of its pouch on her belt, and threw the jewel into the air.

Trina reached up to catch it, and the stone seemed to fly to her hand. The girl stared at it, then burst out laughing, "This is so cool!"

But there was one thing still to do. "'Wind?" Trina asked, suddenly shy, "Will you stay here—in New Camelot—with me—and be Jewel Riders?"

(Of course I will, silly!) Silverwind laughed. Then, as Trina still hesitated, (Go on —try it!)

Trina held up the jewel, \*her\* jewel, "OK, here goes. . . . By the magic of the Starstone!" Magic swirled around her and Silverwind. When it faded, they were both dressed in fancy aqua and white jewel armor. Trina looked down at herself and then twirled around, laughing, to show the armor off. "This is so cool, I bet it would make riding in travel tunnels more like fun, and I bet I look \*really\* hot in this outfit!" Everybody laughed, including Trina when she realized what she must sound like.

Pretty soon Trina decided she'd done enough babbling and tried to get serious. "So what happens now? They have the Friendship Ceremony whenever someone new becomes a Jewel Rider, right?"

"Right." Fallon said.

"That'll be in a few weeks, after Father gets back from his trip. Mother's already started on the invitations and everything."

"It's quite a party. But first we have to deal with Lady Delina. We're all in trouble if Kale comes back."

"After all the trouble it took to banish her, you'd think she'd be polite enough to stay gone!" Tamara said, quite fiercely.

Trina didn't want the happy mood to be broken, though she knew it must be eventually. "We can beat her! We're the Jewel Riders, right?"

"Right!" the others chorused, and laughed again.

Then the four Jewel Riders went back to the castle. There was a lot to find out about, and a lot to prepare for.

(Anything can happen!) Trina thought excitedly, (And we're ready for the adventure, whatever it is!)

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Author's note: Hi. This is Stormdance, I have been your host for the past nineteen pages. I hope you enjoyed reading this as much as I enjoyed writing it; this is my first fanfic and I'm quite proud of it.

Before you ask, yes, the story's over. And yes, I do plan on having a sequel or two. The next story will most likely be about the search for Silverwind's friend Brightwater. It will probably feature Kale and Morgana, and maybe Shadowsong. And that's all the hinting I can do, because that's about all I know right now!

Ahywho, please please mail me with your comments! My addy is [mbaring@powernet.net](mailto:mbaring@powernet.net) since I figure you don't want to scroll all the way back up. : )  
Shade and sweet water, wind to thy wings!

--Stormdance

Starstone chapter two, by Stormdance.

Disclaimer: Everyone you've seen on TV belongs to Amazin' Entertainment and/or Robert Mandell as far as I know. Trina, Silverwind, and Dare are mine. I'm not making any money off this, but if I get any job offers to be a script-writer I'll consider 'em.

Author's note: See, told you guys there was going to be a sequel. Anywho, this starts a few weeks after the end of chapter one. Comments, questions, fanmail, requests for guest stars? Mail me, [mbaring@powernet.net](mailto:mbaring@powernet.net) I don't bite, the worst I'll do is talk your ears off. :)

And if fanfics are worthy of dedications, this one's for Clea.

Starstone chapter two, Morgana Puts a Plot on to Boil

Princess Kale of Avalon was not a happy camper. She had been floating in the wild magic for far too long and was more than ready to get back to Avalon and back to her life.

“Ooooh, I'll make those Jewel Riders pay for this! When I get out of here Avalon will be mine and the Jewel Brats can be exiled to this lovely garden spot.” Kale ranted as she often did. It would have been more impressive if there had been anyone to hear her, but the twisting threads of wild magic were unbothered by Kale's shouting. Suddenly the Darkstone in her hand glittered and started pulling. Kale yelped and hung on; she didn't want to lose her jewel. “Stop, you stupid hunk of rock! Where are you taking me? Stooooooooop!” The Darkstone didn't listen. Instead it towed the protesting princess through the magic in a definite direction.

“You'd better be taking me somewhere useful or I'll melt you with your own magic, you. . . .” Kale's angry shouting cut off when she saw where the jewel was leading her. A

dome shaped island floated in the magic. It was covered with glittering trees and buildings. “\*What\* is \*that\*?” Kale demanded of her jewel. It answered by jerking out of her hand and flying down to the island. Kale followed it down.

The jeweled island was covered with towers centered around a crystalline dome. Kale found a door in the dome and went in without knocking.

Inside, a tall woman in white robes that seemed an extension of her snowy hair, was holding the Darkstone and examining it. She turned sharply when Kale entered. “Who are you?” Her voice had an unpleasant hissing quality.

“I am Princess Kale, of Avalon. What are you doing with **my** Darkstone?”

“\*Your\* stone? Since when?”

“I found it in the wild magic, now give it to me!”

The woman made no move to return the jewel. “It has been mine since the dawn of Avalon. I created it.”

Kale put two and two together. “You’re one of the old wizards!”

The woman laughed, “I am Morgana, greatest of Avalon’s wizards!” Kale gaped but Morgana went on, “So how is my **dear** Merlin these days?”

Kale smiled proudly, “I removed **Merlin** from Avalon, permanently. But not before he set a trap that sent me here.”

Morgana smiled coldly, “So you have no love for Merlin.”

“None.” Kale gave a sudden yank with her magic and the Darkstone flew to her hand.

“Hah! I told you, this is **my** jewel.”

Morgana scowled at her, “For now I guess it is. Tell me of Avalon, who rules there now?”

“My sister Anya. It was almost me, if not for \*Merlin\*.”

The wizard turned away for a moment, and Kale noticed her ears were pointed. “Would you like to go back, now, with Merlin out of the way?”

“You can do that?” Kale asked, covering her eagerness.

Morgana was not fooled. “I can try. But it will only work for short periods of time. You must find for me books of spells, and certain magic jewels, so I can return both of us to Avalon permanently.”

“All right, you have a deal.” (For now.)

“But first you must tell me what has happened in the centuries I’ve been away. How are things in Avalon? What has Merlin been up to?”

“Well, the Jewel Riders are his finest achievement. . . .”

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The four Jewel Riders were posing in front of the big mirror in the princess’ room. They were all dressed up as fancy as they could manage, getting ready for the Friendship Ceremony and party to celebrate Trina’s joining the Jewel Riders.

“We look just dreamy!” Gwen, also known as Princess Gwenevere, announced with a giggle.

Fallon snorted. “Gwen, can’t you find some other word to use?”

“Well it’s true.” Gwen replied, not at all offended.

“I agree.” Trina said, fiddling with her hair, “Except that I look totally fourteen in these pigtails.”

Tamara mock-slapped her hand away. “You look very nice, actually. And anyway, you **are** fourteen.”

Trina sighed, “That’s the problem. I’m a kid from a nowhere little village. They’re never going to take me seriously.”

“Sure they will.” Fallon told her, “Or if they don’t, just zap ‘em with your jewel. That’s what I did.”

Trina gaped. “You never!”

“She did!” Tamara began, when Archie fluttered into the room.

“Are you ready? The ceremony is about to begin.” The owl herded them out through the gardens to the Friendship Ring. It was full of people; half of Avalon had turned out for this event. The talking slowly quieted as the Jewel Riders came in, Trina with Gwen and Fallon, and Tamara leading the animals.

This ceremony would be partly an act; Trina’s animal friend had already been chosen, and she had already been picked by the Starstone. But the people of Avalon expected a show, and they were going to get one. Trina stood straighter and held her head up proudly, pigtails or no.

In the Center of the Friendship Ring was a sort of round stage, where the King and Queen waited with their animal friends. There was also a thin pillar above which floated the Starstone. The jewel drew all eyes, and nobody could have failed to notice that its aqua color matched the trim on Trina’s dress and the ribbons in her hair.

As the Jewel Riders reached the stage, Queen Anya held up her hands for quiet.

“Welcome, people of Avalon.” She announced, “We gather here today to bring a new friend into the ranks of the Jewel Riders. .”

“Nervous?” Gwen whispered under the cover of her mother’s speech.

“A little.” Trina shrugged, “Just stage fright.”

“I had it worse, you know the Starstone works for you.”

Trina nodded, she’d heard the story. “I wish my parents could be here. They’d be so proud.” She was smiling, happy instead of sad about her parents. Gwen smiled back.

The Queen finished her speech and everyone cheered. Trina grinned nervously and stood up. Everybody was looking at her, so she waved and called a greeting to them. Most of the audience smiled, and some waved back. Trina went and took her jewel, holding it up for everyone to see. They cheered. This was fun.

Tamara was standing by the other gate with the animals. One was a graceful winged dragon, one a gryphon, and the third a little unicorn mare, silver an aqua with kitelike wings. Her appearance was causing almost as much of a stir as Sunstar had when she first showed up. Unicorns with wings were very rare in Avalon.

Trina walked over and held the Starstone before the dragon and the gryphon. It didn’t react. The two creatures bowed their heads in disappointment, though they’d known they wouldn’t be chosen.

“Ready to be famous, horseface?” Trina whispered to the unicorn. Silverwind laughed and nodded. Trina held up her jewel—and suddenly there were two Starstones, one in her hand and one on the unicorn’s fancy jewel armor—which had just appeared. Trina twirled around to show off her own armor and everyone **really** cheered.

Then the other Jewel Riders stepped forward, enchanted jewels held high. “Friends together, friends forever!” They cried together. Trina felt her heart overflow. She was home.

There was a sudden flash of light, and Merlin appeared in his swirly glow of magic. “Hello, people of Avalon. Hello, Starstone Rider.”

“Hello Merlin.” Trina grinned and curtsied, to happy to be shy even in the presence of the great wizard.

“Do you have news for us, Merlin?” the Queen asked.

“Only that the Starstone has chosen well. There need be no fears that the new Jewel Rider is less honorable or wise than the others.

Trina smirked for an instant. (Told you!) she thought. But Merlin was continuing.

“In very deed, I could not have better chosen a fourth defender for our kingdom. And Avalon will need all its defenders. Lady Delina is not the only one who would bring things out of the wild magic, and worse creatures than Kale are exiled there. So be wary my friends, and above all believe in the power of good in all of us.” With that Merlin smiled, winked at Trina, and faded out.

Everybody started chattering. “Threat to the kingdom?” “Wild magic?” “Who would--?” “How--?”

Trina looked questioningly at her friends.

“Merlin’s a wise guy.” Drake explained, “If he says there’s gonna’ be trouble, you can bet there will be. We never get a break in this job! First the crown jewels, then chasing down Delina’s pet magicians, which we **just** finished with—“

“At least we’re not in danger of boredom.” Fallon said cheerfully.

Tamara looked much less cheerful, but before she could comment, the King stood up and raised his hands for silence. “This is disturbing news. But Merlin would have warned us if there was danger at this moment. Planning will begin tomorrow, for now we have something to celebrate.”

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Later that evening the party really got underway. There was music and dancing in the ballroom, and lanterns lit in all the gardens of the castle.

Trina was hiding by the refreshments table, a little shy among all these rich and important grown ups. She was more than content to just watch them sail by, making mental notes about clothes and styles while she sipped some punch. She glanced around for the other Jewel Riders. Gwen and Drake were dancing together, oblivious to the admiring looks they were getting. Fallon was talking to her parents. Tamara and Max were in with a whole crowd of younger nobles, and Josh was nowhere to be seen.

Trina grinned suddenly and reached up to finger her necklace. It was a string of real pearls that king Jared had brought back from his trip to the island kingdom of Ocana. Trina was still giddy with the idea that **she**, an orphan brat from a nowhere village, had an enchanted jewel and a present from the King of all Avalon. It was just too cool!

“Starstone Rider?” A voice said. Trina squeaked and returned to reality.

“Yeah, that’s me.” She said, knowing it wasn’t super-tactful, but it was the best she could do.

“You looked lonely, want to dance?” The voice belonged to one of the **cutest** guys Trina had ever set eyes on. It was a classic line, but his voice sounded honest and not like he was trying to charm her.

“All right. But I warn you I’m not very good at it, and that’s **not** false modesty.”

“He smiled, “I am good, and that isn’t either. I’m Dare—Darryn, from Cliffside Keep.”

“Trina. From Last Village, and you don’t have to pretend you’ve heard of it.”

“I hadn’t, until this mess with Lady Delina hit the headlines. Are you allowed to tell the whole story? I only know what was in the papers.”

Trina looked cautious, “Ye-es, most of it.”

“Sorry, probably shouldn’t have asked. I’m a bored younger son and curiosity is my besetting weakness.” He made a woe-is-me pose and Trina laughed. “Hey, have you ever heard this song? It’s really good.”

Trina let Dare escort her out to the dance floor, where they talked about music during the slow songs and laughed at the overdressed nobles during the fast ones. Dare was a good dancer, good enough to make up for Trina’s inexperience. He was also a good conversationalist with a wicked sense of humor. Trina was having a grand time, seeing how the other young ladies there were looking at her. (He’s cuter than Drake.) Trina grinned to herself, (And Drake’s taken but Dare’s all mine. Not that I’m falling for him or anything.)

A few songs later they ended up out in the garden, sitting on a bench and talking. “. . . So that’s the roundabout story of how I got here. Nothing very interesting or heroic.”

“Well meeting evil magic-monsters and dragons is more heroic than anything I’ve done yet.

“The dragon wasn’t evil, I think, just dumb. The magic-monster, well, we would’ve run away if we could, but we couldn’t. My advice is to have a safe quiet life ‘cause heroic stuff’s pretty scary when it’s actually happening.”

“So says the Jewel Rider who gets to be heroic for a living.” Dare laughed.

Trina grinned and shrugged. “Fate happens. So what’s your story?”

“Not much of one. My brother Egael runs the Keep since Father died, so he gets invitations to all the big parties. I tag along just in case another Forest Stone turns up and decides to pick me.”

“You want to join the Pack?”

Dare nodded, “Hey, what’s wrong with that?”

“You’re crazy! That just better not be the only reason you asked me to dance.”

“Hey, it wasn’t, I swear!” He protested, looking so comical that Trina was having a hard time not laughing.

“That’s the second time you said ‘hey’.” She informed him, and started giggling.

“So why am I crazy to want to join the Pack? A jewel turned up for you, didn’t it?”

Trina wondered about him but couldn’t put her finger on just what she was wondering. “Yeah. But there already are four Forest Stones, for Drake and Josh and Max and the King. And I don’t think any of them are going to retire. Maybe there’s other jewels around someplace, I dunno. You could ask the princess. But one thing I know is you need an animal friend to be Jewel Riders.”

“I know.” He looked wistful for a moment, almost lonely. “So how do you get an animal friend?”

Trina realized how impossible it would be to explain. “It just kind of happens.” She said helplessly.

Dare nodded, then suddenly lifted his head and listened, “I think I’ve been missed. I gotta’ go, I’ll save the last dance for you!” He grinned a cocky smile that was completely at odds with how serious he’d been, and went back inside.

Trina stared after him, frowning.

(Trina? What’s wrong?) Silverwind had come up behind her.

“Oh, I don’t know. There’s something about that guy. But I don’t know **what**.”

Trina growled, annoyed that she couldn’t figure it out.

(He’ll probably be gone by tomorrow.) the unicorn commented, as if to see what Trina’s reaction would be. What she did was scowl fiercely and drum her fingers on the bench. “I’ll go crazy trying to figure it out. I think, he sounded so honest. Is anyone at court honest? I doubt it.”

(Cynic.) Silverwind accused her.

Trina wasn’t listening. “I’ll see if Gwen knows anything about him. Hey, did you see—“

(What?)

“Thought I saw someone...” Trina murmured, standing up and looking hard into the deeper shadows in the garden.

Just then they heard major chaos from the ballroom and ran to see what it was. The partiers were shouting and running in all directions from a greenish mist that was suddenly billowing from the center of the room. Dark blue light, Fallon’s magic, appeared around the mist and held it in. Most of it; a wisp of the stuff drifted by Trina, and it **stank**.

“What happened?” Trina asked the world at large.”{

“Someone blew a mega magic stinkbomb on us.” It was Josh. “Everyone’s all right though.”

Everyone seemed to be. Fallon and Tamara were getting rid of the mist, while the other Jewel Riders talked with the king and queen. Trina couldn’t see Dare.

“Who could have done this?” Queen Anya was saying as Trina came up, “It was just a prank, but why?”

Silverwind spoke up, (Would the smoke be the same color as the magic that sent it?) she asked. The queen said it would, and Silverwind remarked, (That was the same color as the magic monster we met in the tunnel.)

Trina jumped, “And I saw someone outside!”

Gwen and Drake yelled “The jewel keep!” at the same time, and ran off with Trina and Silverwind chasing them.

A minute later they found the door to the jewel keep had been blasted open. There was no one in the room.

“The crown jewels—Hey, they’re still here! Drake, is anything missing?”

“... I think so, yeah. Some old books of Merlin’s. What was here?” He pointed to an empty space in an otherwise crammed bookcase.

“Oh shoot!” Gwen said, “Those were the books Merlin had hidden, the ones that show where the old wizards lived. But wat, we needed our enchanted jewels to make them work, nobody else will be able to use them!”

“Someone must be.” Trina reasoned, “Or else why steal them?”

“You’ve got a point.” Drake agreed.

“We need to have a Jewel Riders meeting.” Gwen said, “I’ll go get the others.”

With the princess gone, Trina took the opportunity to explore the jewel keep. Silverwind followed her, asking questions that Trina didn't know the answer to.

Hey cool!" Trina picked up a red jewel cleverly carved in the shape of a flame. She yelped and almost dropped it when the stone turned into **real** fire in her hand. "Drake, what is this? It burns but it's not hot."

Drake had been looking at a book. "Huh? Oh, that's a fire stone. It gets hot if you're angry."

"Oh." Trina carefully put the stone down and decided to be **really** careful what she touched in here. Drake noticed she was curious, and showed off various jewels until the others came in. In fact, Fallon almost got fried by the lightning jewel he was demonstrating.

When the little fight that caused was over, they got down to business. "What were the books for, do you know for sure?" Trina asked.

"Not totally for sure, but the one with the darkstone on it showed how to get to Morgana's lair." Gwen explained, "We assumed the other ones lead to other wizard lairs, but Merlin said we shouldn't fiddle with them, so we didn't."

Tamara was walking around playing with various jewels. "Not smart to argue with a powerful wizard. The problem is—"

"That nobody can use the maps without our enchanted jewels." Fallon finished for her. "Hey, do you think they might try to steal our jewels?"

"I don't think they could." Tamara replied.

Trina frowned, "If Merlin had these books back when the ancient wizards were alive, wasn't that before our jewel were found? Maybe there's another way to work the books with any magic jewel."

"That's a good idea." Tamara leaned against the wall, thinking. "Yes!" She exclaimed suddenly, "Wizard's jewels **could** do things that other jewels were made to do. Like Merlin's jewel opened the queen's safe when Anya was away. Usually it only opened when she magicked it with the Sunstone.

Drake spoke up, "Question is, was it an ordinary thief who just wanted something to sell, or does he want to start tracking down wizard lairs?"

"If I were a thief, I'd take the jewels. They look much more valuable." Fallon said, "I think it's a safe bet that whoever it is wants to find the wizard lairs. So what are we going to do about it?"

"The projector!" Gwen said suddenly, "I forgot all about it! It's back at Merlin's house, come on!"

Trina only had about half a clue what they were talking about, but she joined the mad rush to the door.

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Lady Kale was pleased. Normally hunting around a wizard's house in the dead of night was at the bottom of her list of fun things to do, but in this case what she was looking for would reveal the locations of the old wizard's workshops, and who knew what kind of fun magic stuff they might have left behind?

Suddenly she heard voices outside. And one of them was definitely the princess.

“Blast!” Kale whispered, “Morgana, the Jewel Riders are here!”

“So find the thing quickly!” Morgana’s voice hissed.

Kale spotted the round projector on top of a cabinet. She fetched it with her magic, then crept to the window.

“What are you doing?” Morgana’s disembodied voice asked sharply.

“I want to get a look at them, see what my niece is up to these days.” Morgana didn’t answer, and Kale peered out the window. Josh and Max were in sight, on their wolves. With them was someone Kale had never seen before; a girl with pale hair in aqua jewel armor, riding a strange looking unicorn. “Who in Avalon is that?” Kale whispered angrily.

“Who cares?” Morgana answered, “Do you want me to bring you back or not?”

“Ye—wait! She has an enchanted jewel!” Kale watched in disbelief as the girl heald up her jewel and yelled something. There was a flash of white light and the chair Kale had blocked the door with slid aside. “Yes bring me back.” Kale whispered as fast as she could. She vanished in a purple glow, just before the Jewel Riders came in.

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“Great job on the door, Trina. Did you know your jewel could do that?” Gwen asked.

“Nope!” Trina said cheerfully, “But I do now!”

Tamara was looking around the front room of Merlin’s house. “We’re too late, The projector’s gone.”

Fallon turned on some lights. The place had been searched; it looked like a dump. “I thought I sensed wild magic just as I came in, but I could be imagining it.”

“No, I felt it too.” Gwen said, absently starting to neaten up. “I think that’s how our burgler got out. But without Travel Trees the only place you can go by wild magic is . . . into the magic! Do you think that’s what Merlin meant?”

“If it is, he sure didn’t leave us much time.” Tamara said. “Archie, is anything els missing?”

The owl was riding on Fallon’s shoulder and looking annoyed at the mess. “I don’t think so, but with everything so mixed up it’s hard to tell.”

“So what now, we call a magic-sniffer dog?” Trina asked.

“No, we go back to the party before we’re too much missed.” Fallon said, “Archie, you stay here and look for clues.”

“Oh all right, I suppose you must keep up appearances.” The owl grumbled, “But what am I supposed to do if the thief comes back, hmmm?”

Tina smirked at him, “Owls have wings, right?”

“Oh yes. “ Archie said sarcastically, “But much good that would do me if it was Lady Kale with her flying dragonwagon and her dweasel pets and. . .”

The Jewel Riders were already leaving; Archie’s complaints faded behind them in the forest.

“I wonder if it could be Kale.” Gwen said, “There was no sign of her or her animals when we raided Delina’s castle. I don’t think they had time to get her, but who knows fior sure.”

“Her main wizard didn’t have a clue.” Fallon said. “Even the people at the university have trouble getting stuff out of the wild magic, so he could never have managed it.”

Tamara overrode their discussion, “We’ll know soon enough. Think, don’t guess.”

Trina was already thinking. About wizard lairs, and thieves, and boys with silver-grey eyes....

(Not even Jewel Riders for a day and already there’s a mystery going on. Ask Gwenevere if this is normal.” Silverwind said.

Trina giggled, “Gwen, ‘Wind wants to know if being Jewel Riders is always so hectic.”

“Usually.” The princess answered with a smile, and Sunstar came over to walk next to Silverwind.

“Oh hey, do you know anything about a guy named Darryn?”

“Black hair, gorgeous?” Gwen asked. Trina nodded and she went on, “Not much. He seems nice, his brother certainly is. No one really knows him.”

“He’s the one who came to ask King Jared if he could join the Pack.” Tamara called from where she was riding double with Fallon.

“Oh yeah, and that. Why, you **like** him? So do half the girls at court and he doesn’t pay any attention to them.”

Trina made a face. “You and horseface here! I did not fall for him! We were talking, he seemed nice. More. . . honest than a lot of the nobles.”

“Yeah, he could be.”

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“Trina.”

Trina opened her eyes. Her room was pitch black. The moon must have set.

“Trina!” The voice said again, more insistently.

“What? Who’s there?” Trina asked confusedly.

“Never mind. This is important. The Vale of the Unicorns. That’s where she’s going to go next.”

“What’re you talking about?”

“M—“ the voice broke off with a gasp, then went on, “The one who’s causing all the trouble. The wizard. The Vale of the Unicorns, can you tell the others? Be ready?”

“I’ll tell them, but who are you? What—“ She reached out to feel if anyone was there. Her fingers brushed something soft, and she yanked them back.

Trina heard a small sound that might have been the door closing, and the presence of someone else in her room had faded. Whoever it had been was gone.

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“There was someone in my room last night.” Trina informed the others at breakfast.

(A burglar?) Cleo asked, via Tamara.

“No, he didn’t take any of my stuff and that’s what burglars usually do. In fact he left me something.” She pulled a coil of gold satin ribbon out of her pocket. It seemed to shimmer in the sunlight through the skylights.

Gwen looked at it, frowning thoughtfully. “I don’t know who it could have been, but I don’t think dreams leave presents.”

“He also said the bad guy is a wizard, and where she would be next. The Vale of the Unicorns he said to tell you.” Trina absently rolled the ribbon a little tighter and put it in her pocket.

Fallon looked up suddenly, “That’s strange! Moondance got a message from her mother last night, there’s some weird stuff happening there. Should we check it out?”

“Well of course!” Gwen said.

Tamara nodded, “Well of course. I had another idea, the only wizards I know are the ones Merlin banished, and they went into the wild magic. So why don’t some of us go to Wizard’s peak?”

“Hey, you’re right!” Gwen said, peeling a banana, “There were lots of books there we didn’t get to read.”

“We **were** a little busy.” Fallon laughed. “So who’s for what team? I’d like to check out Wizard’s Peak myself and so would Moondance.”

“I’ll come with you,” Gwen offered.

“That leaves us for the Vale,” Tamara said to Trina, “That OK with you?”

“Very OK!” Trina exclaimed.

The princess looked around at them, “Well meet at the Travel Trees in a few hours, if you’re all ready by then.” Gwen said, and everyone picked up their breakfasts and went to get ready.

For Trina, that meant talking to Silverwind. The unicorn was out in the gardens with Sunstar and Moondance. She came over as soon as she saw Trina approaching.

“Wind,” Trina began, “We’re going to the Vale. We just decided.”

Silverwind thought about it while Trina gave her an apple smuggled out from breakfast. (It’s all right.) she said finally, (I have to tell the Unicorn queen about my family sooner or later. Best not to put it off.)

“You sound so teacherish. Don’t worry, it’ll work out fine.” Trina mock-scolded. (I hope so. Hey, come up here, let’s try the flying experiment.)

Trina groaned, but climbed onto a piece of statuary and then to Silverwind’s back. The flying experiment was to see if Silverwind could carry Trina in the air, and Trina had been putting it off. “Don’t hurt yourself, horseface. Those kites of yours don’t look as strong as Sunstar’s feather things.”

(I’ll be careful.) Silverwind promised. Then she fanned her wings and leaped into the air. Trina hung on tight and wished she were back on the ground.

“You’re about as stable as that dragonwagon! How high are we?”

(Why don’t you look?) Silverwind teased, (You’re not going to fall.)

“Easy for you to say, you’re the one with the wings.” Trina muttered, and opened her eyes to see they were level with the palace roof. “Are you sure this is safe?”

(I’m sure. I wouldn’t want to try it with two of you, but one is easy.)

Trina sat up straighter and looked around. “This is kinda’ cool, but don’t ‘spect me to come up here every day!”

(Hang on!) Silverwind tilted her wings a little and suddenly they were zooming down through the rose path in the garden. Trina shrieked with excitement, this was fun!

Josh and Stormrunner were playing in one garden; Josh stared at them and called, “Hey, lookin’ good you two!” as they flashed by.

Trina waved at him, then asked Silverwind to land so she could go inside and finish getting ready to go.

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More authorial rantings: OK, that’s it for chapter 2, see you in 3 when we’ll see lots of unicorns and Tamara will meet someone you might recognize. Chapters 4 and 5 are flashbacks of a sort to a darker time for Avalon, and most particularly for its last Starstone Rider....

I ought to make up a more jewel-ish goodbye, but ‘till I come up with one....

Wind to thy wings,

--Stormdance

Anja 1, a story of the Jewel Riders, by Stormdance.

Claimer: Everyone in here belongs to me, except for Merlin who belongs to history.

Author's note: You can tell a story is getting out of control when I start playing with alternate versions, or playing with time. This, ladies and gentlemen, is playing with time. But it's still part of Trina's story.

Starstone: Anja

Trina woke up suddenly, disoriented and surprised. There was a light in her room. Not candlelight. Something blue-white, like moonlight but brighter. Trina sat up in her bed and stared at it.

There was a person there, shining like a star. A girl, older than Tamara, with short hair like bronze satin.

Trina frowned at her. "You're the second nocturnal visitor I've had since all this started. We Jewel Riders need our sleep, y'know."

"I know." It was only then Trina noticed what the girl was wearing. Jewel armor. And—"Hey, that's **my**—" Trina stopped, seeing her Starstone was still on the bedside table where she'd left it.

"Of course it's your jewel." The apparition said, "And mine too. I'm the Starstone Rider, the last one, before you."

Trina was staring, openmouthed with surprise. "Anja." She said finally, "You're Anja. But, um, what are you doing here?"

Anja sat down backwards on Trina's chair. She rested her chin on her hands and looked thoughtful. "I came back to help you. It's been a long time since I've been alive, and even Merlin forgets things. Our Jewel can guide through time, did you know that?"

"No. Can I come back and visit you?"

"Hmm. Maybe, but you didn't. I would remember, see?"

Just then a mental yell came from Silverwind's room. (Trina! There's--)

"I know." Trina called back, "Anja's in here."

There was a clatter as Silverwind knocked something over, then the unicorn appeared in the doorway. She looked at Trina and their visitor. (Hullo Anja.) Silverwind said at last, calmly, (Is he with you?)

There was someone next to Silverwind. A brown gryphon, tall enough that his beak was about on level with the tip of Silverwind's horn.

Anja sighed. "Yes, he's with me. Woodsong, this is Trina and the poor creature you scared half out of her wits is called Silverwind."

Silverwind neighed, protesting that she had **not** been scared. Anja grinned, a startling expression on her solemn-looking face.

"This is the awkward part, the introductions." She said, "Do you believe I'm really me?"

Silverwind nodded and Trina said, "You're Anja all right."

Good." Anja said, "Now, Trina. You're doing great with our enchanted jewel. Getting Merlin's door open was genius, how did you do it?" She sounded, not awed, but like an admiring teacher.

Trina thought back. "I wanted it to open and then I just heard my voice say star-key-power. It was strange, I didn't know what I was saying before I said it."

Silverwind nodded, (It was strange, all right.)

Anja nodded, "You found one of the keywords. There are a lot of them, words that unlock the Starstone's powers. The first one I learned is a following trick, it makes a glowing trail where a certain person has been. I'll show you all that I know. But first I think I need to tell you what you're up against." Her face clouded with worry and old grief.

"But, um, how do you know? I mean you're kind of, um, well. . . ." Trina trailed off uncertainly.

"Dead? Yeah I am, but people who are noble and true enough to be Jewel Riders can make visits back here if they want. Since our jewel was found I've been in Avalon, watching. So I know who your enemy is. Morgana." She said it with cold finality.

"**Morgana**!?" Trina exclaimed, "You mean that was really *\*the\** Morgana?"

"The very same. She **isn't** dead, and she wants Avalon. It's because of her, sort of, that our jewel was lost. Did Merlin tell you about that?"

(No!) Silverwind said, (Merlin hasn't been able to tell us very much at all, and The books in the library are missing a lot. Tri, I'm going to listen from my room, all right?) She vanished back to her bed, and Woodsong came to sit beside his rider.

After a moment, Anja sighed and said, "Then I guess that's the first thing I'll have to show you. About Morgana—and Anavey." And Anja and Woodsong faded out.

Trina looked around in puzzlement, "Anja? You still here? **Anja**?"

She waited for them until she couldn't keep her eyes open anymore, then she shrugged, and curled up and fell asleep. And right into the dream.

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She knew it was a dream because she wasn't herself, and you can only be someone besides yourself in dreams. Or maybe if you're possessed, but this was a dream. But then there were more important things to think about than who she was, because if anyone noticed she'd zoned out in the middle of class—

"Anja?" said a voice, "You still with us?"

"Yeah, I'm fine Iris." She answered automatically. The Moonstone Rider was a blur of midnight blue dress and silvery hair. Iris claimed the hair was natural, and it certainly looked striking because her animal partner, Fairfrost, was exactly the same color. Iris was leaning against the great cat's side as they listened to Merlin's lecture..

Evidently there had been a question; Anavey was shaking back her bronze mane and saying, "Faery wraiths will only come out for those who are generous and pure of heart. Unlike **wraith** wraiths, who come out for anybody."

"There aren't any more evil wraiths, Anavey. Arthur's son Robert killed the last of them." Bettina added. The Heartstone Rider seemed to be looking straight at Anavey; it was easy to forget she was blind. For once, not one of Bettina's animal friends was with her.

"That's right, Bettina." Merlin said, "But there is another power in the forest of Arden. The Prince of the Forest is a great beast with a good heart. He uses the jewel of the wizard Teradia."

"Who's Teradia?" Anja asked, "Is she banished?"

"Yes." Merlin answered her, "Teradia helped Morgana bring the evil wraiths to the Northwoods. But her jewel was tuned to goodness and now it protects the forest."

Anavey asked about tuning jewels, and Anja took the opportunity to study her sister. They looked as different as identical twins could. Anavey wore her hair long, a curly mane down to her waist, and she was wearing long silky robes that moved a little in the breeze. Anja herself was wearing riding leathers and boots, her usual clothes. Anja was used to being outshone by her twin; at parties Anavey's only competition was princess Illyria, and Illyria was **beautiful**. Just now Illyria was also gone, on a tour of the kingdom with her mother.

"Anja."

"Oh sorry Merlin. I'm listening."

Merlin smiled, "Then what did I just say?"

"Um. . . ." Anja replied, and everyone laughed.

"I'll explain it, Merlin. Anj, you and your sister are going to the forest of Arden." Iris said.

"What? Why?"

It was Anavey who answered, "To see what happens. Merlin was very secretive, but I think we're supposed to meet our animal friends." She said this serenely ignoring the wizard, but then her face darkened. "Or one of us is."

Anja wasn't sure what to say to that. She knew that sometime it had to be decided which of them would get the Starstone. And Anja was far from certain that it would be her, and in any case their friendship would probably be over. But that was for the future to decide, she told herself firmly.

"Hel-lo, An-ja!" Anavey said, we're leaving tonight, you comin' or what?"

"Yeah, coming..."

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Anja and Anavey stood back to back in the forest of Arden. It was beautiful. The late afternoon sunlight fell in golden streams through the trees. Berries glinted up through tangled bushes and briers.

Anja took two steps, sat down in the grass, and picked a blackberry. "I see we won't be hungry." She said, popping it in her mouth and reaching for another.

Anavey was wandering around looking at things. "What now, we explore?"

"I guess."

"We should split up."

"OK." Anja said shortly. "Into the jaws of destiny, huh?"

"Must you say it has \*jaws\*? I've got too much to do to be eaten right now."

Anja groaned. "You always say that. I'm going this way. See ya'." Abruptly, Anja turned and walked off. She'd just had a premonition of just which of them was worthy to be a Jewel Rider. She walked blindly for a few seconds before reason reasserted itself and forced her to stop and check her weapons. Her knife was secure in its sheath, and her bow strung. They wouldn't be a match for a really big monster, but hopefully she could avoid those. Then Anja heard something. She stopped in the middle of tightening the straps on her knife, and listened. It was a high keening noise, some creature wailing in pain or grief. Anja went to see if she could help.

She came out of the forest quite suddenly, near the base of a high cliff. About fifty feet away from-- "Oh no," Anja whispered in horror, "Oh no."

On the ground was the crumpled body of a gryphon. The golden feathers were dull with dust, unmoving except when the wind stirred them. Standing over the body was a second gryphon, a huge brown one. He had been shrieking in grief a moment ago; now he just stood beside his mate's body, soundless and terrible.

Anja went towards him instinctively. But the instant she moved the gryphon's head came up, his beak open in challenge. "Wait!" Anja cried, "I'm a friend! What-- what happened?"

The gryphon looked her over, his dark gold eyes touching first on her bow, then her face. Finally he nodded regally.

Anja came forward slowly, shaking. The gryphon never looked away from her. Then they were facing each other over the body of his mate. "I didn't hurt her." Anja said, "Truly, I couldn't have--" She stopped, choking on tears. She saw the gryphon lady, her name had meant gold shining in the sun and she had been-- so beautiful--

(You... cry?)

Anja jolted back to reality. "Who--you? I heard you, kind of."

The gryphon thought about that. Then he bent down and picked up one gold feather. He held it out to Anja, who forgot her question in a tide of wonder. "For me?" She whispered, and took the feather. It glittered with tiny gems, glowing golden in the sunlight. Not the touch of death at all, but something else.

(people.) the gryphon said. Not a word, an image. (people here. Cold one.... hurt beloved.) the images that communicated \*that\* made Anja turn away and shut her eyes against them.

The gryphon nudged her with his head (come away.) he said, and they walked off along the cliff. After a while the gryphon spoke to her again, (you help?) the image was

of Anja shooting arrows at people, and of the gryphon pouncing on them and carrying them away.

"You want revenge!" Anja gasped "I-- I'll help you, but not like that! You can't just kill them!"

The beak like polished tigers eye snapped two inches from her nose, and she jumped back.

(sorry.) the gryphon said a minute later. It was more a word than anything else he'd said.

"It's OK, I'd be mad too." Anja said more calmly than she felt. "Listen, my name's Anja, what's yours?"

(Anja) he said, an image of her as well as the sound. For himself the image was of a forest tossed by a high wind, and a (?)

"Woodsong. That's how I'd say it."

Woodsong nodded; he would have liked the name very much except that he couldn't like anything. Not now. Not until he found out why his love had been slaughtered.

"All right, I'll help you. I won't kill anybody if there's a choice, but I'll help you find out why. OK?"

Woodsong nodded, his amber eyes boring into hers. Then he showed her where he thought they were; a deep cave in the cliff.

Anja was momentarily confused. "But then why do you need me?"

(you talk human.)

"Oh, of course. But wait, before we go storming in there we have to go back and find my sister.

(sister?)

"Yeah, sister. We're twins, her name's Anavey. She went this way, I think, come on." Woodsong followed, and Anja told him about herself and Anavey. "We're friends, I mean, usually we are. But there's this enchanted jewel, and one of us will get it and get to be Jewel Riders. And the other one won't."

Woodsong sent an image of two huge birds trying to land on one little nest, jostling each other for room.

"You got it." Anja said with a sour grin. She stopped for a moment to weave the gold feather through the lacings at the front of her jacket so her hands would be free. "I think Anavey's going to get the jewel, she's really better suited to all the heroics the Jewel Riders do. Oh, here are the Travel Trees, she should be around here somewhere. Anavey!" They looked, and Anja called, but Anavey didn't come.

After a few minutes Anja heard Woodsong yell her name. She scrambles through the underbrush to his side. "What? Did you find her?"

(no.) Woodsong was \*growling,\* his feathers fluffed up angrily. (great wolves, human riders. Cold one. Sister. Go, that way, together.)

"What?! The cold one and Anavey?"

(together, I will carry you, faster.)

Anja was in shock. "OK." She said, and climbed onto Woodsong's back before her mind realized it. She woke up when the gryphon kicked out his hind legs and seemed to fall upward through the trees. Green leaves and blue sky swirled around like a

kalidascope. When the world separated into \*sky\* and \*ground\* they were high in the air, as high as the cliff, and Woodsong had spotted Anavey.

Anja could see her sister's hair flaming in the light of the sunset, and her dress was a flash of color beneath them. Anavey was mounted on a great grey wolf, surrounded by soldiers on other wolves. Not soldiers, Anja realized; bandits in fancy armor. But what were they doing here?

Just the Anavey shouted and her wolf leaped at the bandits.

Anja saw the ground jump at her as Woodsong dove to join the fight. Anja could only hold on, couldn't even free a hand to draw her knife-- Woodsong grabbed a man, hurled him against the cliff. Anavey had a sword-- where had she-- a bandit ran from the great wolf Anavey rode. Anja nearly fell as Woodsong spun to grab a club from a man and-- the wolf snapped his fangs on someone's arm-- Anavey's sword flashed-- Anja could only hold on.

The battle was a nightmare. Then it was over. They had won. The bandits seemed to have gotten clean away; Anja found herself grateful they'd all survived. Anja was only bruised; Woodsong had got some slashes, but nothing too deep. Anavey's dress was in ribbons, but she seemed all right.

"Anja!" Anavey shrieked, dropping her sword like it was red hot. "How did you get here, what's \*that\*?"

"That's a gryphon, his name's Woodsong. 'Vey, talk to me-- sensibly." Anja ordered her twin.

"OK. I heard a noise and went to see what it was. They recognized me somehow, and just grabbed me and stuck me on Greatheart here. We were going back to their hideout, that cave, when you came."

"Wait, you know his name?"

"You know \*his\* name?" Anavey shot back.

They looked at each other. "That's not.. we weren't both supposed to..." Anja said incoherently.

Anavey tried to comfort her, "Anj, Merlin knows what he's doing. I bet there's a way we can both be Jewel Riders and he just wanted to surprise us. It'll be all right."

It was on those very words. A flash of white light, and when Anja cleared her eyes, there was a woman standing on the ledge above them. A woman with long white hair, in a white dress.

Woodsong screeched and reared up, nearly unseating Anja.

The woman stared down at them. "Anavey Reshani. Anja Reshani. Pleased to finally meet you."

How did she know our names??

"Who are you?" Anja demanded.

(the cold one!)

"Morgana is my name. I knew your mother."

What??

Anavey sat straight up, transforming from a scared girl into a slightly ruffled queen.

"Who is our other?" she asked haughtily.

Behind Morgana something was growing, a living cloud of dirty white. "She was a wizard like myself." Morgana matched Anavey's tone.

Anja hadn't realized. "You're \*the\* Morgana? The one who..."

She sure is. I think we're dead.

Anja held on with her knees and got her bow out. The white mass behind Morgana was swirling, curling around the wizard.

Anavey and Greatheart were backing away slowly. "What do you want, Morgana?"

"I want Avalon!" the wizard hissed, "And I want you!"

The white thing suddenly shot out tentacles at them. Anja gasped as one of them snaked around her arms, sending the bow clattering to the ground. Another strand caught her around the waist as she tried to get her arms free.

Anavey screamed. Anja glanced over; her sister was in trouble. Morgana has Anavey by the neck and Greatheart too, and was dragging them forward.

Woodsong tried to claw himself free. It wasn't working. "This isn't working!"

Anja whispered, "Wait-- I have an idea--" She pulled against the ropes and barely managed to grab the golden feather. "Come on-- we hafta' try-- magic-- this might just--" She got out. The white tentacle was pulling tight around her middle.

And then Anja focused on the feather, and the spell she half remembered. Ignoring the white stuff, ignoring Morgana, ignoring Anavey. She'd seen Iris and Fairfrost do this once. 'strength of heart is strength of magic, and with love amazing things can happen.' The Moonstone rider's voice said in her memory. Anja felt Woodsong join her. And then. Gold light seemed to pour down Anja's arms, and suddenly she was slicing through the white threads with something that looked like a gold sword.

"Stop." Said a voice. Morgana.

Anja's wild joy fell to pieces. Anavey was next to Morgana, struggling to get out of the white stuff but not having any luck. Anavey's wolf was in the same mess.

"Let them go!" Anja ordered the wizard, brandishing her weapon.

"And why should I?" Morgana hissed, "One sister is better than none."

The white threads started glowing brightly. Anja realized and Woodsong leaped to stop them.

Too late. Morgana had vanished. And the wolf. And Anavey.

Anja shrieked and jumped off Woodsong's back, barely noticing when her shining sword turned back into a feather. She ran a little way into the tunnel and yelled into the darkness.

"Anavey? Anaveeeey!"

Only echoes returned.

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Trina woke up gasping. "Sheesh! Tha' was some dream!" She whispered into the room.

"Yeah. Be glad you weren't there for real." Said a familiar voice. Anja was back, in the same chair she'd had before but glowing much less now.

Trina looked at her steadily. "That was out of your memory. It really happened."

"Got it in one."

"I'm sorry. I mean it's..." Trina couldn't figure out how to say what she meant.

"What happened next?"

Anja shrugged, "I searched their cave, didn't find anyone. Searched the woods 'till it was too dark to see. The bandits attacked us in the dark and we had to run for the Travel Trees. We came back the next day of course, but there was no sign of Anavey or Morgana." Old sorrow echoed in her voice, "So I got to be the Starstone Rider.

Trina waited for Anja to go on, but the ghost just shrugged and said, "End of chapter one. You want to do some keywords tonight or save 'em?"

"Mmm..." Trina yawned, "Some other time, I'm beat. You will come back, right?"

"A' course. \*Someone's\* gotta' keep you out of trouble." Again that unexpected grin.

"I think that's Gwen an' Fallon an' Tamara's job." Trina commented.

"I haven't met \*them\*. Oh well, I'd better get back." Anja stood up and stretched gracefully.

"Hey Anj... If you're in the land of the dead when you're not here, can you talk to my mom and dad for me?"

Anja looked sad again, and shook her head. And started fading.

"Why not? Hey, don't vanish! Anja, get back here! Anja!"

Nothing.

Then Silverwind's voice from the next room, (You're going to wake everybody up.)

Trina scowled at the unpresent Anja. "Stupid ghost, who does she think she is!" she whispered fiercely, and pulled the covers over her head in a huff.

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To be continued.

Starstone: Anja part 2, by Stormdance

Claimer: Everybody in here belongs to me, so there! Except for Merlin, who belongs to himself. And Morgana who ain't mine either but she's an Arthurian Lore character so probably no one can copyright her.

Comments welcome at [mbaring@powernet.net](mailto:mbaring@powernet.net). Send me some, please?

Anja two

Trina was sitting by her window, reading by moonlight. It was around midnight, and the Crystal Palace was silent.

"You're up late, little sister." Said a familiar voice, and Trina turned to see her guardian spirit floating in the air.

Anja was looking very spiritish tonight, her oval face serene and her white cape blowing out behind her so it looked like she had wings.

"Hi Anja." Trina said, putting down her book, "I'm not sure I'm speaking to you after the fade you pulled last time."

Anja broke her 'enlightened spirit' image and looked sheepish. "I really can't tell you. Would if I could, truly."

Trina regarded the ghost with her best cynical expression, then shrugged. "OK, guess I believe you. So, how goes it in the spirit world?"

"Oh, same-same." Anja said, which didn't tell Trina anything. "Hey, what's that you're reading? Looks old enough that I might have read it."

"A story-- it's supposed to be true-- about the founding of Avalon."

"Wow, I never read anything that thick."

"You haven't?" It wasn't **that** thick.

Anja got defensive, "I don't read much, I'd rather be exploring.

Trina would too, actually, but she didn't say so. It was very easy for debates about books to turn into arguments when Trina was involved. "So what are we doing tonight? Keywords?"

"Yep. And then would you like to see the other half of my story?"

Trina had to think about that one. The first half of the story hadn't been fun to live through, and the second half was likely to be worse. "Yes." She said finally, "I guess I'd better; I have to know all I can about Morgana."

Anja looked at her 'little sister', a strange expression on her face, and nodded.

Trina tipped her head and looked right back. "OK then, I'll go get horseface up... 'Wind? Anja's here."

(Oh.) Silverwind replied, (Is her partner here too?)

Anja smiled her out-of-place smile, "No, he isn't."

(OK then.) Silverwind appeared from her room, her mane tangled. (Hello Anja. Could you come here in daylight next time?)

"Sorry." Anja replied, "I'm actually using Iris' Moonstone to be visible-- it's complicated. And it takes a lot of power so I can only visit when the moon's out."

"Are your friends going to show up in Gwen's and Tamara's rooms?" Trina asked suddenly, trying to imagine explaining **that** to her fellow Jewel Riders.

"Nah. They've got Merlin and the King and Queen to teach them their powers. You two, however, have me."

They talked about magic for what must have been two hours. Anja lectured a lot; she was pretty good at it.

Silverwind stood back and watched mostly. They were so different. Anja in brown leathers a few shades lighter than her hair, sleek as an otter and plain as a sparrow. Occasionally dry and by-the-book, occasionally impatient, never meaning insult. A translucent glowing spirit with ancient eyes. Trina was just the opposite, an elven child-creature with eyes that matched her jewel and milkweed-pale hair. Often ignorant, occasionally judging too quickly, never too serious. Silverwind decided that the present Starstone Rider was the better deal.

"A'right." Trina said yawning, "I can't cram in another spell. I'm for bed."

"Well good night then." Anja grinned and ruffled Trina's hair with an intangible hand. "See you soon, little sister!" She stood up very gracefully, spun around on one toe, and vanished.

(Little sister?) Silverwind murmured.

Trina shrugged, "I think she likes me."

Silverwind laughed, (I know she likes you, and so do you.)

"Hmmh. Did you ever think a real spirit could be so... I dunno, **normal**?"

(That's normal?)

"Go to bed, horseface." And, deciding that she'd figure out what she was trying to say in the morning, Trina went to bed too.

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A number-- a great number-- of years before, Anja was leaning over the railing on the balcony outside her room.

"Bright days, lady Anja!" A cheerful voice said from below her. Anja caught a flash of copper hair and green cape. "And since when am I a lady, Cyrrus?"

"Since you're turning nineteen today." Cyrrus was walking backwards across the courtyard, backwards so he could look up at Anja. "Ready to go?"

"We'll be right down... Woodsong, have you got everything?"

(I hope so.) the gryphon replied, in words. Then he came in carrying the picnic basket on one paw. Anja took the basket, climbed onto her friend's back, and summoned their armor. Then they glided down to the courtyard.

Cyrrus was waiting beside his wolf, Wildwing.

"Bright days." Anja greeted them shortly, "Bettina's staying here?"

"Yeah. With Nightranger's kits due for borning any time now she didn't want to be gone if they needed her."

"Sounds like Bettina. Should we stay and help?"

Cyrrus grinned, "I offered and was ordered to get you out of the palace and remind you there's more to life than work."

Anja gave him her best blank look, "You mean there is?"

"Wildwing, bite her." Cyrrus told his wolf, who ignored the command.

"Seriously Anje, do you even know what the city looks like?"

"Cyrrrruuuus," Anja said, drawing his name out into a threat, "The last person who teased me about having no life got a bowl of salad dumped on his head."

"I know. Illyria told me. I just wish I hadn't been on patrol-- to see his **face**..."

Cyrrus laughed and Anja cracked up too, remembering.

They were riding through New Camelot now. Kids who weren't in school came out to wave to the Jewel Riders. One of them yelled, "Happy birthday Lady Anja!", causing Anja to look around furiously for the speaker then demand to know how anyone in the city knew when her birthday was.

Cyrrus answered, "I don't know, maybe Illyria's planning a surprise party."

"Well it's not a surprise anymore. Hey, let's go out the west gate, we can get to the forest quicker."

Cyrrus gave her a sideways look then shrugged, "OK. Let's go, Wildwing." But the wolf pulled back and gestured at a vendor selling hot fruit pies. Anja had noticed at the same time, and was digging in her pouch for a coin to toss to the vendor. Cyrrus accepted two big pies, then they left the city for the forest beyond.

A quarter hour later they were lounging on sun warmed stones by a small spring.

Anja finished the last bite of her blueberries and pastry, and dipped her cup in the spring for a drink. "Ooh, that was good. You look like Fairfrost when she's had a big bowl of cream, Cyrrus."

"Heh. You should have seen her and Iris when we were at Castle Rivermist; Fairfrost made friends with the castle cats and they went on a mission to liberate the roast chickens we were supposed to be having for dinner..."

That story led to another, which led to Anja's account of the salad-on-the-head episode, then about the time Illyria set out to organize a party for her father without him

finding out about it. That tale finished with both of them laughing until they were out of breath and then getting serious.

"Yeah." Anja murmured, "That reminds me of the time Anavey got me a puppy for winter gifting. She hid him in a hatbox in her closet, I knew something was up cause 'Vey never had a hatbox before, her hats were all lined up on top of the bookcase."

"Who's-- oh yeah, your sister."

Anja nodded, "She's gone, dead prob'ly."

"I'm sorry--"

"It's OK. That was a few years ago, before you got here. So I've got lots of other memories piled on top of that one."

Cyrrus nodded and there was a long silence, "Illyria said you'd want to know, we heard a rumor that the Badlands bandits are organizing and moving towards New Camelot."

"What!" Anja exclaimed, sitting up straight. Behind her, Woodsong looked hard at Cyrrus.

"It's just a rumor! We told the king, he's checking it out."

Anja wasn't listening. She was talking quickly to Woodsong, "Ya' think... Could be, oh I hope not... Illyria, she'll let us go." Woodsong was nodding.

Cyrrus was confused, "Anje? C'mon, talk to me here, what stung your tail a'sudden?"

"Morgana used to be the leader of those bandits, I wonder if she still is." Anja said in a perfectly normal voice, but her eyes were shining with a fierce light. Then she jumped to her feet and Woodsong moved so she could mount.

"Aren't you forgetting something? Like telling me where you're going?" Cyrrus said pointedly.

"Back to the palace. See you there." Anja said, and Woodsong leaped straight up through a gap in the trees.

Cyrrus watched the gryphon hang in the air for a second, then snap open his wings and fly off.

(Hadn't we better go too, brother?" Wildwing asked, (If we want to get back in time to warn everybody.)

"Warn them?" Cyrrus asked, and vaulted from the rock to his friend's saddle.

(That their Starstone rider is like as not to blow nuclear any time now.)

"Heh. You could say that. OK, let's ride!"

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Anja was talking between the beats of Woodsong's wings, "Why didn't anybody tell me? I think Illyria would've or Iris, they know what happened."

(Fairfrost told me about it, but I didn't think it could be Morgana. Such uprisings have happened before, the guard dealt with them.) Woodsong said-- in words, thanks to their enchanted jewel.

"We'll go help the guard then. And if it is Morgana..."

(At least we can call justice on her." That was a remarkably mature answer from Woodsong, who had spent at least a year threatening extreme violence against Morgana for her crimes to him and Anja.

"What, you don't want to take her apart with your own claws anymore?"

(you're the one who said revenge is wrong.)

"True... do I have to take my own advice?"

(Yes.)

"Oh."

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Cyrrus arrived back at the palace to find that Anja had not summoned all chaos. He was greeted at the gate by Iris, her face radiant. "Hey, glad you're back! The kits were born just after you left, four of them, the cutest things!"

"That's great! They're all healthy?"

"As can be!" Iris replied, walking next to Wildwing into the palace.

"Has Anja come back?"

"Yeah, right through the skylight into the throne room. Good thing there wasn't an audience on. Whatever she's going on about sure has the royals interested, I'll bet. Do you know what it is?"

"Yes. Anja's flipped."

"Oh." Iris considered, "And this is new?"

Cyrrus sighed, "Literally this time. Anja thinks she's got a lead on where Morgana is."

"Oo-oh. And she ran off to investigate leaving you behind?"

"Yep. Now let's go see what she's up to."

They snuck up to the door of the throne room and looked in. The king and queen were on their thrones, not being regal; just sitting. Illyria was standing next to her mother, looking both worried and annoyed.

Anja was pacing the floor. She looked out of place in the throne room, especially compared to Illyria's light gold curls and blue dress. By contrast Anja looked like a very stubborn brown sparrow. "I'm going to check it out." She was saying to the king and queen of Avalon.

Their majesties talked to each other, then Queen Laren nodded, "All right Anja, We'll assign you and Woodsong to investigate what the bandits are up to and stop them if you can. But Cyrrus and Illyria are going with you."

"All right." Anja said, "Lucky you princess, you get to wander around the forest with us."

Iris judged that she and Cyrrus had been hanging in the doorway long enough. "Anje, are you being too cynical again?" she said loudly.

Anja just looked at her; Iris shrugged and muttered something about 'your girlfriend going totally wacko'

"That was my line." Cyrrus told her.

"I can hear you!" Anja sang out.

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"What are we looking for?" Illyria asked.

I can tell you what we're looking at. A scene of peace and tranquility." Anja replied, sounding grumpy. It was indeed a scene of peace. The people of the little village were going about their business as usual, with no problems to report to the Jewel Riders.

Except as they rode through the village square a man and a woman came out, arguing furiously. They heard the man say, "Are you sure it wasn't just a common wolf? We haven't had a hunt lately, one could have gotten bold."

"Bold enough to leap the fence into my garden? And smart enough to get the pie down from the second floor window?"

"Are you sure it was a wolf?" the man asked dryly.

Then they saw the Jewel Riders. The woman smiled and waved them over, "Jewel Riders, can you help me? Something broke into my house and left **pawprints**." She darted a look at Cyrrus and Wildwing. , "I'm Jaseen, I teach here."

"How big pawprints?" Cyrrus asked.

"Bigger than my two hands. In the garden and everywhere."

"Hmhmh." Cyrrus replied.

Illyria rode out from behind Woodsong, "Then it was either a person or a great wolf like Wildwing. Could we see the place?"

Jaseen and the man both looked surprised, "You're--?"

"Yes, I'm Princess Illyria. On patrol; I'm not being royal right now." It was futile. Illyria could have been the spirit of Guinevere, all blue and gold and sylph-slender.

Anja put on her officialness like putting on a coat, and took charge. No one was likely to mistake **her** for anything they ought to bow to.

They went to Jaseen's house, a tall slightly overdecorated building with a good-sized fence around it. As far as they could tell, the footprints had been made by genuine paws. Wildwing could jump the fence easily, and get up onto an overhang that had access to an upstairs window.

"Jaseen." Anja said suddenly, "Let's go up to that room, is anything else missing besides the pie you put up there?"

Jaseen led her up, babbling all the way. The teacher noticed something immediately, "My gems! I had a bag of little prisms and crystals, a few were magic. It was right here on the dresser. Now why would a wolf take a bag?"

"A wolf wouldn't." Cyrrus said from outside, "The great wolves are intelligent, but one wouldn't take something unless it had a use for it. A wolf **would** have a use for a pie." Anja heard his smile.

"Hey!" Illyria called, "I think Woodsong found something!"

Anja leaned out the window, looked down, and decided to show off. She carefully stepped out the window and walked down the overhanging roof. Then she jumped to the ground. She got a surprise when Jaseen came down the same way, and realized the teacher couldn't be much older than **she** was.

Woodsong was sniffing around the pawprints, (Familiar. Kind of. Morgana for certain.)

"He says it's Morgana!" Anja exclaimed.

"Morgana!" Jaseen yelped.

Anja ignored her. "Can you track it?"

(Yes... yes. North, into the forest.)

"In the forest, that way. Let's ride, guys."

Cyrrus found the next clue, a symbol carved into the bark of a tree. "It's a thief sign for major job offer this way."

"Are you sure?" Illyria asked, while her unicorn poked at the bark with her horn.

"Yes." Anja said, "Cyrrus showed me some thief signs and that looks like one."

"Careful Iceflower, don't mess it up." Illyria told the unicorn. Iceflower's pearly horn bobbed as she nodded, then looked over at Anja and Woodsong.

The Starstone rider was holding her jewel in her cupped hands, whispering to it. Light shone between her fingers, then a blue-white beam shot out through the trees. Anja turned to see the others watching her, "I asked it to find the person who made the sign. If we're lucky it'll lead us to their hideout, otherwise we'll have someone to question. If he doesn't move before we get there!" Woodsong made one of his straight-up leaps and flew off

Wildwing and Iceflower galloped after the airborne pair.

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(Why do they always lair in caves? I hate caves.) Woodsong commented, in between reporting back to Iceflower.

They were in a sandstone canyon, hiding in hollows in the rock. Cyrrus and Illyria were on the other side, higher up, hidden in the trees.

(Well?) Illyria asked through Woodsong.

"Tell them I'm going in." Anja told him.

(They don't like it. Neither do I, you'll be all alone.

"I can do it. You can't come though, you're hardly inconspicuous."

(Our magic hardly works when we're apart.)

"Yeah, and it was our gold stuff that beat Morgana last time." Anja bit her lip, "Well I **do** have an enchanted jewel this time around. It'll have to do. We don't have any other choice, has Illyria admitted that yet?"

Woodsong was listening, (Yes. But Cyrrus says he's going with you. Illyria would too if she could risk herself.)

Well she can't; she's the only heir we've got."

(She knows. Cyrrus is climbing down. Huh, he's good, I can't see him.

"I'd better go too." Anja murmured, "Friends forever."

(Forever.) That was all the goodbye they said, all of one that they needed.

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Their boots made little scratching sounds on the sandstone by the entrance, "Do we sneak or brazen it out?" Cyrrus asked.

Anja looked them over, "We look enough like bandits with our jewels covered. Act like we belong, with luck nobody here keeps a head count."

Nobody they passed made a fuss, so they must not have looked out of place. They passed various tunnels leading off the main entrance hall. It would be easy to get lost in this place, or buried if the roof caved in.

Deep in the mountain, the central tunnel curved. They could hear echoing space around the corner, and a woman's voice raised stridently. Her words were distorted by the walls, and what Cyrrus did hear his brain classified as military jargon.

Anja seemed to hear more. She was gripping the Starstone with one hand and her knife with the other, and whispering what could have been curses or prayers.

They turned the corner and saw a scene of carefully orchestrated chaos. It was a huge cavern that seemed to hold several weapons practices, much dashing back and forth with supplies, several huddles over maps and at least as many over dice games.

The orchestrator of all this was standing on a stone pillar pointing and giving orders. She was a surprisingly young woman but had the air of someone who expected to

be obeyed. She was wearing black hunting leathers of a cut that would have gotten her thrown out of most respectable places, and had long curly hair that reflected copper in the torchlight. There was something very familiar...

Anja was definitely cursing. She stopped long enough to say, "That's Anavey. Can you say major complication?"

"Yeah, I think that fits. So..?"

They stepped gingerly through the debris around the edge of the cavern and bent over a heap of packs, looking busy.. "I'm not sure. Can you still bespeak Wildwing?"

"Yes. Illyria's going for help." Cyrrus answered.

"I have to talk to Anavey."

"Your sis is running the show here. 'Case you hadn't noticed.

"I had. Can you think of a way to get the bandits out?"

"I can try." Cyrrus said with a flashing grin. He got out his Forest Stone and whispered to it, hiding the green light under the heap of stuff. A few moments later there was a tremendous crash from down one of the tunnels.

"What'd you **do**?" Anja asked in alarm.

"Caused a cave in. Don't worry, I didn't hurt anyone. But it'll take them a while to clean up."

Indeed, once the noise and falling rocks had stopped Anavey ordered a few bandits to inspect the damage. The room emptied as the others were either ordered to help or drifted away so they wouldn't be. Anja and Cyrrus ducked behind an archery target as Anavey suddenly ordered the stragglers out. There was silence for a few heartbeats.

Then Anavey said coolly, "You can come out now."

Anja shrugged and scrambled onto the target so she and Anavey were on the same level with ten feet of thin air between them.

"What do you want here?" Anavey asked, her voice still cold.

Anja thought of a hundred answers, most of them hysterical. "What are you doing here? Where's Morgana?"

"Around. And you'd better be gone before she gets here. As in **now**."

Not likely. Anja put on her officialness, "What is happening here? It's against the law to outfit an army without the king's knowledge."

Anavey was not impressed. She gave her sister the kind of look you'd give a hopelessly stupid person. "Anje, Merlin is old and his magic's rusty. Morgana is going to win. Which side do you want to be on?"

"I'll stick with the good guys, thanks."

"All right. If you want to get squashed that's your problem. But give me the enchanted jewel!"

"Not a chance." Anja said, deadly calm.

Her sister's face twisted with anger, "Merlin meant for me to have it!"

"I'm not saying he didn't. But that was before you decided to serve Morgana!"

"Not serve, side with. And I could take the Starstone anytime. See?" She gestured and the jewel jerked towards her, breaking the leather string Anja wore it on.

"What!" Anja gasped.

Behind her Cyrrus muttered something to the effect that he would be devoutly religious for the rest of his days if the Spirit would only get them out of here intact.

The Spirit seemed to have other ideas. The Starstone hung in the air between the two girls, spinning and flashing reflections everywhere. Anavey looked really evil. Anja was just scared.

She heard Cyrrus call to Wildwing outside.

Anja was still trying to get through to her twin. She couldn't not try, even now. "You could still come back with us, you could! Everyone missed you--"

"Go back to what? Living in your shadow? Being second best?" She whipped her hand around and a whip of dark magic followed it. Anja dove out of the way, nearly falling off her perch on the target. But the attack had broken Anavey's concentration and Anja caught her jewel.

"Midnight blast!"

Anavey shrieked and jumped off her pillar just before the top of it crumbled into pebbles and rained down on her.

Anja looked down at her. "Well, give up yet?"

"As if. That target's made of straw, you know." Cyrrus took the hint and backed away; Anja didn't and had to jump for it as the target burst into flame under her. She landed hard and gasped in pain. "OK, that hurt. Where did you get wizard powers?" They were circling each other, looking for opportunities. Anja motioned Cyrrus back; he was just as glad. There wasn't much he could do and he really didn't want to get fried.

"Midnight blast!" The blue fire flared-- and splashed against a dull white shield that appeared in the air. Anja cursed.

Morgana appeared behind Anavey. "That's enough, jewel brat." The wizard said, and shot a bolt of red lightning at her.

Anja didn't dodge fast enough. She was blasted back against the wall, stunned, the Starstone falling from her hand. Cyrrus ran to her, "Anje! You all right?"

"Feel like-- I've been hit-- by a falling tree, but I'll live." She said, trying to get her breath.

Anavey bent down and picked up the Starstone. She turned to Morgana, "We win."

"And we lose." Anja whispered, "And so does Avalon. Want me to try snatching it again?" She added absently.

"Yes!" Cyrrus hissed angrily, "Try everything!"

Anja reached out her hand and pulled with her magic. The jewel was snatched away from Anavey, but before her sister could catch it Morgana's red power lashed around the Starstone. It was an uneven fight; Morgana and Anavey had their wizard powers, and Anja only had her stubbornness and a bond with her jewel that had never been very strong.

Morgana looked impatient, "You're not going to win."

"You see sister, the winning side."

Anja made a rude suggestion to her twin, and lost another few inches.

Then there was a scratching of claws on rock. Anja's face filled with unholy glee as two-- no, three-- creatures exploded into the room growling. Two wolves and a gryphon.

Woodsong ran to Anja's side. She stood up, still grinning crazily. "This worked once. Duck, guys." She said absently. Then she rested a hand on Woodsong's back. Gold light shone where they touched, sun-bright and painful to look at.

Anavey looked panicked and made a last grab for the Starstone. Anja let go.  
"Woodsong, let's get 'em! Midnight blast! Now!"

Gold fire and blue lightning mingled and then it all exploded, with a flash and a sound like the world ending.

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Anja woke up sprawled in a pool of sunlight. There was a hole in the ceiling. She sat up and looked around. The room was full of rocks and dust. Woodsong was next to her, unhurt. Cyrrus was getting to his feet with Wildwing helping him. The other wolf, who looked vaguely familiar, was trying to wake Anavey.

Woodsong looked up at the sky and sent an image of the hole and an image of the two of them.

"Yeah, I think we did that. Hey-- why didn't you use words?"

Image of the Starstone vanishing into light.

"It's gone, huh?" She was too tired to freak out any more, "I didn't know what all that magic together would do. Acceptable risk."

Woodsong replied that she was too tired to make sense.

"Anje?" Cyrrus called to her, "You OK?"

"Yeah. I guess."

"Your sister's out cold, we need to get her to a healer. Can you take her out through the roof? I have to unblock these tunnels."

"OK." Anja said, and with a determined effort got her brain working again. She got up, coughing on the dust, and stumbled over to Anavey. The stranger wolf gave her a measuring look then stepped back. Anja got herself and her sister onto Woodsong's back and they flew out the hole and back towards civilization.

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The healers had their hands full between Anavey who was blasted and battered, and Anja who was blasted and exhausted and passed out again as soon as it was safe to do so.

So she only heard later what happened in the cavern.

Cyrrus was using his Forest Stone, convincing a tree to dig a path to the surface with its roots. It was not easy work and it took a lot of energy to make the tree work fast enough to free the trapped bandits. Where the caved-in rocks were loose enough he got them to roll aside or compress to make exits.

He had just finished when the stranger wolf looked at him and barked (Greatheart found Morgana!) Wildwing exclaimed, (And she's alive!)

"Alive under **this**? I guess she made a shield. So what do we do about it?"

(Listen.) Cyrrus heard hooves on stone and a second later sighed with relief as his friends came in.

"What have you been up to?" Illyria asked, "Who's the wolf, where's Anja?"

"I guess we missed the excitement." Iris added.

"Be glad." Cyrrus told her, "It was Morghana and--"

"Morgana?" Said a soft voice. Merlin was riding behind Bettina on her deer.

"Yes, and she's still alive. Anja brought the roof down."

Bettina raised her eyebrows, "Anja did this?"

"Her and Woodsong, I don't know how."

Cyrrus was interrupted by a clatter of rocks. Morgana got to her feet, very slowly. The wizard was covered with dust, her gown torn. She looked in even worse shape than Anja had.

Morgana got a rude awakening when she saw Merlin and the Jewel Riders were there. "Hello Merlin old friend." She said sarcastically.

"Friends no longer since you turned to doing evil." Merlin was standing tall on a rock and looking much more wizardly than Morgana

"There's no way I'm going back there to be locked up. And I can get one of you before you can get me." A thin throwing dagger had appeared in her hand; she raised it towards Bettina--

And Merlin calmly lifted up his staff. "You have been a plague on Avalon long enough." Morgana was caught in a ball of light. Then a hole opened in the air and she was pushed through it, yelling all the way. The hole closed and everyone looked at each other in surprise at this sudden ending to their battle.

"Is she gone for good?" Iris asked at last.

Merlin looked like a smiling gnome. "For a good many years at least, she won't return in your lifetimes and maybe not even in mine. Her jewel was already in the wild magic you see, that made it easy to send her there too. She is alive, but even if she finds the jewel I doubt she'll be coming back."

The explanation answered some of the questions but not all by a long shot, so everybody started asking them.

Cyrrus got in the last question, "What about Anja's jewel? Can you get it back?"

The great wizard looked at them sadly, and shook his head.

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Anja stood on her balcony watching a new day begin in Avalon, and a new day begin in her life.

She wasn't a Jewel Rider anymore. Her enchanted jewel was lost in the wild magic until chance or fate brought it back to Avalon. Until then, maybe for the rest of her life, she'd just have to deal with what happened as it happened. That was enough for anyone.

(You think too much.) Woodsong said, not words but ideas. (Our friends are here.) he added warningly, and the door opened to admit ten people and enough animals to take up all the floor space and then some. Anja laughed, "Hi guys, why so glum?"

Merlin was the only one who looked calm and collected, but then he always did.

Cyrrus spoke for the others. "Anje-- I wish you'd change your mind."

"Yeah, why are you leaving? Are you sure?"

Anja looked at all of them. Iris, hands on her hips demanding. Illyria, worried now but always understanding. Bettina, cool as Merlin but always trying to think of ways to help. The Pack, her friends and partners-in-crime. Cyrrus, who she cared a lot for. The King and Queen, who had cared enough to be parents to a pair of orphans. And the great wizard, who cared enough for everyone. There was one discordant note: Anavey, changed beyond recognition. But she was starting a new life here in New Camelot, with her old friends.

Anja was starting a new life elsewhere.

Yeah I'm really leaving. No I don't know where. Or how long. Of **course** I'll visit.

Do you have to go? Why? You'd **better** visit. I'm so sorry, I wish it could be different. I'll miss you.

I know it sounds corny but I have to find myself. Find out what 'm going to be. I'll be fine silly, no one's going to bother me with Woodsong around. If wishes were fishes, Illyria...

"You are always welcome here, all of you." The queen's look included Anavey and Greatheart as well.

"You are both true Jewel Riders." Merlin said. Anja was startled. Anavey was shocked speechless.

One by one they said their last good-byes and left. Cyrrus was the last. "I found these at the market for you." He said, handing her a big package and a small one. The big box was three berry pies and a note saying 'I think you're allowed a make-up birthday after how the last one turned out.'

The small package was a silver chain with a silver leaf and a little glass star hanging from it. Anja laughed with delight and hung it around her neck.

"With that you won't forget us-- people will always be asking where you got it! But seriously... come back when you can.

"Of course I will. You guys are my family, of course I'll come back." She couldn't think of anything else that wouldn't be saying either too much or too little, so she just smiled at Cyrrus and went to vault onto Woodsong's back. Neither of them said anything, not yet.

(Ready?)

"Ready." Anja agreed, "Let's go find someplace totally peaceful, if we're lucky the spirit will decide we deserve a vacation!"

Woodsong nodded firmly, and took off.

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In the present, Trina's dreams of flying turned into no dreams at all, and she didn't wake up until morning.

Fin.

Starstone chapter 3, by Stormdance

Disclaimer: Trina and Silverwind and anyone else I invented belongs to me, anybody else belongs to Bohbot entertainment and/or Robert Mandell; he created the show and did a darned good job and I'm not trying to steal the credit.

Starstone chapter 3, Vale of the Unicorns

“Travel Trees!” Fallon called, “Would you please take Gwen and me to Wizard’s Peak?”

“And we’d like to go to the Vale of the Unicorns.” Trina called from behind Tamara on Silverwind’s back.

The four Trees lit up, “We are pleased to be able to serve the Jewel Riders. All aboard for Wizard’s Peak!”

“Be careful.” Tamara said.

Gwen answered, “Will do. See you guys later.” Sunstar followed Moondance into the portal, and they were gone.

That doorway closed and another one opened up, “Thanks Travel Trees!” Tamara said as Silverwind leaped into the tunnel.

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Archie huddled in his wings on the back of Sunstar’s saddle. “Oh, why does Wizard’s Peak have to be so *cold*?” he lamented, looking around at the bleak mountains covered in ice, or maybe it was crystal.

“I think I see the door!” Fallon called from up ahead somewhere in the blowing snow.

“Great!” Gwen answered, “We’re freezing!”

They climbed through the broken door to the mine and made their way through the mazelike tunnels to the great Hall of Wizards.

“This would be a lot easier if we knew what we were looking for.” Gwen commented, looking around the room. The place was huge, a great cavern carved from solid rock then lined in wood panel and hung with tapestries. And cluttered with stuff that might have been magical, or might have been just junk.

Anything about the old wizards.” Fallon answered, “Who they were, their powers, where they went, anything.”

“Just stay away from that chest, it’s got a genie in it. Why don’t we check out the books?”

There were a library and a half full of books. Fallon had the feeling they were going to be here for a while.

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Silverwind’s hooves landed in soft green grass. (We’re here!) she announced. Trina and Tamara dismounted and looked around the beautiful meadowland that surrounded the Travel Tree ring.

Their arrival was noticed already. Three young unicorns pranced up. (Who are you?) The biggest one asked rudely, looking at Silverwind.

“We’re Jewel Riders.” Trina said firmly, “We’re here to see Queen Thiera.”

The unicorn spokesman looked doubtful. (*That’s a Jewel Rider?*) he said, pointing the words at Silverwind, who didn’t reply.

Trina scowled at them, then looked at her best friend, “Want to impress them?”

Silverwind nodded firmly, and let Trina vault onto her back. Then Silverwind reared up and spread her wings, and Trina shouted, “By the magic of the Starstone!” Their jewel armor flashed down over them, shining in the sunlight and looking quite magnificent. Trina smiled sweetly at the three unicorns. “Shall we go, Tamara?” She said as Silverwind dropped down to all fours again.

Tamara grinned, “This way, Starstone Rider.” The three unicorns galloped off ahead of them, obviously to spread the word that two Jewel Riders and one strange unicorn with kitelike wings had come to the Vale.

Tamara looked after them, “I don’t know those three, but that leader needs someone to clip his tail. Most of the unicorns aren’t like that, don’t worry.”

Then they came around a hill and saw a valley full of unicorns. Silverwind stopped dead, struck with stage fright. Trina was frozen in plain amazement. They were beautiful. Seeing unicorns at the Crystal Palace didn’t compare to seeing them here. White and pastel fur shone like satin against the light green grass. Horns were mirror-bright gold or silver, or pearly and glowing. They moved more gracefully than deer, and the soft voices Trina could hear in her mind were like crystal flutes. Tamara went ahead of them, and the unicorns flocked around her to say hello. Trina and Silverwind snapped out of their immobility, and followed her.

Queen Thiera came out to meet them. Walking through the crowd around her, Silverwind drooped her head so her forelock fell in her eyes.

The Unicorn Queen was lovely enough to outshine all her subjects. Amethyst and rose colored, her sparkling mane and tail flowing around her. Her gentle eyes looked them over; Tamara, confidant and graceful; Silverwind, trying to disappear; and Trina, sitting tall between her friend's iridescent wings and looking ready to stare down the entire Vale.

(Welcome Jewel Riders.) Thiera said, (Tamara, it is so nice to see you again. Tell me what brings you here, but first let me know your friends.)

"It's a long story, your majesty. These are the newest Jewel Riders."

Trina interrupted. "I'm Trina, this is Silverwind."

Queen Thiera was looking at them, obviously not recognizing the winged unicorn. (Silverwind?) she murmured finally, (Who are you, my child?)

Silverwind finally lifted her head and shook her mane out of her eyes. (My family went to live near Ravenwood. I was just a little filly then, my name was Tylien.)

(Tylien!) Thiera gasped, (We thought your folk had been lost to the wild magic! Where are they, are they well?)

(Yes—when I left they were. But we were all changed by the wild magic.) Silverwind sounded startled.

"Queen Thiera," Tamara said, "Silverwind's kin would like to rejoin the Vale, will you help us find them?"

(Trina and I went back to where I left my family, but they had moved on. Have you got a spell or something to show us where they went?)

Thiera tipped her head and thought for a moment. (Yes, I do.) she said positively, (Come, I'll show you.)

The Queen took them through the Vale, to a strange lake in a sandstone canyon. There were large diamond shaped crystals floating in the mist above the water. On the other side was a beautifully carved stand holding a glittering aquamarine jewel. Tamara gasped, "That's the jewel of the unicorns!" She whispered to Trina, "Merlin gave it to them a long time ago."

Thiera nodded and started down a little trail down to the lake. (It binds all the families of unicorns together, and keeps us safe.)

Silverwind took up the explanation, (Those big gems are the Path. If you don't walk it just right--) She tossed her mane, (Who knows? You vanish forever.)

Thiera stepped onto the first gem, and Trina gasped, "What if she trips?"

"She won't." Tamara said, "The royalty of the unicorns know how to do it, it's instinct I guess."

(The Queen wouldn't do it for us if she didn't think she could make it.)

Trina watched, biting her lip, while Thiera walked the Path. It looked like a strange dance, the glowing jewels and the Queen's graceful steps. At last she reached the other side. She picked up the jewel in her mouth, leaped into the air—and appeared next to Silverwind on the hilltop.

(Here.) The Queen gave the jewel to Tamara, (Use this to find your kin.) She smiled at Silverwind, though how Trina knew what a unicorn smile looked like she wasn't sure. (I have to get back. You're invited to stay as long as you want, and come back when you can.)

“If we can get some time we’ll come explore.” Tamara said, and Trina grinned and nodded.

“Thank you your majesty.”

Thiera trotted back towards the main part of the Vale. Trina slid off Silverwind’s back and the three of them stood in a circle.

“You ready?” Tamara asked. She held up the unicorn jewel and let go—and it floated. Trina gasped.

Tamara started the spell: “Power of ancients be with us today, magic of Avalon show us the way!”

(Heart of the families, in the name of the light, help bring my people out of their lonely night!) Silverwind said. The jewel began to spin in the air, flashing in the sunlight.

Trina said her part in a voice that trembled with awe. “For the sake of friendships old and new, help us in what we’re trying to do!”

The jewel was flashing dazzlingly like a new star. Trina turned her face away and closed her eyes. She reached out one hand to catch Tamara’s, the other tangled in Silverwind’s mane. And then there was nothing but the light from the jewel sweeping out around them like silk woven of sunlight.

And then it was gone, and the jewel of the unicorns dropped to the grass between them.

“Oh **wow**.” Trina said blankly, “That was really **really** cool. Like turning into angels, I bet we looked like angels, it sure felt like we did.”

Tamara laughed and picked up the jewel, tucking it in her sleeve for safekeeping. “If that’s not a reason to love this job I dunno what is. Now, we’re someplace but is it the right place?”

(I think so.) Silverwind said with a mental grin, just before another unicorn voice exclaimed—

(Tylie—Silverwind! Bright stars, it is you! How did you get here, who are they?)

(Hello Mist.) Silverwind replied calmly, (These are my friends, Trina and Tamara.)

(The Jewel Riders?) Mist stepped out of the bushes so they could see her. She was dappled in shades of green, with a short pearly horn.

“We’re the Jewel Riders all right!” Trina said mischievously, posing so Mist could see her jewel and Silverwind’s.

(Bright stars!) was all Mist seemed to be able to say, while the Jewel Riders laughed.. Then the green unicorn collected her wits. (I’ll take you to the meadow, ‘kay? But where’s--) she looked around, then called (Shadow!)

Another unicorn head poked out of the bushes. A unicorn striped pink and lavender, with a crystalline turquoise horn. He was holding a basket of berries in his mouth, and looking very silly.

(This is **Shadowson**.) Mist said.

Shadowson was gazing at Tamara. Then his head pulled back and he leaped over the bushes to land beside them. He was a stocky creature, striped all over with a tuft on his tail.

(Hello Silverwind.) Shadowson said, (We’ve missed you.)

(I’ve missed all of you as well, Shadow.)

Tamara was watching the zebra unicorn, a puzzled look on her face. One hand stole up to touch her Heartstone.

Mist was watching them, now she tossed her mane and said, (C'mon, let's go say hi to everyone! Tamara--)

Shadowsong interrupted, (Tamara, would you like a ride?)  
Tamara found **her** wits. "Thank you Shadow, I would." Then she turned a sun-bright smile on the handsome unicorn.

Trina was already mounted. "Come on you guys!" she called, then leaned forward to whisper in Silverwind's ear, "What's with those two?"

(I surely don't know.) Silverwind shrugged.

"So what's the deal with the names?" Trina asked after a moment.

Tamara came up next to them, "Nothing too secret, as far as I know. They take new names when they become part of the human world. The Vale unicorns only have their original names and everybody else takes word-names."

Shadow nodded, eyes twinkling. (We don't want humans stealing our real names, they're too pretty for any other race to wear.)

"Oh reeeeeeealy!" Trina said, matching him for arrogance. Then she laughed.

A few minutes later they entered a beautiful meadow, almost as lovely as the Vale. Unicorns stood around grazing and gossiping. Mist leaped out ahead of them, shouting to everyone to look. Graceful heads turned, and they were in the spotlight again. This time Silverwind didn't seem to notice the stares or the questions; she made her way through the crowd to where four unicorns were waiting out of the mob. Trina heard Tamara start telling who they were and what had happened at the Vale, but then she had another drama to worry about.

(Mother, Father!) Silverwind exclaimed, (Moonmeadow, how are you?)

Moonmeadow was dark violet, turning a little gray with age. (So you're finally back. Had a nice adventure?)

(I surely did, Grandmother. This is my friend Trina, who pulled my tail out of the fire a couple times. Come down here and say hi to my family.)

Trina did, and curtsied to Moonmeadow, two unicorns who must be Silverwind's parents, and a little filly not much older than Cleo. "Pleased to meet all of you." She said with a real smile.

Silverwind did the introductions, (My father's called Flame, my mother is Dreamspirit.)

Dreamspirit nodded, (A human girl gave me that name, when we met outside her town.)

(Oh, and the kid is nobody I know, looks like a poor excuse for a horse to me.)  
Silverwind added, with laughter behind her words.

The little unicorn flipped her tail at Silverwind then looked squarely up at Trina, (I'm Ganni. I don't have a people name yet. I'm her sister. Do you know the princess?)

Trina smiled. "Which one, Gwen or Moondance?"

(Moondance, of course.) Ganni would undoubtedly have gone on to say more, but voices from outside their little circle interrupted.

(Hey 'Wind, what happened to you? We were worried?)

"Iiiiiit's showtime." Trina muttered.

(I had an adventure and ended up a Jewel Rider. It happened like this...) And she started explaining.

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Gwenevere snapped the book shut in a shower of dust, and put it back on the shelf. "That was a cookbook." She told Fallon, "And not for spells either, just spaghetti and stuff."

Fallon shrugged, "Wizards have to eat too."

Gwen could find no answer to that, so she wiped the dust off of another book, and started to read.

Archie was hopping around on a desk covered with propped-open books, partly rolled scrolls, dried inkpots and things of that nature. "Here's a treasure map." He commented, "But with a footnote that the treasure was dug up by... oh this script is hard to read, Ebis the Night One I think it says, an old bandit."

"Hey, look at this," Fallon exclaimed, and Gwen and Archie hurried over. It was a leatherbound tome entitled Stories From My Grandmother's Day.

"Old fairytales, Fallon?"

"That's what I thought, but look here."

Gwen squinted at the ancient calligraphy, "The Story of the Twins." She read, "Anja and Anavey, were they real people you think?"

"You haven't seen the illustrations." Fallon turned a page.

"Hey, the Starstone!" Whoever had done this art had been good; the images of the two girls seemed almost to come alive on the pages. Anja was shone wearing jewel armor, posing with the shape of a gryphon behind her. Anavey had been done even better, drawn mostly in black and copper. She was shone holding a black version of the Starstone and walking beside a red-eyed direwolf.

"Yow." Gwen muttered.

"The writing has faded a lot more than the pictures, I can't read much of it. I know that word, Morgana..." Fallon pulled the book up to about an inch from her nose, and said from behind it, "Heeeey, this is about when Morgana was exiled from Avalon!"

"Well that's something about the old wizards, let us see!" Gwen all but snatched the book, and she and Archie began deciphering the archaic language. "Something about great golden power plus the powers of two jewels and a real big bang." Gwen had to tip her head forward, as Archie was pacing back and forth across her shoulders.

"There's a theory in Merlin's books, that if you get too many kinds of magic together doing different things to each other, it will overload somehow and explode. There's no danger if you're careful, but people who aren't..."

"Like Kale when she got her hands on the crown jewels." Gwen said and shuddered.

"So is that what happened to Morgana?" Fallon asked pointing back at the book.

"No... it says the jewels were vanished forever but Morgana lived through it. They were in a cave and it collapsed partly. And then Merlin and the Jewel Riders of that time showed up and Merlin banished Morgana somehow. I don't think the writer knew much about magic, even I can see this is full of mistakes."

"Yes, some of the phenomena described here are not possible." Archie put in. "But we can examine the rest of this book later, there's still a lot to go through here."

"All right Archie..." Gwen put the book aside to take back with them, and turned back to the high brown bookcases. Fallon was up on the rolling ladder, looking through a heap of scrolls on a high shelf.

"Need a spell to grow mushrooms?" She asked.

"Noooo thank you, there are enough in the garden as it is.... Archie, ever heard of something called Four Gods of Sky and Earth? Never mind, if the old wizards put a warning note on it I'm not even going to open it." Gwen said firmly, replacing a tome with strange symbols on the cover. Above she could hear Fallon and Archie looking at a scroll written in the desert traders' language and arguing about the translations of some words.

After another while Fallon jumped off the ladder with two fat scrolls. "Here's what we were looking for! This one's a list of the wizards, names, ranks, powers, and a lot of magical terms I can't make head or tail of--"

Archie grumbled, "I could do better, seeing as I've both a head and a tail..."

"And this is a long essay about magic and magical creatures."

"Very cool Fallon. Do we have enough stuff yet?"

"I don't-- Hey, is that what it looks like?" Archie flapped down and landed on yet another tome, "This is an encyclopedia of magic! Just one volume though, come on you two, help me look for the rest!"

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While Trina and Silverwind told their story, Tamara hung back with Shadowsong. "They're enjoying themselves." Tamara observed.

(Yes. Why don't we go walking? They can handle this show.)

"Hmmh." Tamara nodded, "All right."

They walked through the trees, Tamara absently weaving a wreath of flowers. "This is a beautiful place. I think that unicorns from the Vale will start coming here for vacations."

(Really? That's so strange to think. The Thornwoods are about an hour's easy walk that way. Sometimes monsters come from them and we have to fight.)

Tamara was looking at him strangely, "I've never heard of unicorns fighting before."

(I never said we like to. I hate fighting, but sometimes you have to.)

Tamara draped her wreath around his neck. A light seemed to shine in the depths of her eyes, and was answered in Shadowsong's. "Shadow..." Tamara began, then shook her head and didn't say it.

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The princess of all Avalon looked down at her dusty coat and sighed. "Archie, we found three volumes, that's all we can carry anyway. Let's go."

"All right Gwen." Archie replied, looking as tired as she did.

But Gwen had noticed a huge book on one of the tables. It was about four feet square and covered with strange magical symbols. "Who on earth could read a book this big?" She muttered, struggling with the clasp on the cover. It unlocked, and Gwen lifted the huge cover.

"Hey, that's Morgana's sign!" Fallon yelled. Too late.

Blinding green light shone from the book, taking the princess, the Moonstone Rider, and a very startled owl. It spread out, shining through the rock and ice of Wizards' peak. Then the book fell shut.

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Gwen looked around. They were in a big room with midnight blue stone walls and strange glass towers holding up the arches of the ceiling. "Where *\*are\** we?" She asked, not really thinking anyone would know.

Beside her, Fallon shrugged. "Wherever that spell took us. Looks like a wizard lair."

A double shout came from behind a woven screen. (Gwen!) (Fallon!) (You're her too!) Sunstar and Moondance came around the screen. The girls ran to their friends.

"OK," Gwen said when they were mounted and ready for action, "Does anybody know where we are?"

Archie had resumed his seat on Sunstar's saddle. "I have no idea." The owl admitted, "The spell that brought us here could be as old as that book, maybe as old as the old wizards."

(So let's find the way out.) Moondance said, (This place is creepy.)

It was creepy. The columns distorted the torchlight strangely, the arched ceilings between them were reflective like glass and made you feel like you could fall up if you looked too long. And the woven grass screens seemed placed on purpose to cut off the Jewel Riders' view in any one direction.

"Find anything, Fallon?" Gwen called. The glass columns seemed to vibrate at the sound of her voice.

"We found a wall. That's where doors usually are."

"That's better than we've done." Gwen said as Sunstar turned to follow Fallon's voice.

A little while later they found a door. It was high and metal and big enough that all four Jewel Riders could have ridden through it side-by-side and not been squashed. Across from the door was a big dark mirror, flanked by two very impressive glass columns. "It's locked, of course." Fallon said after trying to tug it open, "Moondance, try your horn." Moondance touched her horn to the lock, trying to open it by magic. That didn't work either.

"Let's blast it." Gwen said. Sunstar was fidgeting from nervousness and Gwen didn't blame her.

"OK." Fallon agreed readily, "By the magic of the Moonstone!"

"By the magic of the Sunstone!" Their jewel armor swirled into being around them-- and then pulled away, flowing in pink and purple ribbons into the glass columns.

"Huh?" Gwen asked, "What happened?"

"I've got a really bad feeling about this..." Fallon said, backing Moondance away from the dark mirror.

Something was appearing there. Coming clear like a face surfacing in muddy water. A brown-skinned face with white hair that flowed in invisible currents, and green eyes that were flat and merciless.

"Morgana?!" Gwen cried. Archie tried to make himself invisible behind her.

Morgana looked at them, a flickering of her eyes. "Very good, little princess." She hissed.

"What happened to our magic?" Fallon demanded. Gwen was glad; she'd been about to say something dumb like 'I thought you were dead'.

The wizard laughed silently, showing pointed teeth. "This enchanted glass steals wild magic from anyone using it. Now that power is mine, and I'll have the rest when you give me your enchanted jewels."

"Dream on, Morgana." Gwen said shortly, and sent a beam of golden light at the image. The attack warped away into the columns. Gwen said a word Fallon hadn't known she knew.

(Princess, we are in seriously big trouble.) Sunstar observed.

Morgana's image smiled wider, "There really is a winged unicorn. Perhaps the Sunstone will bind you to me when I have its magic. Would you like to be mine, little freak?"

"Leave her alone!" Gwen cried.

"Yeah. Buzz off witch, we're not interested."

Morgana regarded the angry Fallon for a moment. "All right, I will. Your jewels will be mine before you leave here anyway." The image faded away, sinking back into its filthy pond of glass.

Gwen put her arms around Sunstar's neck and shuddered. "Was that really Morgana? I thought she was dead."

A very shaken Archie polished his glasses before answering. "Yes it was. At least she matched the pictures Merlin had. Oh I wish Merlin were here, we're doomed!"

Gwen moved to comfort him, "No we're not, Archie. We'll find a way out of here. Tamara and Trina are still free. Hey, I wonder if we could call them." She added

Fallon perked up, "We could try. But then we'd all be trapped here. Unless... Archie, could Tamara's Heartstone make a sound to break the glass?"

Archie blinked, "Why yes. It's one of the fighting powers of the Heartstone."

"Fighting powers?" Gwen had never heard of such a thing.

"Never mind! Just call your friends."

Fallon was frowning thoughtfully. "It's not good strategy, but I've got this feeling like we need them to get out of here."

"You do? So do I! Let's try it then." They held up their jewels, almost close enough to touch above their heads. "Tamara, Trina, we need you!" The two girls whispered together. A tiny ball of light appeared between the jewels, then vanished. Into the magic glass? Or away?

"Now what?"

"We wait, I guess."

Trina and Silverwind looked at each other. "Huh?" (What was that?)  
(Is something up?) Ganni asked from in front of the crowd of unicorns.

"Gwen and Fallon!" Trina gasped, "They're in trouble, we have to go! Where's Tamara?"

Shadowsonc galloped into the clearing, Tamara on his back. "Did you hear that?" She called, "We've got to help them! But first... Moonmeadow, keep this jewel until we return." She handed the jewel of the unicorns to Moonmeadow, who looked very startled but accepted it.

"How do we get there? There aren't any Travel Trees around here even if we knew where we were going."

(I can take you.) Shadowsonc said unexpectedly, (I have friends in the wild magic. And Tamara needs a mount anyway.)

"Shadow? This will probably be dangerous, are you sure you want to come?" Tamara protested.

Shadowsonc didn't argue, he just closed his eyes and called. A doorway appeared in the air, and three strange creatures like pastel squirrels came through. Two of them landed on Trina, the other on Shadowsonc's head.

"Um, what are they?" Trina asked, disentangling one of the creatures from her hair.

"We're gliders!" It said, surprising Trina.

"At least I think we are." Said another.

"Nope, definitely not gliders." Said the one using Shadowsonc's horn as a mirror.

"Okaaaaay." Said Trina, deciding not to ask any more, "But can you take us to our friends?"

"Of course!" "Anywhere in wild magic," "We are your glide guides!" At least they were agreed on this.

Tamara spoke quickly, "We need to follow a call for help that came through the magic, can you do that?"

"Yes." "Certainly." "Right this way." They opened another doorway, and Silverwind and Shadowsonc leaped through.

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Gwen was pacing, looking all around and wishing she had eyes on the back of her head. It was that kind of place. A flash of light nearly made her jump out of her skin, then she saw that it was Trina and Silverwind, and Tamara and a strange striped unicorn. "Fallon, the cavalry's here!"

"We sure are!" Trina said, "That's Shadowsonc. What's up?"

"This." Said Fallon, coming up silently. "That glass absorbs our magic, and the door is locked."

Tamara looked around, "Scary place. Who built it?"

"Morgana. And she's still around." Gwen and Fallon chorused.

"What?!" Trina cried, "Morgana? For real?"

"THIS REAL." Said Morgana's voice. Trine shrieked and whipped her head around to look at the image.

"Ummmm." The Starstone Rider said numbly. Then she got her courage back and started to do what she did best: babble. "So you're Morgana. I read all about you in

my history book, is it true you fought against the Jewel Riders for ten generations? Was the Darkstone really yours before Kale got it? How did it get in the wild magic anyway? Is wizardry different from Jewel Rider magic? Can you teach me a spell? Is your hair really that color? Did you put a monster in a Travel Tree tunnel once? Can--" Trina ran out of breath and had to stop. But Morgana had rolled her eyes and vanished several questions before. The Jewel Riders looked at Trina in unbelieving admiration. "So! How do we get out of here?" Trina said cheerfully.

"The door is here, large as life, but without our magic we can't open it. And our magic keeps getting sucked up by those two big glass things." Fallon said. Her alto voice made the glass pillars vibrate so hard the air seemed to shimmer.

(We could try using those vibrations to shatter the glass.) Shadowsong suggested.

"Like Lady Rianna can do with wine glasses?" Gwen asked, "Tamara, could we?"

"I think so." Tamara replied, conjuring a flute with her magic. She blew a low note, far too low for an ordinary flute. The pillars trembled and made the air sing, but that was all.

Trina tried to conjure a set of pipes. The first set vanished into the glass, but the second she hung on to. "These I can play." She said, and whistled out a tune. Tamara joined in, but their duet didn't have any success.

Fallon held her Moonstone next to Tamara's flute and watched the jewel shimmer with the tune. "I think our jewels could be made to vibrate, that could break the glass!" She exclaimed. A short technical discussion later Gwen said, "But that glass has all the magic it stole from us--"

"And my pipes." Trina muttered; they'd vanished from her hand.

--Besides who knows how much magic that was put in before. It might explode and that'll be the end of us."

They looked around. "It might, but I don't see anything we can do about it." Fallon said at last, and the others reluctantly agreed with her.

They stood in a circle, the four Jewel Riders and their unicorns. Shadow insisted on staying with Tamara. Four enchanted jewels were lifted high, and the music began. It echoed all around the place, getting louder until Trina could feel the floor shake under her feet. The black mirror acted like an amplifier, blowing noise in their faces so hard Trina was surprised her hair didn't blow in it.

(Just a little more!) Silverwind said, (Hang on!) And then there was a sound of breaking glass, louder than if the Crystal Palace had shattered.

"Get down!" Tamara yelled. They dropped to the floor, raising magic shields against the razor sharp bits of glass that rained down on them. And with the glass came a thousand years of stored mages, snaking around the room in colored ribbons and blasts like burning sunlight.

"Tamara, look out!" Trina screamed as Tamara's shield fell apart and a beam of wild magic lanced down at her. Then suddenly Shadowsong was there, catching the beams with his prism horn. In a moment all the magic was swirling around him like lightning. Shadow pointed his horn at the door, and let the power go. It blasted through the metal doors and took out no few of the trees on the other side. Then he fell to his knees and was still. "Shadow!" Tamara screamed and ran to him.

By the time the other Jewel Riders got to them, Shadowsong was on his feet with Tamara hugging him and crying with relief. And then something amazing happened. The Heartstone flew from Tamara's belt, and became two.

"It's Shadow!" Gwen cried, "He's your partner!"

"Very cool Tamara!" Fallon exclaimed.

Shadowsong looked down at the Heartstone he wore, and nodded to himself. (Let's find out where we are, and go home.) The newest Jewel Rider said.

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Authorial rantings: Did I hint that Shadow would make an appearance? Note the book of Fairy Tales Fallon found, that's a hint for the Anja stories. And as for what a book from Fushigi Yuugi was doing in Wizards' Peak... Don't ask me. (shrug and an innocent expression) It's just a good thing Gwen didn't open it!

'Till next time and don't forget to send comments to [mbaring@powernet.net](mailto:mbaring@powernet.net)

--Stormdance

Starstone chapter four, a Jewel Rider fanfic by Stormdance

Disclaimer: Everybody you've seen on TV belongs to Bohbot or Robert Mandell or both as far as I know. Trina and Silverwind, and anyone else, belong to themselves since they have minds of their own, but please talk to me if you want to use them 'cause I'm their manager! Unless it's for a subreality type thing o' course... There, who says disclaimers can't be interesting?

Starstone chapter four:

Morning at the Crystal Palace. Trina cracked open one eye, saw that it wasn't *that* late, and pulled her sheets over her head. A minute later she heard hooves on the carpet, and a velvety nose nuzzled her hair. (Good morning dearheart.) Silverwind said in her mind.

"Morning i'tis." Trina said into her pillow, "*Good* I won't grant you. Nobo'y bothered to tell me Jewel Riders never ge'tany sleep or I'd never 'ave taken the job." She didn't mean it, as the unicorn well knew.

Silverwind yawned and looked at her rider--a tumble of almost-white hair above her bedding. (Well I'm going to get breakfast. Tamara's asleep in Shadow's room, that's how late they were up talking last night. Want me to send you up some food?)

"Nah." Trina said, sitting up, "I'm awake now so might'swell get my own. And I didn't do any more work than th'others yesterday."

Silverwind tipped her head and looked puzzled, (Do all people talk like that first thing in the morning?)

"Like what?" Trina was baffled, "Oh, um, no. Just me."

(It's a cute accent.) Silverwind teased her, (I'll give you a ride to breakfast but you have to put a robe on...)

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Tamara woke up and couldn't imagine where she was. Too irregular for her bed, too soft to be the ground. Then she remembered staying up talking to Shadowsong until after one, and then curling up on his bed for a while and now it was morning. "Shadow?" She whispered. He was still asleep. Well, they \*had\* had major adventures yesterday. Hopefully nobody would need them for a while.

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Trina and Silverwind entered the ballroom where breakfast and lunch were served every day. Trina called her thanks to the cooks as she grabbed a little basket of rolls and a bottle of milk to take out and eat in the field while Silverwind grazed.

"Hi." Gwen said, coming up next to her, "Any crises?"

"Not a one. Which is good 'cause we were up late late late last night. Do Jewel Riders \*always\* get their sleep interrupted by ghostly visitors?"

"You had another one?" Gwen asked and bit into an oatcake. She sounded only mildly surprised. Trina sighed and said, "Never mind. I'm nuts today."

"Nuts enough to come with me to Wizards' Peak? We left the books there, there was one I think you'll be interested in. It's about the past Starstone Rider Anja."

"What happened? Did you get to read it?" Trina asked excitedly. They started out to the meadow where the unicorns were grazing.

"The story goes that she wasn't supposed to be a Jewel Rider at all, it was going to be her sister but then..."

Trina drank in the story, and asked Gwen more questions than the princess could answer. When they'd finished eating, they found Fallon and went to Wizards' Peak.

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Tamara woke up again, hearing strange noises outside her window. She got up, pushed her hair out of her eyes, and looked out. At two very familiar creatures climbing up towards her. Tamara pulled her head back in and went to get her Heartstone.

"Shadow, you up?" She whispered, "We've got visitors."

(Friends, enemies, both?) Shadowsong asked, getting up.

"One of the above... I think. They're Kale's dweasles."

(Dweasles?!)

"Dweasles." Tamara whispered, "Look." She pointed at the window, where a purple head and a green nose were just poking up over the sill. Before the two creatures could climb inside, Tamara caught them in a cage of light from her Heartstone.

The dweasles were not happy. They tumbled around in the cage muttering insults to each other for a few minutes before looking expectantly at Tamara. (Well, what is the meaning of this?) the purple one demanded.

Tamara gave them a look of disbelief, "What's the meaning of breaking into the Crystal Palace?"

(Um er ah.)

(It is a long story, noble Jewel Rider. We are law-abiding citizens though.)

(That's right, just following our orders.)

"What orders? From who?" Tamara demanded.

(Orders to spy on you all of course, especially on the little Jewel Rider we gave a ride in the dragonwagon.)

(The witchy one and the wizardly one would not be pleased to hear about that.)

(Which is why we did not tell them.)

Shadowson leaned his head on Tamara's shoulder, (Are they giving us information on purpose or just babbling and letting it slip?) Tamara shrugged.

"Why do they want you to spy on her in particular?" Tamara asked casually. If the dweasles were giving out free info, why not take advantage?

The two dino-weasles huddled in the middle of the cage. (The wizardly one was very veeeerrrry angry that star jewel come back in this time.)

(Yes, she will do great violence to whoever has it.) The dweasles shuddered.

Then they said something entirely unexpected. (Which is why we choose to run away, not wishing to be turned into toads. Or raspberry jam.)

Tamara blinked at them. "You're changing sides?"

(Is that not what we just said?)

"Um, Shadow, what do I do with them?"

She was saved from the question by a wild magic portal that swirled open in the air, sending the dweasles back to hugging each other in fear. The three gliders came out. "Hi hi hi!" they said, swirling around the room. "We have news for you." "Bad news." "Big trouble." "Eek, dweasles!" And they all shut up and hovered.

Tamara saw her answer. "Gliders, is there somewhere you can dump these two where they'll be all right but won't be able to get out and do any damage?"

The gliders did a huddle. "OK." "Yes." "We have just the place you need." "Right through here." They opened a doorway and Tamara dumped the protesting dweasles through it. "Where does that go?" she asked belatedly.

The gliders snickered, "To dweasle heaven." "The storage room of the Avalon potato chip factory." "Even if they could unlock the door they wouldn't leave." "But we have bad news." And they all started to speak together, "We have come from the Vale of the Unicorns. Their queen, Thiera, is missing. You must come at once, all of you."

"Oh! Of course we'll come to help, the others went to Wizards' peak I think... Shadow, tell Wintermane where--"

(Already have. Let's go!)

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Trina was looking around the wizards' library in awe. "Can we bring all these back with us?" she asked reverently, pulling out a small book and glancing at the cover. It was a book of love spells. Trina shrugged and tucked it in her pack, thinking such a thing might be useful... someday.

Gwen pointed to the stack they had decided to bring back first time: several books and scrolls. "Here's the one with the story about Anja."

Trina opened it on the table, with care for the ancient paper. She skimmed through the story, occasionally muttering, "That's not right..." to the utter confusion of her friends, who decided not to ask.

They transported the stack of books, heavier now with a few of Trina's finds, to the outside of the mountain where the unicorns were waiting. They mounted up and were ready to get back to the Travel Trees and home, when Trina stopped them. "Guys... there's no one living around here, is there?" she asked thoughtfully.

Fallon shivered, "Not for miles, why?"

"I wanted to try something." She and Silverwind went away from the others, to the edge of a high cliff. (Are you trying what I think you're trying? Well be careful, you could fry us!) Silverwind reminder her rider.

"Yeah, I know... by the magic of the Starstone!" and, sitting tall in the saddle, Trina held the Starstone over her head and shouted, "Midnight blast!" Blue fire raged from the jewel, across the valley and back again, crackling over the tops of the mountains in its way and sending bits of stone rattling into the valley. The lightning whipped up a wind that blew snow in their faces and Trina's hair in her eyes. Silverwind shied, realizing that the source of this power was sitting on her back!

"Enough!" Trina screamed, "I said Stop!" And it did, the storm subsiding at once into silence. Trina slumped and put her arms around Silverwind's neck, "Sorry horseface. I didn't think it would be that big." She said very, very sincerely.

Sunstar landed next to them, the whites of her eyes showing. "Trina, what was that?" Gwen demanded.

"Um, a power of my jewel I learned about. I wanted to test it."

"You should ask Merlin before you go blowing up mountains!" Fallon sounded disapproving.

"Anje said Merlin doesn't rememb-- um." Trina said before she thought.

"Nothing. Not important. Let's get out of here."

Gwen was last to turn away. "Anja said?" she murmured, "Tri never read **that** in the book!" And, keeping her suspicions to herself, the princess followed the others.

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They got back to the castle in time to be ambushed by a trio of gliders. "There you are Jewel Riders! Hi hi! We have terrible news, you must come to the Vale at once! Queen Thiera is missing!"

"What?" Fallon gasped, "Moondance, your mother!"

"What happened?" Gwen demanded.

"We don't know." "Sorry." "You must come at once!"

Trina nodded, "On our way." She set down her stack of books as Silverwind bespoke the babies to come and get them. Then the Gliders opened a doorway and the Jewel Riders were off.

The Vale held the largest gathering of unicorns Trina had ever seen, more than she could have imagined. As they arrived, a big blue unicorn was talking about the Trials to choose a new ruler. "Trials?" Trina whispered.

(Yes, the unicorns must have a leader even while searching for the old Queen. And Thiera was so powerful, if she hasn't come back yet she probably won't be able to.)

"Oh..." Trina murmured, trying to take it in. The beautiful unicorn queen, **dead**? She couldn't be! "What can we do?"

Silverwind couldn't answer because the Jewel Riders were going to the front of the crowd, through a path that opened for them. Sunstar and Moondance were talking to the blue unicorn.

(We came as soon as we could, what happened?) Sunstar asked.

(Queen Thiera came here to return the jewel of the unicorns to its place after you borrowed it. She never returned.) The blue unicorn said. He wasn't accusing them, not yet anyway. (The Trials must begin immediately. Moondance, will you participate?)

Moondance looked at Fallon who nodded, biting her lip. "Go on Moondance. Your mother would want you to be queen."

Trina edged next to Tamara, who'd appeared out of the crowd. "What's going on?" She whispered.

"Moondance is the princess of the unicorns. If she gets through the trials she'll be queen-- and won't be able to be a Jewel Rider any more."

"Oh no!" Was all Trina could think to say. She watched with the others as Moondance took off her enchanted jewel, leaving it with Fallon, and entered the cave with the other royal contestants. The unicorns who weren't royalty drifted away to talk and wait for the end of the contest.

The Jewel Riders gathered in an out of the way nook. Fallon was trying not to cry, and Tamara tried to comfort her. Trina leaned against Silverwind, thinking aloud. "This whole thing is terrible. Thiera... Moondance... Fallon... it's not right."

"Morgana's doing." Gwen said, "I bet ten crowns she's at the bottom of this." The princess was grim.

"I wouldn't bet against you. But what can we do?"

Tamara spoke up, "If we could find Queen Thiera they'd have to call the trials off and everything would be OK. Anyone got a better idea?"

No one did. Gwen took charge and led the way out to the Lake of the Path. The place was beautiful, awe-inspiring in a quiet sort of way. The air hummed as if the crystals of the Path were vibrating. "So where do we start looking for clues?" Trina asked.

Gwen tried to step out onto the first crystal. It blazed orange magic and threw the princess on the bank. "Ow!" Gwen yelled. "What was that?"

(Sorry. Only unicorn royalty can walk the Path, or people who don't want to get to the jewel.) Sunstar explained.

"What's that about people who don't want to get to the jewel?" Trina asked, completely baffled.

(It's a way for the unicorns to tell friends from thieves. Anyone who has no desire for the jewel can get to it, but anyone who might possibly steal it will be kept away.)

"Neat system." Trina said, poking the orange stone with a stick and making sparks jump.

"So the queen was last seen here." Gwen murmured, "She returned the jewel because it's over there now, but then she vanished. What happens if you fall off the Path?"

"You're never seen again." Tamara replied, "But we saw the queen do it, she **wouldn't** fall. Besides, she did a jump thing from the stand back here."

Fallon was frowning out at the lake, "What if something caught her and pulled her off the path, just as she returned the jewel?"

"Like what?" Gwen and Tamara chorused.

Trina looked up from where she was crouching by the water's edge, "Hey, why didn't I think of this before?" She held up her enchanted jewel, "Starlight magic, show us where Queen Thiera is!" A beam of blue light traced a circle around Trina, then shone straight into the lake at her feet. "In the wild magic." Trina translated, lowering her jewel.

Then the lake roared. That's what it sounded like, a low rumbling like a really huge lion. Trina clapped her hands to her ears, starting to say it wasn't anything she was doing, when a flash of white light joined the thunder, blinding her.

Then it got very still. Trina opened her eyes and gasped. She was on the road that came down the hill, just a minute's walk away from her house. Close enough that she could hear voices, her **parents'** voices, talking to each other as they worked in the garden behind the house. She took three steps then stopped, stunned. "Mama, Daddy?" They answered. Trina raced down the hill, skipping from rock to rock; the road was badly made and the dirt tended to slide under your feet. She got to the bottom, and the cottage was in front of her.

Gwenevere opened her eyes, blinking away spots from the light. "What the..." She began, then forgot what she was going to say. "Trina!" The Starstone rider was standing on the stones of the Path, looking forward.

"What's going on?" Tamara said practically.

(Trina! Trina, answer me!) Silverwind was shouting at her oblivious rider.

"People who don't want the jewel-- or don't know it's there. She's trapped in an illusion and we don't have time to break it!" Fallon said with rising fear.

Just as Trina got to the other side and reached out to take the jewel of the unicorns.

Trina looked up at the house, seeing nothing different. Everything was just as she remembered it, she was home. Her mother called that they were in the back garden, and Trina reached for the doorknob to go in.

As she touched it the bright metal became turquoise crystal, and the forest dissolved around her. "No..." Trina whispered in shock, not knowing where she was. Then someone appeared behind her and another hand closed over the unicorns' jewel. Trina didn't see who it was; the other person shoved her off the stand. She fell into something that wasn't water.

(Trina!) Silverwind screamed as her friend vanished into the misty pool.

Gwen was standing ready to attack, her armor on. She could feel Tamara and Shadow powered up, and even without her Moonstone Fallon was a force to be reckoned with. Over the water, the woman in red floated in midair waiting for them.

"Kale." Tamara said, "Where's Trina?"

The former princess and would-be ruler of Avalon, tossed her black hair and shrugged, "How should I know? Ask your unicorns, it's **their** magic that got her. I have what I came for." Kale turned the unicorns' jewel over in her hands, watching it sparkle. She knew the Jewel Riders couldn't do anything to her here. "By the way Gwenevere, just who is the brat who I just dumped?"

Nobody answered her, and Kale shrugged and said, "Morgana really has it in for your little friend, not that it will matter now. Ta-ta." Kale vanished.

On the shore, Gwen slumped and cursed. "Aunt Kale's back too?" She asked nobody in particular.

Silverwind pawed at the water with one hoof. By the edge it was real water, not whatever wild magic weirdness it was around the stand. (Trina still won't answer me. She's alive though, just not here. What do you guys know about getting people out of wild magic?)

Trina fell a through the water, a long way down. She landed softly on something that felt like warm glass and looked like purple light. Looking down, there was still a long way to fall. Trina stood up on the solidness beneath her and looked around. Nothing but twisting threads of blue and purple light in all directions. "Hello? Is anybody here?"

(Who calls?) answered a low voice, and Trina nearly jumped out of her skin.

"It's me, Trina. A Jewel Rider."

(Trina!) The Unicorn Queen appeared quite suddenly where Trina would have sworn there wasn't room to hide her.

"Queen Thiera! Are you all right, they're holding the Trials out there."

(Yes, I am fine, or would be if I weren't trapped here. But how did you come to this place?)

Trina took a breath, "Morgana or one of her friends pushed me off the stand. She... got your jewel."

Thiera's eyes widened, (What?! How?)

"I... It's my fault, I think. I saw my old house but when I went to open the door it turned into a jewel and then somebody pushed me." Trina answered, her confusion turning to shame, "I dunno why I believed it."

Queen Thiera was thinking. (Of course, an illusion to get through the spell on the Path. It's not your fault at all, good illusions are like dreams, everything makes sense then.)

Trina wasn't sure, but she did know a guilt trip would not be helpful right now. "So... how do we get out of here? Where is here, anyway? I'd guess wild magic, right ballpark?"

(Right exactly. This is what happens to enemies of the unicorns, or royal candidates who would be very bad for my people. There's supposed to be no way out.)

That was not reassuring. "Um. Is there anything we might use, and buildings or doorways or, well, anything? Can they hear us outside?" The queen shook her head, and

Trina went on, "I've got an idea and a half... Starlight magic, show us the way out!" The light appeared, and shone through the mist ahead of them. Trina shrugged, "Let's see where it goes."

The three gliders swung in the air, in orbit around the tip of Shadowsong's horn. "Yes, we know where they are." "Right beneath your feet." "In the wild magic."

"Yeah, we figured." Gwen said, hands on her hips, "But can you get them back here?"

"Sure!" "No." "We can try!"

"So try!" Fallon ordered. The gliders started to spin in a circle, but were interrupted by a voice from behind them. (What are you guys doing here?)

"Moondance!" Fallon yelled, running to hug her friend. "Are you all right? Did you win?"

(I'm fine Fallon, just a little scorched. Nobody's won yet, we both have to walk the Path now.) Moondance switched her tail at an annoyed looking orange unicorn just behind her. He gave the Jewel Riders an arrogant look, which they ignored.

"Moondance, Kale was here, she got the jewel and dumped Trina off the Path." Fallon said.

(Whaaaaaat?!)

"That was our reaction too." Tamara said, "Gliders?"

(Trina? Trina, can you hear me?)

Trina lost hold of her spell and the light went out. "Silverwind? Is that you, where are you?"

(Where do you think, on the shore in real life! Are you all right? Is Queen Thiera there?)

"She's here, we're fine, but we can't get-- oh spirit." Trina stopped. In front of her was a replica of the Path, square jewels floating above a lake of mist. "Thiera, what if we cross that?"

(Cross..? I don't see anything. What's there?) The Unicorn Queen replied.

"Guys, we have a chance." Trina said, hoping both unicorns could hear her, "There's a Path thing down here, but the queen can't see it. If we could cross it I bet that's the way out, but I don't know how!" It was already maddening.

(Sure you know how, I saw you cross the real one!) Silverwind protested.

"Yeah well I couldn't see it then!"

(Wait, everyone.) Moondance's voice, (Why don't we all do it together? Fallon and me on this side, you and Mother down there, between us we ought to know enough to get across.)

Trina and the Unicorn Queen looked at each other and slowly nodded. "OK. Wait, what about the magic squirrels, can't they zap us back?"

(We wish. They can open a portal for voices, but not for people.) Silverwind answered.

"Oh. OK, let's try it together then. I think the blue is the first step..."

It was not easy. Trina had to really concentrate to remember how she'd stepped in the illusion, and she was never really sure. Queen Thiera knew the route but her

knowledge was less useful because she couldn't see the stones they stood on. And Moondance was trying to use her instinct and relay instructions to them at the same time. They got to the other side tired and slightly scorched, all of them. But in the end it worked, and Trina and Thiera came out a cave mouth above the lake.

"Whew!" Trina exclaimed, scrambling down the cliff to where the others were waiting. "Let's never do that again, 'kay? Where's the rat who pushed me in?"

"Escaped." Fallon informed her.

Trina cringed. "Um, sorry. I'll get your jewel back your majesty, don't worry."

"Of course we will. Morgana's an enemy of Avalon, so we have to fight her."

Tamara said.

(How do you fight someone in wild magic?) Silverwind wondered aloud.

Everyone looked at each other. Trina grinned, "With difficulty, horseface, and lots of luck!"

Tamara snapped her fingers, "We had some luck already, the dweasles showed up at the palace, they want to join our side!"

"Are you serious?"

(Good dweasles? Now the sun will rise in the west for sure!)

"This I must see. Is everything going to be all right here, Thiera?"

(I think so Gwenevere. You ought to return to the Crystal Palace before your mother comes looking.)

"OK, I guess we will... anyone have other ideas? OK, let's get back and talk to the dweasles."

Sunstar smiled, (Or in other words...)

The Jewel Riders finished together, "Let's ride!"

Trina couldn't believe it. "Hey horseface, what gives with these people? I got fooled by Morgana's illusion and I let Kale take the unicorns' jewel, but nobody cares. Does this not add up or is it just me?" She whispered to Silverwind as they walked towards the Travel Trees.

(Just you.) Silverwind replied serenely, then repented and explained, (Evil magic users make illusions to fool people, so they have to be perfect; that's how they're made. Morgana could have used any of us and it would've worked just the same. You just got unlucky, and anyway you're helping us find the jewel again.)

"But... huh, maybe your logic adds up. Maybe."

The Travel Trees came into view ahead of them, and Gwen and Fallon called for a tunnel while Tamara talked to the gliders, telling them to get the dweasles back to the palace and lock them somewhere. The gliders vanished, muttering about potato chips. Trina raised an eyebrow, "Potato chips?"

Tamara shrugged, "Where would you keep a dweasle?"

"In a zoo. Yeah yeah it's against the law to keep intelligent creatures locked up, but they do deserve it."

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Back at the Crystal Palace, the dweasles reappeared looking much rounder and dressed in potato chip bags that crinkled whenever they moved. They were less than pleased to be facing all four Jewel Riders, plus unicorns, plus the babies. Especially the babies, who said "Eek, a dweasle!" More times than was really necessary.

Gwenevere started the conversation, "So you want to join our side?"

The dweasles were only too eager to babble. (Yes oh beautiful princess with great magic power, let us help you beat the wizardly one!) (You Jewel Riders are all nice people right? You would not turn poor helpless dweasles into raspberry jam.)

"Oh, we might." Fallon said with a smile.

"So what's Morgana up to?" Trina asked, leaning forward excitedly.

(Oh, it's you!) (The Wizardly one does not like you, not at all. If I were you I'd go into hiding.)

"So as not to be turned into raspberry jam?" Tamara guessed and Trina grinned at her.

"What's Morgana got against me? I'm innocent."

(You have the magic star jewel.) (The wizardly one says magic star jewel trapped her in wild magic.) (You should go hide.)

Fallon took over, "What's Morgana trying and how's she trying it?"

The dweasles had a fascinating story. (Wizardly one wants to live in Avalon again, but needs very, very great magic to return.) (She is looking for the enchanted jewels of the ancient wizards to get that power. We don't know how she finds jewels.) (Great wizard wouldn't tell us.)

(One big reason for noble Jewel Riders to hide in holes, Morgana has found a strange creature.) (A creature of many shapes, it can look like anything.) (It is wizardly one's favorite spy. It might be one of you now.)

"A shapeshifter!" Fallon gasped, "Where did Morgana find one of those?"

(We do not know. Maybe it was a real person once.)

"You can make someone a shapeshifter?" Tamara asked incredulously.

(We don't know.) (Try it sometime.)

"Can we ditch the dweasles for a while?" Gwen said, and they shut the two creatures in the window seat and put a chair on top. Then they went outside the door to talk.

"I suppose the right magic could turn someone into a shapeshifter, especially if they were related to the 'shifters in the lands outside Avalon." Gwen said. "A few of the noble houses are."

Trina hadn't known there were lands outside Avalon. "There are really other countries out there? How do you get to them?"

Tamara answered, "Wade through the border mist or bribe the Travel Trees. Preferably the second, crossing through the mist is a day's journey and you get seriously wet on the way over."

"But we have to take care of Morgana before we can go exploring, guys." Fallon reminded them both.

Gwen nodded, "In case any of you haven't figured it out, we're on another quest."

"Hey, cool!" Trina exclaimed. The others looked at each other and laughed.

Authorial Rant: Coming up: friendship magic, wizard jewels, neat spells, and some serious nastiness from Morgana. And more on the mysterious shapeshifter, anybody out there \*not\* guessed who it is? Heh heh heh, of course Trina won't figure it out for a loooooong time...

Starstone chapter 5: Revalations, a Jewel Riders fanfic by Stormdance

Disclaimer: Bohbot's are Bohbot's, others are mine.

Authorial note: This chapter is less pink, less hearts and flowers. Morgana is a nasty wizard, and she does nasty things, that's just the way it is. I read too much Mercedes Lackey and her books are well-reasoned and supposedly realistic and that style's creeping into this story whether I like it or not...

The fox sat on a fencepost, his nose pointed towards the first trees of the Forest of Arden. He was large fox, black furred with white underneath, and silvery green eyes that reflected light from more angles than animals' eyes should. Sitting tall, he pointed his nose up and sniffed the breeze from the forest. Trees, earth, herbs that grew in the underbrush, and a whiff of the animals and stranger creatures that ran there. And the sweet, elusive smell of wild magic. The fox clicked his teeth together in satisfaction, leaped to the ground in a fluid motion, and ran towards the woods. He could find the source of this magic on his own, without involving other people of any sort, especially without involving the Jewel Riders.

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Princess Gwenevere and the Jewel Riders were gathered around a map, along with Gwen's mother Queen Anya. "Mother, we have to find the rest of these 'wizard jewels' so Morgana doesn't get them and escape from the wild magic."

Fallon tossed a knife in the air and caught it deftly by the handle, "If we get just one of the jewels it ought to stop Morgana; you need the full kit for this kind of thing to work."

"I think you're right Fallon, but Morgana's been able to cause trouble without being here physically." Gwen said.

(Well she is the second greatest wizard in Avalon.) Said a voice from the floor. The voice belonged to a little blue panther sitting in the lap of a strawberry-blonde girl. Tamara repeated what Spike said, and added, "Spike's got a point, we need to take away all Morgana's jewels including the Darkstone if we want her out of our hair."

"And that's going to be soooooo easy." The fourth Jewel Rider said glumly. Trina was leaning on the side of the table, her head bowed.

"Hey, we beat Kale. How hard can it be?" Tamara asked, more serious than sarcastic.

Gwen, Fallon, and Trina looked at her in shock, "Hard!" they chorused. Then everybody laughed

Trina leaned over to look at the big map spread on the table, marveling at how much of Avalon there was, and how many different kinds of land there were. Forested hills led down into swamp which cleared into a river winding through grassy plains to the sea.

Gwen pointed out a forest, a cloud of green on the map. "That's the Forest of Arden, part of the Northwoods. In one of the books we found, one of the ancient wizards was supposed to have disappeared into the forest so even Merlin couldn't find her."

"You think her enchanted jewel might still be in there?" Trina asked.

"Well why not? It was never officially found."

"That's an awful lot of area to search for something that might not be there."

Fallon commented.

"Still, it's a lead." Tamara said, getting up and coming to join them. "And we'll be in the area anyway, there's a dance at the castle soon."

Gwen perked up, "Oh yeah, I forgot all about that! We'll stay after the dance and search the forest, all right?"

"Sounds like a plan." Trina and Fallon said together.

They left the map room a little later and wandered in the direction of the kitchens; the four of them had been pouring over the maps since early in the morning and now it was after noon. Archie flew out of an upstairs window and joined them, perching on Gwen's shoulder.

To everyone's surprise, Tamara pounced on the owl with a question. "Archie. When we were trapped by Morgana, you said our jewels have 'fighting powers'. What's that all about? Merlin told us the jewels couldn't be used as weapons."

"But we saw Trina nearly turn the crystal cliffs into sand a few days ago." Gwen added, tilting her head to stare at Archie. Trina cringed; she hadn't meant to make such a display.

Archie fidgeted with his feathers, like a person straightening their coat to play for time. "Well, I hoped I'd never have to tell you girls this, but... When Avalon was newly claimed it was a very different place than it is today. There were monsters inhabiting many parts of the kingdom, and Morgana's evil wizards doing mischief. The Jewel Riders were created as defenders, who had to fight to protect innocent people. All of your enchanted jewels have destructive powers."

The four girls stared at him.

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The fox yawned and sniffed a flowerbed. Lovely scent, but no smell of wild magic. He was tired, and bored, and making no progress. And his time was running out, if Morgana decided he was slacking on this job she would lock him up again or do some other unpleasant thing. Then he smelled something almost as welcome as the wild magic smell: water. A small lake bordered in reeds and water lilies. As the fox stepped out from the bushes, he saw three brightly colored creatures dancing above the water. They twirled and swooped, leaving streamers of colored light behind them. Faery wraiths. The fox gasped in surprised pleasure, but the faery wraiths heard him, took one

look, and vanished without a trace. He sighed and padded closer to the water to drink. Faery wraiths would only stay for someone pure of heart...

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"I don't believe this." Gwen was saying, "The Jewel Riders were fighters?" The other members of her team all looked different, shocked of disbelief..

"It's hard to believe, but it does make sense. Sometimes you have to fight." Fallon was saying.

Trina looked at them all like they were crazy, "You guys are sheltered! Of course people fight, that's how the world is. Why are you so shocked?"

Tamara pulled her younger friend aside, "Tri, we were always taught that the enchanted jewels weren't weapons and couldn't be used for violence. Jewel Riders have to find some other way to do things, and only use our magic to help people or defend ourselves."

"I still think it's crazy. Don't you get to hit back?"

"Why hit back?"

Trina had to think about that one. She wasn't exactly keen on fighting, but people fought, it was just how they were, and if you didn't fight you were a doormat. That much she had learned from years of working in a kitchen among people as poor as she was. They were all trying to grab enough to get out. Trina didn't like that of course, but it was how the world was. Right? "I dunno Tamara."

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The Jewel Riders didn't do any adventuring for the next few days. Trina was very busy. Fallon was teaching her fighting, Gwen was teaching her map reading and other scholarly stuff, and Tamara was **trying** to teach her how to wear dresses and act like a lady.

Trina turned in front of the mirror, trying to see the back of herself. "Tamara, are you sure this is how this thing goes?"

"Yep." Tamara said serenely, stepping back to look, "You look great."

"I feel ridiculous." Trina retorted. The dress was much fancier than the one she had worn at her first party here; it reached the floor in a spill of lavender ruffles. "And people actually walk in these things?"

"Of course, just slower than you usually do. Now, the secret to not tripping over your skirt is..."

Trina tried to pay attention; Tamara was being really nice to help her out like this. And being elegant was fun, romantic and charming, a lot like Trina's daydreams. But these days being elegant wasn't as important as being ready for action in case something happened. Oh well, that was what jewel armor was for...

Fighting lessons were more fun; Trina was strong enough to hold her own against Fallon despite being half a head shorter than the Moonstone Rider. They did staff fighting and knife, and every dirty trick Fallon knew. And since Fallon had been fighting bandits before she became a Jewel Rider, she knew lots of dirty tricks.

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The fox was not enjoying life. Orders had appeared from Morgana that he had to stay in the forest until he found the jewel. That also meant he had to stay a fox until he found it, and eat mice and sleep out in the cold and generally not have a good time.

Just now he was curled up under an overhang, cold, hungry, and very worried. He had to find the jewel soon, or Morgana wouldn't need to punish him because fate would do it for her. He cautiously stepped out into the morning dew, sniffing the air for the smell of magic. For the first time, he caught the scent and was off following it. He came to the wall off cliffs that separated this forest from the crystal peaks on the other side, and scrambled up a little ways. There was the jewel he'd been looking for. High up, half buried in the face of the cliff. He groaned, getting it down was not going to be fun.

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The night of the ball came, and the Jewel Riders went. Trina enjoyed the dancing and being admired, even though she did feel silly in her dress. She mostly hung out with Fallon; Tamara and Gwen were always being asked to dance.

"I'm bored." Fallon admitted after a while.

"I'm looking at the costumes-- isn't that dress silly?" Trina murmured back, nodding at a woman in a green gown. "This is what I did during my ball too-- are all the nobles' parties like this?"

"Yep."

"Huh." They watched the whirling people go by and listened in on a dozen conversations before Gwen called them over to join a group talking about starting a new village with no grownups (Trina privately thought they were nuts)

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Night had fallen some time ago. The fox could hear noise from the castle on the other side of the forest; a bird reported that they were having a party, and the Jewel Riders were there. The fox cursed, seeing his good intentions crumble. If the Jewel Riders got involved this whole situation could go up like lightning-struck tinder...

After spending the day trying to dig out the jewel, with no luck, he'd gone to the nearest stream for some dinner, the fish in this forest were easy to catch. Now he was returning to dig some more, wishing he had hands for this job... He stopped short. Something had growled.

In front of him a huge white wolf stepped out of the bushes, almost glowing in the shadows. It was growling. The fox bit back a yip of pure terror. The huge creature stopped in front of him, bent its head, and spoke in a low voice, "Leave my jewel alone."

"I'm sorry, I can't." the fox replied in his clipped voice.

"Why?"

The fox had a good answer, good enough for any person. What this wolf would make of it he didn't know. So instead of answering he let the fox instincts go and ran away. As fast as he could and hoped the wolf wouldn't catch him because an ordinary wolf could have done him damage and this was a huge glowing wolf.

And he had to stay all night in the same forest it was in. Marvelous. Unless...

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Trina woke up the next morning knowing something would happen. Finding herself in the castle's guest bedroom confirmed it, and Trina got up and dressed fast to go

jewel hunting. But before she left her room there was a knock on the door. Trina went to open it wondering who was up; it was an unholy hour of the morning.

The person outside was wearing a long cape, and a hood over his head. He looked tired and worried.

"Dare?" Trina greeted him blankly, "What are you doing here?" And how did he know **she** was here? They'd only met once after all.

"Lady Starstone Rider, I'm in trouble." He said dryly, smiling a little.

Trina frowned suspiciously but beckoned him in, "Well you can beg help of the Jewel Riders and we'll help you, that's the whole reason there are Jewel Riders."

Dare grimaced, "I wish. No, I need off-the-record help from a friend and since I don't have a friend I thought of asking you. Please say you will. It's important." His silver eyes were hard and grim, completely different from the guy Trina had met at her party.

"I can't promise until I know what it is, Jewel Riders are sworn to defend the people and animals of Avalon so I won't help you poison someone's tea." Trina said, trying to sound responsible and mature.

"Nothing so exciting. There's a magic stone in the forest I need to get. Not powerful magic or anything important, I don't think it would do anything for anyone besides me. But it got stuck between two rocks halfway up a cliff and I can't get it out."

"So you want me to dig it out for you? That's all?"

"Trina, the jewel by itself is not important but it is important that I get it. There's a wolf guarding it but he can't climb high enough, if you and Silverwind go in from above there won't be any danger. Will you do it? Please?"

Trina nodded, "OK sure. If you tell me what's going on with you."

"Deal. But later. I'll find you when you find the jewel, OK? Now I have to get back before certain people start looking for me. Thank you." He stood up and left quickly.

Trina stood staring at the closed door.

(Well that was interesting.) Silverwind commented from outside, and stuck her head in the window.

"It sure was." Trina went over to lean on the wall next to the window, "I wonder what happened to him."

(Nothing good. Are you going to give him the jewel?)

"Maybe. I want to check it out for sure."

The sun was up when the Jewel Riders left the castle and entered the forest. It was a beautiful day, the kind with slants of sunlight and a little mist, and dew. Trina sat tall in Silverwind's saddle, staring around her. (What are you looking for, silly?) the unicorn asked her rider teasingly.

"I dunno... magic jewels, man eating plants, the entrance to a lost library? Whatever we see. Something's going to happen today."

Silverwind shrugged her wings, thinking that what happened might not be nearly as fun as Trina was expecting.

Gwen had a map out, "The cliffs are straight ahead, the lake's to our right a few hours' ride, and left the forest continues for days. Where too?"

"I'd like to see the cliff." Trina said, "There are caves where things might be hidden... uh, right Fallon?"

Gwenevere answered her, "Yes, there are caves that go all the way up... bandits used to lair there."

Trina could have told her that, but not without saying how she knew. And having met a ghost was complicating enough without letting it complicate things for everyone else. "Sounds like a good place to start... unless there are **still** bandits there."

"Not here. Patrols from the castle will take care of them." Fallon assured her cheerfully.

"We ought to split up." Tamara suggested, "Cover more ground. Fallon, why don't we look around the forest? I'll be able to ask the animals if they know where there's magic. Gwen, you and Trina can go wander around the caves."

"Fine with me Tamara." Gwen replied, "Tri, coming?"

"Surely!" Trina said as Silverwind followed Sunstar deeper into the forest. When Fallon and Tamara had turned away and were out of earshot she asked Gwen, "What's up? Is Tamara scared of caves?"

The princess shrugged. "I don't know... but it's basic search tactics anyway. Did you know this is where the faery wraiths live?"

"No! Here?"

"Mm-hm, they dance above the lakes on nice days, and if you're pure of heart or in love they'll let you watch them. That's the story anyway."

"Cool. But what makes someone pure of heart?" Trina asked, curious.

Gwen shrugged, "Well I know Kale isn't!" she laughed.

Suddenly both unicorns half reared, spreading their wings. Trina grabbed the pommel on her saddle to stay on, "What is it?"

(Scent of a predator, a big one! Maybe a great wolf!)

Gwen paled and looked around quickly, "You sure?" she asked Sunstar.

"Wind says a big wolf maybe. Do we fly?"

They stayed very still, the unicorns tasting the air while the two girls stared at the bushes around them. Nothing happened, and after a while Trina began to relax. **Then**, of course, they heard the voice.

"Jewel Riders, I beg help." The voice was low and clear.

"Where are you?" Gwen called bravely.

"Here. Do not be afraid." Then a tall wolf walked into the clearing. It-- he was almost as large as the great wolves the Pack rode, a yellow-white color and very shaggy.

Trina stared, in admiration almost as much as fear, and the wolf looked back at her with blue eyes.

"Who are you?" Gwen asked, also staring.

"The guardian of this forest and its treasures. My name is Ian."

Gwen gasped, "The prince of the forest? The legend?"

"Legends do not matter in real life, and now I need your help. Someone is trying to steal the enchanted jewel kept in this forest. Come." He turned and leaped away.

Gwen and Trina looked at each other and motioned Sunstar and Silverwind to follow him.

They came out of the forest at the base of the cliffs. Looking up, Trina could see a black dog shaped creature digging frantically at the cliff face. Ian shouted, and it turned and saw them. Trina got an impression of a fox face with silver-green eyes huge with surprise before the creature yipped and ran, zipping sideways along the cliff face then leaping down to vanish under the trees. "That is the thief." Said Ian, "I cannot catch him."

"Want me to see if I can get it out?" Trina offered, "You could hide it somewhere else."

Ian nodded. Trina dismounted and walked part way up the cliff, and climbed to where the jewel was caught. "It's wedged between two rocks, I think I can get it loose..." She held on with one hand and worried at the jewel with the other, "That fox must have dug it out of the dirt... ah!" the stone turned in her hand and suddenly came out. Trina came down the cliff in three long jumps and landed with the others. The jewel in her hand was golden, cut into the shape of a faceted leaf.

Gwen took it to wipe it clean on her coat. "I've seen this stone before... in one of Merlin's books! It's a wizard jewel!"

Ian nodded his shaggy head, "Very good. The guardian before me said that a wizard called Teradia left it here in ancient times. Jewel Riders, can you keep it safe?"

Gwen knelt before the wolf, "We'll do our best... do you really want to give it to us?"

Ian snorted, "Yes. That way I won't have to chase stupid foxes all day!" he said, and they all laughed.

They met up with Tamara and Fallon, who had seen the faery wraiths dancing and heard many other stories in the forest. Gwen handed the jewel around so they could all look at it.

"Hey, maybe we could see this 'wizard Teradia'." Fallon said, getting out her Moonstone.

"Ooh cool, try it!" Trina urged her.

Fallon touched the two enchanted jewels together and murmured a spell, and a midnight-blue bubble appeared in the air. The bubble lit up to show a woman with bronzy sheened hair and an oval face, except that she looked like a person crossed with a cat: cat face, ears, whiskers and all. Then she held up her jewel and became fully human. Fallon blinked, "That's the wizard-- but the image was already in the jewel, like a recording waiting for someone to see it."

"That must be what the jewel does." Tamara reasoned, "makes part-humans all the way human. But why? And I never saw a cat-woman creature like that before anywhere."

Trina was putting two and two together, and had to bite her tongue to keep from blurting it all out. What if Teradia was a shapeshifter? Her jewel might work for shapeshifters to turn them human. But what did Dare want with it? The other two Trina added in was Teradia's appearance. She could have been Anja grown up! Exactly where that fit in Trina didn't know, but it was worth remembering in case she ever saw Anja again.

When the others finished looking at the jewel, Trina quietly pocketed it.

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The fox watched them go, and sighed in relief. Everything was working out. He might win this yet. There was a chance, at least a chance.

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That night Trina waited outside the castle, on a bench in one of the gardens. Dare had not shown up yet. Trina hadn't told the others about his visit; she knew she should but something kept her from saying a word. "Admit it, Starstone Rider, you care about him." Trina muttered, pulling her knees up to her chest, sitting sideways on the bench. Two inches in front of her toes Teradia's jewel glimmered in the moonlight.

(So at last you admit it.) Silverwind's voice said from a clump of trees behind her.

"Hi horseface, was wondering when you'd show up. And I do not care about him **like that**." She added, hoping to avert a teasing session like the one she'd gotten after spending most of her joining-the-Jewel-Riders party with Dare. "I'm more interested in Teradia, could she be Anja's twin or what?"

(I think she's Anja's mother.)

"Could be. The timing is off by a hundred years or so but she was a wizard. And Anja never knew her real mother. But what this has to do with our present problems I don't know."

(It has to do with Anja, who Morgana is still angry at. I think she mistakes you for her... could even a wizard still be sane after all that time floating in the wild magic?)

"Very good, Silverwind." Said Dare's voice.

Trina looked around, "How come you can hear her? Where are you anyway?" she couldn't see him anywhere.

"No I won't come out. You got it?"

Trina snatched up the jewel, "I got it, but you owe me information."

"Like?" Trina could hear a grim smile in his voice.

She didn't back off, "What's going on with you, you looked terrible. And what's so important about this jewel? And what do you know about Morgana?"

"Silverwind was right. The Wizard is not sane and she's put your face on the one who threw her into the wild magic. She wants to destroy you in the most horrible way she can; all you Jewel Riders are walking targets. She won't try physical attacks, she wants you all hurt inside first. She may be crazy but she isn't stupid. Throw that star-rock of yours down a well and you'll live longer." All this was said in the flat, clipped tone of voice.

"As if. Will you please come out?"

"What else do you want to know?"

Trina thought she saw movement, a ripple of black that reflected moonlight, then it was gone. "What's wrong with you?"

"Don't worry about me."

That was insane advice, and Trina ignored it. Silverwind spoke suddenly, (You're caught up in the battle against Morgana.)

"Oh possibly."

Trina marveled at how purely nasty Dare could sound. She was standing now, looking vainly for a human shape anywhere. She didn't think of using her enchanted jewel to make light. "Hey, aren't I your friend?"

"Maybe. But if you are or not, you won't change. Loyal Jewel Rider. I could be taking advantage of your generosity. Or not. Or I might actually like you. Or I might have been lying all the time."

Trina got mad. "All right, if you want to be that way fine. But I'm going inside." She moved to put Teradia's jewel into her pocket-- and something flew past her, snatching it from her hand. It happened so fast for her to do anything, the next moment she was staring at the grass with empty hands. Nothing moved in the garden.

"What?! Dare, was that you? Are you here?"

Nothing.

"Oh blast!" Trina said, suddenly ready to cry, "I messed up. Again. They're never going to forgive me."

Silverwind came out next to her, but couldn't offer any comfort. (He's gone by now. Let's go inside, maybe something will turn up tomorrow.)

"Yeah, and maybe Gwen'll figure out I'm the weakest link in the team, and put me to work washing dishes where I can't do more damage." Trina replied, only half in jest.

But then they heard a quiet voice behind them, "I'm sorry, Trina."

Girl and unicorn looked at each other in utter confusion mingled with a tiny bit of 'maybe it'll be OK after all'.

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The fox leaped from the forest into the wild magic, carrying the jewel in his mouth. Once he was sure he wasn't going to fall back into the real world, he muttered the spell to change back to his real form. That form should have been human, he'd started out human. But no humans had white feathers mingled with their hair and claws at the ends of their fingers. The claws were new; one too many hours as a fox lately. If he'd been a full shapeshifter instead of a descendant this wouldn't have happened. If Morgana hadn't ordered him not to go human in the forest it wouldn't have happened...

"And if the moon were green or wishes really **were** fishes..." Dare muttered to himself. 'If' was not important, the important thing was what you were going to do about it. He held up the jewel and tried to call on its magic. Nothing seemed to be happening, there were no fireworks at least. Then he noticed his hands had gone normal again, and his hair too. For now at least. Dare let himself sag with relief for a minute, then pulled himself together and took two steps to Morgana's island. Distance was relative in the wild magic...

The wizard was waiting in her throne room, watching something in her crystal ball. Kale, chained up, was offering Morgana a tray of edibles. Probably her punishment for letting the dweasles vanish. Dare couldn't feel too sorry for her; the former princess of Avalon was getting her just deserts.

He stepped forward and bowed, "I found it, Lady Morgana."

"Good, and the jewel works, I see." Morgana hissed, "Give it to me!"

Dare tossed her the jewel, Morgana snatched it out of the air with her magic. "I took your advice and tricked the jewel brat into giving it to me. She'll have fun trying to explain losing a second jewel to her friends."

"I'm watching her explanation now." Morgana said, motioning at her crystal and smiling. "Would you like to see?"

This was not in the script. "If your majesty wishes." Dare replied, hoping it was a neutral enough answer. Morgana tipped her head and smiled, which could have meant anything. Then Dare saw the scene in the crystal ball. Trina was pacing, scowling fiercely. Her expression boded ill for whoever she was mad at, and in this case it was herself she was trashing out. On both sides of her pacing corridor the Jewel Riders were standing around looking very uncomfortable. They didn't want to blame their teammate, but there was no way they could refute the fact that Trina had lost the jewel. Dare cringed mentally, but looked up at Morgana and nodded.

"Just as I wanted, shame them first." Morgana said to no one in particular, "And if I can make **her** the first person ever kicked out of the Jewel Riders... could you set that up?"

Dare thought about it. On the surface it was impossible, unless the enchanted jewel completely rejected the person, he or she couldn't be kicked out. But that could be faked, "I'd have to think about it, but it could be done." He told the wizard.

Kale had been watching the conversation, now she spoke up for the first time, "I could get the girl banished from the crystal palace, I have greater magic than this half-breed shapeshifter! With the Darkstone--"

Morgana smiled, one of her nastier expressions, "As you wish, Kale. You will work together on this. I want that chit to be Starstone Rider no longer, and make them all suffer for it."

Dare looked sideways at Lady Kale, who was looking sideways at him. Neither of them were t all pleased.

Morgana hadn't finished. "Fail. Or fight each other. And you shapeshifter will be turned into a dweasel permanently and you, princess, will be put to work in your own mines. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Queen Morgana."

"Yes Majesty."

They both left the throne room, breathing sighs of relief at being out of Morgana's sight. Kale looked very glad not to be chained to that wall any longer, and Dare didn't blame her. She headed for her room without a word, so Dare shrugged and headed for his, to plan.

On the way he passed a magic window Morgana had installed. He looked down into a cave, an unstable cave that looked like it might cave in at any moment. And on the floor were people sitting around in groups. They were eating and talking, some singing to try and keep their spirits up. In the center of the cavern a young man with black hair was talking to some others, obviously the leader of the group. He looked up, even though none of them could see the window. Dare shrugged and waved anyway; his brother would probably know. That was who was down there: his brother Egael and the inhabitants of their keep down to the smallest child who'd lived in the fortress. Morgana could collapse the cave any time she wanted to.

All that. And he couldn't be a double agent with Kale around.

Dare went to his own room and started to plan the most convincing way to get someone expelled from the Jewel Riders.

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At the crystal palace Trina went to help Queen Anya look at the maps; the queen thought she had a lead on where another wizard had vanished. This much Trina was pretty sure she could help with without doing more harm than good. She and Anya translated clues from several old books, and came up with a location.

The queen shrugged, "That's where the wizard was last seen. Do you think you'll check it out?"

Trina frowned, "But that's way out in the ocean..."

## Starstone chapter 6: Lime Green is Not the Answer, by Stormdance

Disclaimer: As per usual, most of these characters belong to Bohbot and Robert Mandell, or maybe someone else entirely. My characters belong to me, or so they let me believe. That's Trina, Silverwind, Dare, Janni, and any wizard except Merlin and Morgana. I'm not making money for writing this piece o' fanfic.

Authorial rant: Wasn't the fashion show ep dumb? Well here's my version, which has got to be better cause I cut every cheesy plot point-- and then found I'd cut \*all\* the plot points. This part is a little crueller to poor Trina than last time even, but nobody said being a Jewel Rider was easy. Send any comments and "prevention of cruelty to fictives" signs to me at [mbaring@powernet.net](mailto:mbaring@powernet.net)  
Well, here's to my silly sister who insists lime green is a good color.

### Lime Green is Not the Answer

"You didn't escape, you know."

The dweasles looked up from their card game, saw their visitor, and yelped. They scattered the cards running for cover.

The reason for their fear nearly fell down laughing. He **was** wearing a black hooded cloak from which only his eyes were visible, and he **was** making his voice particularly icy... but still!

A dweasle voice came from under an overturned chair, (What do you want?)  
(You eediot, we are about to become raspberry jam! Now shut up!)  
(You shut up, Rufus!)

With a lot of self control, Dare managed to get his face straight and his voice hard. "I want to know what's going on, what the Jewel Riders are planning." He waited, "Or I really will turn you into jam!"

Two snouts poked out from hiding places. (Oh, it's you.) the green one said unenthusiastically. (Rufus, do we tell it what it wants to know?)  
(No!)

"Want to be turned into catnip mice and given to the Heartstone Rider's cat?" Dare offered.

(Nooooo, not catnip mice!)

(All right, here's the latest buzz.)

(Just do not tell any Jewel Riders we told you.)

"I think they'd understand dweasles and self-preservation."

(Maybe. The biggest news is...)

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"In the middle of the ocean?" Fallon asked in dismay, "Are you sure that's where the next wizard jewel is hidden?"

Trina leaned over the map table, her white-blond hair falling in her face, to trace out the longitude line, "Yep, we rechecked a few times and that's where it is."

Tamara was standing next to Trina around the table, while Gwen and her mother checked the references that had led to this spot. They were on the other side of the map room, crowded around Anya's desk.

"Oh, this is interesting." Gwen said, coming to join her friends with a scroll in her hand, "One of the ancient wizards lived in the ocean, another was said to have dwelt as one of the common folk in a village, designing beautiful things with her Jewel of Illusion. Like your Moonstone, Fallon!"

Tamara straightened in surprise, "Speaking of design, have you guys forgotten the fashion show is coming next week?"

"What, already?" Gwen said, looking at the calendar hung on one wall.

"Fashion show?" Trina inquired.

"It's a big festival kind of thing, happens every year. All the hottest designers come and show off their totally dreamy dresses." Gwen said excitedly.

"We usually get to model-- and eat festival food. It's fun." Fallon added.

"We haven't had much time for partying lately, this is perfect."

Trina blinked, "Are we going to put off looking for wizard jewels so we can party?"

"If we had any good leads we wouldn't." Tamara told her seriously, "But this ocean idea will take time to set up, and we can use that time to do more research. It's only a week."

"OK good, I thought you people had totally lost it." Trina said, and glanced over at the princess. Gwen was telling Fallon about her plans for the week, featuring the word 'dreamy' a whole lot. Trina sighed.

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That afternoon everyone seemed to have found something to do, except for Trina. Tamara was helping with music for the show, Fallon and Moondance were off somewhere, and Gwen was organizing. Trina wandered the gardens restlessly, unable to shake off a meaningless feeling of fear and wishing she was doing something. But not wishing it enough to overcome her sudden shyness and ask if she could help.

Trina saw Archie perched on a bench, a big scroll open in front of him. The owl was reading and taking notes, holding a pen with his wing feathers.

"Hi Archie, what're you doing?" Trina asked, going over to him.

"Oh, hello Trina. This scroll tells the powers of the ancient wizards. I'm trying to think of where their jewels might have ended up."

"Cool. There's Morgana's entry, Teradia, M'naan the sea wizard, dang this is hard to read."

"Well it was written two hundred years ago, just after Morgana was banished." Archie said, and pushed up his glasses.

"Were you alive then?" Trina asked suddenly, giving the owl a sideways look.

"Me? Heavens no, I may be a wizard's familiar and have long life, but I was only hatched in Gwenevere's grandparents' time."

"OK." Trina giggled, "I didn't think you were that old, but since Merlin is..."

Archie muttered something that was supposed to sound scolding but didn't make it, and went back to reading his list. "Here's an interesting one, the jewel of illusion used by the wizard Eskar to design buildings. The jewel could create images that acted like the real object so he could tell if a building was unstable. The Moonstone isn't that good!"

Trina knelt by the bench so she and Archie were on the same level, "But the Moonstone has other powers besides illusion, it's better for a Jewel Rider."

"You're right, I think you're right." Archie muttered, "Now where-- ah. Eskar was never banished, instead he repented his evil and Merlin let him stay in Avalon as a common builder. He helped design the crystal palace."

As one they turned and looked at the spires of the palace rising over the trees. Trina shrugged and turned back to the scroll, "What would have happened to his jewel then?"

"Who knows? He could have hidden it or left it to his children, sold it or even lost it. Could be anywhere by now."

"We'll have to find it sometime... The wizard Chierru-- where'd she get a name like **that**?-- whose enchanted jewel could call forth mighty warriors to do her bidding, banished by Merlin after her magic trampled two villages. Nasty one. The wizard Stellis, whose powers included transport to anywhere in Avalon, banished by Merlin. 'Nother nasty one. Why are all the ancient wizards nasty?"

Archie sighed and shook his head, "How much history did you learn?"

Trina laughed and turned so she could lean against the bench, "Some, but that was a long time ago."

"Well. In the beginning Merlin brought Good King Arthur and his court to Avalon to found a kingdom of peace. But Morgana learned how to come here, and she decided to take Avalon for herself. She gathered together her friends, six of the most powerful wizards in that world, and they came to Avalon and tried to take over."

"But they didn't, and Merlin dealt with them. I know that."

"Exactly. The wizards are nasty because they were Morgana's friends. But some of them weren't as mean as she thought so they turned to goodness."

"Like this one." Trina grabbed the scroll, "The wizard Teradia, friend of the shapeshifting folk. Her enchanted jewel had the ability to help and heal them, and temporarily grant another form to any thinking being." Trina blinked, "**What** did that say?"

"It could turn any intelligent creature into something else, but not for very long." Archie translated.

"Oh. OK. Teradia reformed and was allowed to return from banishment. She married and lives peacefully in the Forest of Arden."

"That's very poetic, but we already found her enchanted jewel. There should be one more wizard on the list."

"Yep. The wizard Reika. Youngest of the ancient wizards, her enchanted jewel let her communicate with the unicorns of Avalon, that's all it says. The Jewel of the Unicorns. She was my age in the stories, why would she hang out with Morgana?"

The owl shrugged his wings, "We'll never know I'm afraid. History. So much is lost."

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The fox sat quietly behind some barrels, watching the people set up for the great fashion show. Tents were going up just outside the walls, and already vendors had come to sell food and drink to the workers. The Heartstone rider had found herself an impromptu stage along with her magical animals; they were playing music for the workers, and some people on breaks were even dancing.

"Bah." Said a voice, "Are they working or playing?"

The fox turned silver eyes on his companion, a skinny black dog. "It's work, Kale. That's how they always set things up here."

The now-canine princess snarled, "I know you fool, I used to live here. When I rule Avalon there will be no dancing while there's work to be done."

Dare thought that the way things were going the moon would turn blue before Kale ruled Avalon, but he didn't say so. They were supposed to be working together on this project.

Kale continued, "So how does watching this help us take the Starstone Rider's jewel away?"

"I don't know, yet." Dare was forced to admit, "But at least we know there's chaos and a half going on. What would you do?"

Kale sat down, curling her thin tail around her, "The easiest would be to make the brat think her jewel is rejecting her. A Jewel Rider with no faith in herself is not a Jewel Rider who'll be giving us-- or Morgana-- any trouble."

Being a dog was civilizing Kale; she couldn't rant and rave in this form without somebody noticing. Dare nodded, "And I guess you have a plan to do that?"

"Of course I do." Her voice took on a lecturing tone, "Magic effects magic. The enchanted jewels can be interfered with by a powerful enough force. Like the darkstone with its new powers. I can do it all right."

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"Trina? You around here?"

"Over here Gwen!" Trina called, standing up and waving.

The princess hurried over, waving a card, "Look at this, it's from Lady Janni! 'Jewel Riders, I have a new line of dresses for show this year, would you like to model for me? For the usual payment of course. Thanks for the invite to the show, Janni Shonseal.'" Gwen finished reading and looked up to see Trina's reaction.

"Janni Shonseal? Isn't she the one who makes most of your gowns?" Trina asked, a little lost.

"Most of everybody's gowns Tri, she's the best! We model her stuff every year, and in return each of us gets to keep a dress after the show's over. We're about the most famous people in the whole kingdom, and she's the best designer... You in?"

"Sure," Trina said, "Hang on, I don't know a thing about being a model."

"Don't worry, it's easy!" Gwen called, already off to find Fallon and Tamara. Trina shrugged and sat down again. Archie was still there; he'd watched the exchange without saying anything. Now he straightened his coat and sighed, "The princess is enjoying this; she'll be back to normal when the show's over."

"The princess is an airhead." Trina grumbled, "And she says dreamy too much."

"That's as may be, but she's your leader and she's a good one." Archie said severely.

"True." Trina answered mildly. "So anyway, tell me things. About enchanted jewels, where do they come from, how do they choose who gets to be a Jewel rider?"

"Well I did want a student with the knowledge-hunger." Archie muttered, then said aloud, "The wizards created their jewels, nobody knows how except for Merlin who isn't telling. Your enchanted jewels were made by the wild magic that's in all of Avalon; Merlin found them and created the Jewel Riders-- we think that was the plan of the magic all along. The jewels are attracted to the bond of loving friendship that forms between a human and a speaking animal, and they will choose the pair who most closely matches their powers."

"Waitasec, this thing is **alive**?" Trina demanded, looking at her jewel.

"Well not exactly alive, but it is magically aware."

"Oh." Trina wasn't quite sure what she thought of **that** one. "Has an enchanted jewel ever... messed up? Chosen someone completely wrong to be a Jewel Rider?"

"Not in living memory for sure..." Archie tapped his beak with one feather while he thought, "It happened several times in history, the last one was about the time Morgana was banished, if I remember correctly."

Anja's time, Trina thought, maybe she was there. "What happened?"

"One of the Forest Stone Riders was a thief, and he used the powers of his jewel to steal things. His animal friend didn't agree with him, and it drove them apart until the Forest Stone rejected him. It's quite a fascinating story, the way the stone stopped working for him until at last the Pack leader figured out what was going on and had him sent away."

Trina wondered. Cyrus had been a thief, but he wouldn't do something so bad as to drive his friends away... would he? She resolved to ask Anja for the whole story as soon as possible. "This jewel is entirely unlucky; it's being followed by total chaos!"

"Enchanted jewels do seem to do that." Archie shrugged.

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The next day the Jewel Riders leaned off the balcony outside Trina's room to watch more people arrive for the show. It was a bright morning, sunlit and cheerful.

If one had slept last night; which Trina hadn't. Dreams. But she pushed away lingering fear and joined the others in discussing three people who came through the courtyard beneath them. Nobles from all around the kingdom were coming, as well as the greatest fashion designers.

"Oh, there's Janni!" Gwen exclaimed suddenly.

Trina saw a caravan wagon pulled by two unicorns. On the front seat a woman sat with a pile of papers beside her. She looked up and saw the Jewel Riders at the same moment, and stood up on her seat, waving, "Gwenever! Hello everybody!"

"Hi Janni, welcome back!" Fallon shouted, "We'll be right down to help you set up!"

Trina asked, "How come you guys know a famous designer?"

Tamara giggled, "We're her best models, come on, let's go see her!"

They ran down the stairs and out the front door, collecting Tamara's baby animals on the way. Cleo was still exclaiming, (Janni's here!) when they found the caravan in the jam of wagons and people just inside the gates. After each arrival signed in, they had to get **out** of the courtyard again, and Janni's fat caravan was causing some problems. Not that it wasn't a stupid system just in general...

Janni offered Tamara a hand up to the seat, while Spike and Sugar bounded into the designer's lap. The unicorns pulling the caravan rolled their eyes good-naturedly and patiently waited for a lull in traffic, probably good because Janni wasn't guiding them at all... Up close Trina saw that Janni was older, perhaps the King and Queen's age. Parent-age. Her hair was gold-and-silver, tied back from a strong triangular face. And the famous designer dressed like any woman of Avalon, in long but practical skirts. She was chattering happily with Tamara and Fallon, while hugging a baby animal with each arm. Trina was charmed.

"Janni, this is the newest member of our circle, Trina Starr. Trina, Lady J Shonseal." Tamara introduced them.

Janni looked down, seeming to notice Trina for the first time. "Hello! So you're the fourth Jewel Rider I've heard about. I'm pleased to meet you."

"Pleased to meet you!" Trina said shyly.

"And are you going to model also? I have the perfect dress..."

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"What are we looking for?" The fox asked, following his partner through the maze of tents.

Kale didn't answer for a long moment; she was sniffing the ground like a dweasle trying to get a scent. "One of the famous designers, Monsieur Antonio, has a magic spinning wheel. With it we can create anything made out of cloth, with any spell we want."

"Oh-ho, useful magic! What are you going to make?"

"Presents." Kale hissed (no mean feat when you're a dog) "For my niece and her little friends."

Dare cringed inside. Whatever Kale was planning would not be pretty. He didn't want to see the Jewel Riders destroyed, he really didn't... That train of thought always came to the same end: if he didn't help Morgana, worse things would happen. Who's the lesser evil?

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"Hi dad, I'm back!" Trina shouted and delivered a solid kick to the garden gate. It sprung open with a screech of annoyed hinges. Even the gate was correct... amazingly accurate for a dream.

"Hello Trina, how's life in the palace?" Traver greeted his daughter from the front window of their house.

"Lessons all day, chasing monsters all night... typical. Where's Mom?" Trina asked suddenly. A darker feeling entered the dream; she looked around but couldn't see any cause for it.

"Out in the back." Traver told her, "But Trina..."

"What? Dad, what?"

Instead of answering Traver turned and shouted, "Elodie! Trina's here!"

Her mother's golden voice floated back, "Trina! Come on back!"

With a sidelong glance at her father, Trina went through the house and out the back door. Elodie stood in the garden, turned away. In the sunlight her hair was bleached from gold to a silvery color more like Trina's own.

"Mama?"

"Trina, I have something to tell you." Elodie said, her voice softer and hesitant like it always went when she was uncertain. "Did you never wonder why you look the way you do? That silver hair, your face... you don't look a thing like either of us."

Trina still couldn't glimpse her mother's face. Fear was building in her, "Sure, when I was a kid... what are you trying to say?"

"That your mother isn't who you always thought she was." Elodie turned-- and she was Morgana.

"Nooo!" Trina shrieked, sitting straight up in bed. She realized where she was and slumped in relief, trying to clear the feeling of the dream from her mind. "Bad dream, really **major** bad dream." She whispered. She'd had the same kind of nightmare off and on since what had happened at the Vale of the unicorns. First the good part, about her parents being alive, and then a bad part about any number of things.

Trina reached her hand in the direction of her bedside table, where she'd left her enchanted jewel. Instead of floating to her hand as it usually did, the Starstone just lay there. She frowned and called harder, still nothing. Annoyed and frightened, Trina sat up and grabbed her jewel without magic. It was cool in her hands. She hugged the stone to her chest and curled around it, and lay like that, her eyes wide open, until morning.

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Dare yawned, lifted a paw to cover his mouth, and nearly tripped and fell. He blinked hard and cursed; being this tired was really messing up his ability to deal with the form he was in. "Kale, will you be finished soon? Like before the sun rises?"

"Yes, in a minute!" Kale said crossly. She used her darkstone to levitate the pile of magical thread they'd been spinning for most of the night. Then the color of the magic darkened and instead of glowing thread an assortment of ribbons fell to the ground.

Dare sniffed at them and covered his nose-- serious bad-magic stench! "You're telling me the Jewel Riders won't notice that?"

"By the time they do it will be too late!" Kale said in her human voice. She grabbed the end of a newly-made ribbon, tugged on it, and the shapeshifter jewel appeared at one end.

Dare goggled at her, "How did you do that?" He demanded, and turned human just as Kale did. They were of a height, so the stare-down wasn't interrupted.

"Wouldn't you like to know." Kale replied, tying the jewel around her neck, "Now I'm human and you're... not. Exactly."

He knew exactly what she meant; he still had fox eyes and ears on an otherwise human form. Not exactly human. "What are you up to? Morgana will be after you so fast--"

"Not if I do something she can't expect. My spell will wreak havoc on the Starstone without any more work, you couldn't do that. And I'll bring her the wizard jewel."

"What wizard jewel?!"

"Oh yes, the poooooor fox can't smell wild magic like I can. It's here, somewhere in these tents. Now since I'm doing the planning you can do the work and put those dresses where my niece will see them." The once-princess stooped down and sifted through the ribbons, "Here, this is for the little jewel brat you like so much. See that she gets it."

Dare fumed while Kale swept past him out of the tent. "When Travel Trees dance then maybe I will." He muttered in a fake drawl. But it didn't look like he had much of a choice. Unless he could pull something as unexpected as Kale's wizard jewel.

As the sky lightened from black to gray to pink, Dare began to search the wagons for this jewel, and to think furiously.

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(Trina, you're up already? You got back about midnight last night.) Silverwind said incredulously. It was only sunrise, long before Trina usually got up.

"I wasn't tired." Trina replied shortly, tying the ribbon at the waist of her shirt. Actually she was tired, but doing something was better than thinking. She'd been up before Silverwind even, and drunk a big cup of tea and juice to get conscious enough to make sense. "The show starts today, we'll finally get to see the dresses Janni and Monsieur Antonio have for us to wear. I can't wait, they wouldn't show us anything yesterday."

(So you were up until moonset dancing on wagon roofs with Fallon.)

"Yep! And now I have to go find some breakfast before we have to meet Janni." Trina said, and left.

Silverwind looked after her, switching her tail. She called her enchanted jewel and it came, attaching to her chest band. The Starstone felt funny, magically. Trina was in trouble of some kind, not immediate danger but something that would be danger if-- Her thought was cut off. Something dark had flashed by outside the window. Silverwind reached out with the power of her jewel, and grabbed the thing in a magical cage. The creature proved to be a large fox, who was sitting up straight and glaring.

"Just my ^#%\* luck." The fox said.

Silverwind gasped, (Dare? Is that you under the fur?)

Dare cursed again, cursing himself for forgetting Silverwind could understand him whichever way he talked. Just now the unicorn was glaring at him, her jewel shining brightly. He sighed, "Yes it's me. None of it was my idea."

(None of what?)

"None of anything. I'm on Morgana's side in case you haven't figured it out."

(That isn't your idea either-- why do you work for her?)

Dare attempted to bite one of the bars of the magical cage with his fox jaws and succeeded only in electrifying his teeth. Or at least that's what it felt like. "Maybe I have a good reason, or maybe I want to help her take over Avalon. Or both. What are you going to do about it?"

Silverwind switched her tail; she would have liked to hit him upside the head with it, (Trina's right, you're insufferable. If you'd come to the Jewel Riders for help we'd help you, you know.)

The fox's eyes glowed silver and he laughed, "Trina will help me anyway, she likes me."

Silverwind wouldn't have bet on that. (Whatever. But right now I have you locked up. So tell me what Morgana is doing.) She waited.

Dare knew he had an opportunity; he let himself hope that Morgana couldn't hear the mental speech of animals and that Kale wasn't close by. (There is a wizard jewel in the tents. Kale means to give it to Morgana too prove she is more valuable than I am. Kale also--) wait, should he tell about the spells on the Starstone? Yes, no... No, he couldn't. There was no way they could act well enough, and once Morgana realized her plot wasn't working she'd do something more violent to everybody.

(Also what?) Silverwind asked narrowly.

(I can't tell you. Kale also made some black-magic ribbons, I don't know what for. Now will you please let me go, I have to find something to impress Morgana or she'll--)

The fox's voice stopped like it had been cut with a knife, but Silverwind saw an image of falling stones. She dissolved her cage and let the fox-- Dare-- leap to the windowsill and out it. He was their only spy in Morgana's group, however infuriating he could be. Now, she had to decide who to tell what...

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Janni moved around her tent so quickly she seemed to float, holding dresses up to the girls one after another, then sitting on a chest of cloth while she made notes. Trina and the others looked through everything and had raptures over the dresses while Janni scribbled notes on her pad and muttered things like, "Wrong neckline, very nice but need a new neck-- how about the lunare look... perfect, but needs something to break up the lines. Maybe a sash, no, a low-slung belt right to left... if that would only drape properly... purple is the right color but that's the wrong shade... What was I thinking when I drew **that**?"

At that last, Trina looked up and laughed, deliberately posing with an armful of glittery cloud-white netting. Janni looked at her and grinned, "Perfect, Trina! That with a blue underdress and a gold top, I can modify something I have-- that will look perfect! And for you Gwenevere, more pink silk, a ball gown. Fallon, would you mind wearing a fancy hunting costume? It'll be much more practical than most of the silliness nobles wear to hunt."

"I don't mind, as long as there are no feathers." Fallon answered with a grin.

"Tamara, for you something casual looking, a little like what you've got on now, but..." and she was off again describing modifications to Tamara's outfit.

Trina grinned, "We are going to look great."

"You bet!" Gwenevere answered, "And you should see Monsieur Antonio's designs. He's not as good as Janni, more into hunting costumes with big feathers, but he's good anyway!"

Janni made a face and mimed huge swoops of feathers. "Not practical clothing at all, but neither are your dresses. That's an idea, a line of gowns that could be modified into fighting gear, Fallon do you think the merchant ladies would go for it?"

Fallon looked like she had to catch up to that one, "Uh, I think they would, yeah. Some of the merchant women can fight as well as their husbands but are too close to nobility to wear pants in public. Ask my mother, she might finance a project like that."

"I think I'll do just that. Now you four have to find something else to do, and leave me to finish your dresses. You'll see them when the show starts, everything will fit."

Now go on, scat." She shooed them out, not rudely. Trina didn't think Janni could be rude if she tried; she was just too bubbly.

The babies met them between the tents of the fairground. Sugar flew into Tamara's arms while Spike reported, (Tamara, there's someone here to see you, and Fallon and Gwenevere. Something about Morgana.)

Trina frowned, "Am I invited?"

(No, you are to please not come, very sorry.) Spike said like he was repeating someone else.

Trina scowled but shrugged, "Go see what it is; I'll hang around here."

Cleo stamped her little hoof and glared around, (I'll stay with you, we can have our own secret meeting.)

Trina giggled, "OK! Thanks, Cleo! Goodbye everybody, go on."

(Yeah, we wanna' talk about you behind your backs!) Cleo added, and the girls all had to cover their mouths to keep from laughing at her.

The other Jewel Riders left, following Spike and Sugar back to the palace, and Trina crouched down so she and Cleo were on the same level. The unicorn foal was about as tall as a big dog, though she wouldn't have appreciated that comparison at all. "So, what shall we do until they get back?"

(I know! Go back and see if Janni will let us in. Bet she will, since we got abandoned by everybody else.)

"I bet she won't, she's going to be pretty busy fixing the stuff she has for us... but I guess we can wander back that way."

They did, right back to Janni's tent. The door was firmly tied closed, but Trina looked through the flap anyway. The designer was sitting with her back to them, surrounded by billows of cloth as usual. She was working on a dress, making the wide stitches that wouldn't work for real life but held fine for just one show. Just in front of her a little image was hovering, of Gwen wearing the dress that Janni worked on now.

Trina gasped and choked on the breath she was taking. When she got her breath back, she ducked through the tent door squawking out, "Janni, **what** is **that**?!"

"What?" the designer looked mystified. She snapped closed a round case, and the image vanished.

"That picture thing!" Trina not-quite-yelled. Behind her Cleo squirmed through the door flap, her long mane miraculously not getting tangled. (What is it, what's happening?)

Trina was having trouble believing it. If Janni had what she thought Janni had, and just happened to have been using it just now, right after the Jewel Riders first learned of it and... Some corner of Trina's mind added up how improbable it was and came up with very, while the rest of her stepped forward and said, "Janni, would you please show me what that thing is?"

Janni was looking at her uncertainly, "Sure Trina. It's just an image-maker I got from my guild. Nothing special, just mirrors." She opened the case, which was flat kind of like a big powder-compact. Where the powder would have been was a round mirror with very thick glass, and another mirror was inside the lid. When she opened it the image appeared again, somehow created by the two mirrors.

Trina took it and touched the thick mirror. "Wild magic!"

"What?!"

(What?) Cleo echoed.

"This is a wizard jewel." Trina informed them flatly.

"You sure? I guess it's your Jewel Riders' job... but what in heavens was my guild doing with a wizard jewel?" Janni asked almost absently.

(That's a wizard jewel? What does it do? Let me see!) Cleo demanded imperiously.

Janni gave Trina a look, "Yes, show us what it does."

"Janni! D'you think I don't know magic when I sense it? Really... It ought to be able to do... um..." Trina held up the jewel, still in its case. Suddenly they were somewhere else. The air filled with the smell of flowers, green grass had replaced the rug of the tent, and all around them instead of cloth and canvas was...

(It's the Vale of the Unicorns!) Cleo exclaimed, bending down to sniff the grass.

"It's not real Cleo, don't eat it!" Trina told her hurriedly.

Janni was staring around wide-eyes, the sun glinting on her gold-and-silver hair. "That does illusions like this? I was told it could only do models... Trina, how did something that powerful end up being used for clothing design? And what am I supposed to do with it? And would you please return us to the tent."

It took Trina a few tries to undo the illusion-- it almost seemed like the Starstone was working against what she was trying to do. But at last it worked, and Cleo watched in awe as the ground under her hooves melted into the tent floor.

"Um." Trina said. "Sorry it was such a bid display... And you'll have to give this to the Jewel Riders for now; Morgana is hunting wizard jewels and you do **not** want to be caught with one, trust me. I don't know how your guild got it; the wizard who made this was a builder, a long time before the guilds were formed."

"History." Janni said, the one word seemed enough explanation for her, "But you'd better get that to the jewel keep now. Morgana might have spies here."

"I can never tell if you're kidding or not. And I will. Come on Cleo, we have to get this to Gwenevere!"

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The fox was sitting on top of a tent, calmly ignoring everyone who wondered aloud how he'd gotten there. Truth was that he'd flown, but they would have been hard pressed to believe that. Dare was watching Janni Shonsear's tent, on orders from Kale. He'd seen Trina and the little unicorn with the too-long mane go in a few minutes ago, but couldn't hear what they were saying. The tent flap opened, and Trina and Cleo ran out, almost skipping. Dare followed them, leaping from roof to roof. Luckily these tents were too well made to be knocked down by his weight.

Almost at the entrance to the palace courtyard there was an empty bit of field with hedge on one side and the back walls of tents on the other. Trina ducked through, still skipping.

Kale stepped out in front of her, Darkstone held high.

Trina shrieked a curse. She was carrying something cloth-covered, now she flung the strap over the unicorn's neck and yelled, "Get out of here Cleo!" The baby unicorn took one look at Kale and sprinted away, vanishing in the direction of the palace.

Dare tried frantically to come up with something he could do, and drew a total blank. Interfering would get himself at least killed.

Trina grinned insanely, "You must be Kale, I see the resemblance to your sister. Except the hair." She added as an afterthought, pulling the Starstone from its place on her necklace. "And the lipstick is awful."

"I am not impressed." Kale informed her, shooting a blast of magic that missed.

"Oh? How about this then?" Trina said, and held up her enchanted jewel, "By the magic of the Starstone!" There was a blinding flash.

That shouldn't have happened! Trina looked down. No jewel armor.

"What's the matter, jewel blown a fuse?"

Trina snarled at her.

Kale grinned, a truly fearsome sight. "What are you going to do now?" she asked.

"Well I've never been mostly defenseless before someone with a nasty magic jewel and a grudge against me... What's the usual thing?" Trina parried, and Dare stuffed a paw in his mouth so they wouldn't hear him laugh.

"You could always surrender completely and hand that jewel over to me. After all, it's not doing you much good."

"That's beneath my dignity I'm afraid." Trina said, after pretending to consider it. She was shifting her weight nervously, obviously wondering if Cleo had gotten the whatever-it-was far enough away yet. Dare got ready to leap off the roof just in case, and watched.

Kale scowled, "Beneath your dignity, gutter-brat from nowhere? I'm surprised."

"I'm a Jewel Rider." Trina replied.

"Not anymore you're not." Kale said as if stating the obvious.

Dare saw the words hit Trina like a blast of cold air. She stopped, frozen for a moment in horror. Just a moment though, and a second later she was back to normal. "OK, that better be long enough..." she bowed courteously to Kale, and started backing away, "You'll forgive me if I listen to my common sense and run away right now."

"Oh no, that would be unforgivably rude." The former princess replied, shifting her grip on the darkstone. Red magic gathered around her hand. She flung it forward--

Trina dove out of the way, but not quite fast enough. "Yeeeeeeesh! Ow. Pain. Major pain!" she yelped, trying to get up from where the magic had thrown her. Dare could see red fire rippling over her body-- that had to **hurt**. It occurred to him that getting blasted like that might cause real damage...

Kale bent over the fallen Jewel Rider-- ignoring Trina's attempts to hit her-- and picked up the Starstone. "A pretty little toy. If I throw it back into the wild magic..." Kale stopped and considered. "No, you keep it. Morgana will enjoy watching you try to keep your friends from finding out. Can't be a Jewel Rider without a jewel you know."

As Kale turned to walk away, Trina magically snatched the Starstone back from her. Trina looked like a demon at that moment, her face twisted with rage and lit red from Kale's magic. "Hah! I am so a Jewel Rider! I am so!" Dare cringed and bowed his head; this was all his fault and he could see no way to help.

She was still shouting when the Jewel Riders found her.

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Silverwind pushed open the door with her hoof and looked around it. Trina's voice floated to her from a cloud of steam, "If that's a human, go away, I'm taking a bath. If it's not a human, talk fast and I'll probably throw you out anyway."

(It's me, and I'll refuse to be thrown out. Are you feeling better?)

Trina answered sounding much less crabby, "Yep. Gwen was right, water really does wash off bad magic. Who'd've figured?"

(You mean you haven't read about it somewhere?) Silverwind asked, keeping the mood light.

"Hmm, it says standing under a waterfall is an antidote for love spells. Might be the same principle... or maybe the force of the water rattles your brains and that does it!"

(Maybe!)

Trina sighed, "You're being very nice horseface, you really are."

The unicorn blinked at her, (Huh? I mean thanks, but..)

"Everybody's asking what happened, I know. It's simple. I didn't dodge fast enough, that's all. She didn't give me time to get my jewel armor on."

(All right, I'll tell 'em that. Your friends think you're too good a fighter to be too slow, I'll remind them bad luck happens. But you'd better come out of here soon if you're going to be in the fashion show and not turn mermaid.)

"OK I'm coming. Wouldn't miss all the costumes for anything!" Trina got up and grabbed a towel, "What'd Gwen do with the wizard jewel? Is it locked up somewhere?"

(In the jewel keep. Fallon's really excited about it, she wants to try experiments with that jewel and the Moonstone. So if you go up there, don't trust your eyes!)

"No fear of that, I'm staying away from the jewel keep-- too easy to blow yourself up on all that magic. Although it might be an interesting way to go..."

(Morbid fascination.) Silverwind grumbled, shaking her head, (Well come on, you, or we'll be late.)

"Coming, coming..." with an effort, Trina switched into ditz mode, something she'd copied from Gwen, and babbled the whole way out of the palace to the big tent where the show was being held.

In a little tent behind the one with the stage, Gwen and the others were waiting for her. "Here, this one's yours." Tamara said, holding out what looked like a frozen fall of glitter on a hanger.

"That? Uuuuuuh, I do have some modesty." Trina said. Tamara just laughed and showed her how to put the creation on. It was actually more opaque than it looked, though the sleeves had more material than the skirt did. Trina knew she looked like some kind of Pure Maiden or a mist spirit or something in it, which was weird because she didn't feel anywhere near that graceful. The show was a blur and Trina was sad because she'd been looking forward to it and wanted it to be fun... but it was a blur of faces of the crowd cheering. Fallon did the total model walk complete with swaying hips and blowing kisses-- until she actually got on stage. And then Tamara went out and did a little turn around so the people could see her costume from all angles-- she really did look good in those colors. Then Gwen swept onstage in her ball gown that Trina could never have worn without tripping over and she looked every inch the princess. Trina had her turn on stage and was too distracted to notice everyone staring at her.

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When the show was over and the partying had ended for the evening, Trina left the others having a late dinner with Janni and went wandering. She had to find someone to ask about this business with her enchanted jewel.

And the fox watched her go.

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Trina left her room through the stable door that went right out to the gardens. It was too late and too cold for her to be out like this really, and she shivered in her thin nightgown. Well, she could go back to bed soon, until morning when somebody figured out what she had done. Then all chaos would begin, but that would be later. Trina wouldn't let herself think about later, not even a time as soon as sunrise. If she did she'd lose her nerve for this.

Trina walked through the gardens, where the air was streaked with flower scent, around the pond and into the friendship ring. It was very creepy, the place looked so much larger with nobody here but her. How many generations of Jewel Riders had done this... but they'd all been grown up and ready to go on to a life that wasn't all adventure. Trina wasn't ready for that, but she had no choice.

In the center of the friendship ring was a small stage and the pillar that would hold an enchanted jewel until it found someone to bond to. Usually the pillar wasn't there empty, but now it was. Trina got the distinct impression that the whole place was watching her. "Not a word." She muttered grimly to the spirits that hung around this place, "Not one word." She pulled the Starstone off her necklace, and put it in the air above the pillar. And couldn't make herself let go.

"Wait--" said a breathless voice. Trina whipped around. Something was coming across the floor, something black that reflected the moonlight. A fox. It spoke quickly in the human language, "I told you to drop it down a well but never thought you'd take me seriously."

Trina recognized the voice, "Dare, is that **you**?" she demanded, too incredulous to actually listen to the words.

"None other. Hi." The fox shape turned into a black blur which sort of flowed upward and solidified into the form of a human wearing a long cloak.

Trina was staring with her eyes as wide as plates. "You. The shapeshifter. You did everything."

"Most of it, yeah." He came closer so they were face to face, though Trina could only see his eyes under his hood. "Hey, sorry. I wanted to be a good guy but stuff happens you know."

Trina scowled at him, "I know. Now would you please tell me why you don't want me to drop my enchanted jewel down a well or else go away."

"Because it's all a trick. That rock's still bound to you. Kale's been screwing up its magic, her darkstone got a whole lot stronger since meeting Morgana."

"Marvelous." Trina rubbed her eyes, "And why should I believe you?"

"Because... I don't know. It wasn't my idea to run around stealing magic rocks for a three-hundred year old wizard. If you must know, she's got hostages for my good behavior. A lot of hostages. And that's the truth."

Trina looked at him, not glaring anymore but still suspicious. "Oh..."

"Don't believe me then. But believe in your jewel because it's still yours. In fact it should start working again soon, Kale has a powerful rock but she's not as hot as she thinks."

"All right, I'll wait. Are you..." she wasn't sure what the next words should be.

Dare grinned, Trina could hear it in his voice. "I'm sure. And I have to go, Morgana thinks I'm reading your travel plans-- which I already have. I am on your side, but I can't do everything. And whatever I do, it's to keep people alive. Believe that." He shifted back down into the fox and bounded away before Trina could say another word. Silence fell again.

The Starstone Rider turned and went back to her room to think.

Starstone 9/13: Jewel of the Sea by Stormdance

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Jewel of the Sea

The moon was rising, crescent shaped above the crystal palace. Trina was in her room reading while Silverwind had an evening snack in the meadow outside. The Starstone Rider had just finished telling her partner about what had been going on and Kale's spell on their enchanted jewel.

"Are you over that silliness?"

Trina nearly jumped out of her skin; she'd been alone in her room and had not expected the voice. She wasn't nearly as surprised when the speaker, a young woman with short bronzy hair, walked in through the wall.

Trina jumped up, "Anjadon'tyoueverdothatagainyouscaredmehalftodeath!"

Anja had some trouble trying to separate that into single words. "Oh. Sorry, I'm still used to having footsteps when I walk."

Trina tried to keep glaring, "you've been dead two hundred years!" she protested and covered her mouth so she wouldn't start laughing.

"Well my feet make noise over **there!**"

"Oh, I gueeeees that explains it. So there are floors in the afterlife."

"Maybe, or maybe spirits dance in high heels on the top of clouds."

"Then there's no gravity in the afterlife cause you couldn't dance in high heels otherwise!" Trina retorted, quite happy to let this go on all night.

Anja seemed to feel the same, "Have you heard that spirits have wings?"

"You don't. At least not right now. I guess you're not as high up a spirit as the ones in paintings."

(I agree, they always look so alightened.) Silverwind had entered the conversation, and the room, from her door to the meadow.

"Alightened? Is that a word?"

(Sure, invented it myself. It means light and enlightened and graceful, which you two aren't.) Silverwind finished, looking very pleased with herself.

The two Starstone Riders looked at each other, and declared Silverwind the winner of the day-- though what exactly the game was none of them knew.

"Things must be going well in the spirit world, Anje; you're making jokes." Trina commented, sitting down on the end of her bed.

"Yep. My... someone just got back from her fifth life so we're all together until she decides to go out on a sixth. But that's not the point."

Trina was trying to get her mind around the idea of someone wanting to come back for five lives, much less that such a thing were possible. "What's the point then?"

"That I'm supposed to ask if you want to see what happened to the poor kid who lost his enchanted jewel."

"Oh." Trina said, "I do. And I have another question or three, like how long are you going to be visiting?"

Anja looked serious, "I was wondering that myself. Ghosts aren't supposed to be allowed to meddle with the living, it messes up the... the rhythm. So why am I allowed to come tell you things? Hmm?" She wasn't asking Trina, not in the way of expecting an answer at least.

Trina tried to give one anyway, "What if the rhythm, whatever that is, was already messed up and you're supposed to put it back on track?"

"That's a pleasant thought." Anja drummed her fingers on her knife hilt, her voice meaning it was no such thing. "If anyone's going to fix things it'll be you. I'm dead and safely out of it!"

Silverwind stamped one hoof, (But things are good in Avalon, except for Morgana, and I think she's part of this rhythm. So are things supposed to be bad?)

Anja looked like she'd been thinking the same, "It might be so." She said grimly, pulled her cape around her, and vanished.

(Typical exit, just when we had more to ask.) Silverwind observed.

"Things in Avalon are supposed to be bad? That's nonsense, why would they be?" Trina asked in total confusion.

Silverwind shrugged her wings, (I don't know. Bad times are supposed to make people stronger, that's what the grownups say but I think they're wrong.) She stopped to nuzzle Trina's hair, (Don't worry about it. We sure won't make anything bad happen to Avalon!)

"Well I know that! We're Jewel Riders!" Trina laughed, then cringed at a memory of Kale. Not any more you're not, can't be a Jewel Rider without a jewel... It was going to take a while to forget that. The future would take care of that, and in the meantime a look into the past... Unless Anja forgot to set it up or something, just how **did** these memory-dream things work? Well it was all right either way, as long as it was over by morning; they were leaving to look for the next wizard jewel just after dawn.

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Things in Avalon... valiant protectors of the kingdom... supposed to be bad... Can't be a Jewel Rider without a jewel... it'll be you... can't be a Jewel Rider without... without...

The words echoed in her mind all night; not one of Anja's story dreams, more of a question. Riddle. Challenge. You can't be a Jewel Rider without...

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Trina looked out at the vast ocean beyond the tip of the Bay. The gray water went on until it met the gray sky, dotted with a very few islands here and there. The wind was crisp, though it wasn't a cold day. Trina pulled her cape more tightly around her and buried her fingers in Silverwind's mane. "We have to search for a wizard jewel in that?" she asked, "How, by turning into fish?"

Next to her, Gwenevere shrugged, "Not fish, I eat fish." She said deadpan, then grinned. "We'll get a boat and search the islands for starters."

"I can talk to some of the sea creatures, the ones that breathe air." Tamara added.

Fallon had a scroll spread across the front of Moondance's saddle, "The wizard M'naan lived in the sea, with his star sapphire which enabled him to breathe under the water and swim like a dolphin." She read.

"I guess that was written before the merfolk came to Avalon, or they would've kicked him out of their waters." Gwen said absently, watching a seagull.

Trina turned to look at the others, "Mermaids? For real? Can we ask them what happened?"

"Not likely, Trina. They never let humans see them, it's their way. Even for the Jewel Riders they won't come out." Tamara replied.

"Why can't things like this ever be simple!" Trina grumbled.

"If they were simple somebody else would have done them already." Fallon replied, and they all sighed.

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"I am not pleased." Morgana said icily. Her two unwilling conspirators quailed.

The scene must have looked strange as anything; the wizard on her throne, white-haired and robed in her signature pale green. And the two conspirators, one was a tall woman dressed in red jewel armor with a red enchanted jewel in one hand and a gold jewel on a ribbon around her neck. Next to her stood a young man with his face hidden

under the hood of a cape; he stood like someone waiting to get blasted-- as indeed he was. Having a ticked-off Morgana in the room tended to do that to one...

But the wizard turned her attention first to Kale. "Your spell was not good enough, or not long enough. If she was going to leave the Jewel Riders, she would already have done it. Have you got a good comeback?"

Kale's answer would probably determine if she spent the next month chained up or not-- or alive or not. Luckily for her she did have an answer. "I am valuable to you, Morgana. I'm already making progress finding the next wizard jewel, using this one so I can search the underwater--"

"Chaos take the wizard jewels!" Morgana shouted, "I want the Jewel Riders! I want that girl broken!"

Dare grimaced, baring pointed teeth under the shadow of his hood. Morgana was not sane, really really not sane. Not for the first time he had the urge to shapeshift into something really fast and get **out** of here...

Lady Kale was just as shocked, but managed a recovery, "But the wizard jewels can get you out of this wild magic and back into Avalon. You could be revenged on the Jewel Riders in person."

"Oh all right." Morgana hissed. Then she stopped, as if she'd realized something. "If fooling the Starstone Rider into giving up her jewel is not possible, could you make it give **her** up?"

"Corrupt one of the Jewel Riders?" Dare tried to keep his voice from going too incredulous. "That's what it would take and I think it's impossible to do."

Morgana hissed displeasure, but didn't shoot him down on the spot.

Seeing that, Kale added, "The Jewel Riders' unicorns are creatures of goodness, nobody who rides around on one can be turned evil. Besides, where's the fun in that?"

Morgana didn't answer; acted like the subject had never come up in fact. She started asking about finding the next wizard jewel and Dare breathed a quiet sigh of relief. Safe for another while.

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The Jewel Riders spent the rest of the day exploring up and down the coast from the inn. Trina and Gwen had the most fun, since their friends could fly them above the rocks where only Fallon could climb. There were plenty of interesting nooks and caves to look in, but nothing seemed to be hidden anywhere. Unless of course you counted the strange tide pool life.

By the end of the day they had given up on their task and decided to just enjoy it. The sun came out, it got warm, and they weren't finding anything anyway. Gwen and Tamara were discussing how sea creatures lived; Tamara had offered to call a whale, but taken the offer back because none of them were in the mood to get back to their quest just now.

Trina sat on top of a huge boulder, the highest one on the beach. She was doing her Starstone's 'find' spell, testing it out finding shells and starfish. The third time she tried, the Starstone made a shower of blue sparks instead of the straight beam of light. Trina gave the jewel a good thwap like Josh used on his gadgets when they weren't working, then sighed and hung the jewel back on her necklace.

Silverwind landed softly behind her partner, her kitelike wings catching the air; the rock was big enough for both of them. (It worked twice.) she observed.

"Yeah, but if I tried again it wouldn't. Morgana's spell should be wearing off faster than this!"

Silverwind had no answer, (At least nobody else saw the sparks. But if we get in a fight and they don't know your jewel armor doesn't always work...) the unicorn didn't have to finish the thought.

"I think that part of it works, it did when we were riding the Travel Trees here." Trina looked out over the ocean, her almost-white hair blowing back in the wind. "Y'know, we haven't seen another one of those travel-tunnel monsters. I thought Morgana made it, but why would she make only one?"

(I don't know. Maybe it was watching the part of the wild magic near her castle?) Silverwind guessed, (The king and queen are working with Merlin to learn about that and a lot of other things too, so we can concentrate on our job here.)

"Finding a wizard jewel somewhere out there..."

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Selace looked up and followed the light. She came up in the blue-on-blue middle of nowhere and looked towards the rocks. There they were, the winged unicorn banking above the shore, the two girls sitting in a hollow, the girl and the prism-winged creature on the high rock looking like they might be blown off.

"Humans." Selace muttered, and shrugged. These were supposed to be the best of the humans, but why give any human a magic jewel?

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The Jewel Riders rented a small boat to explore the islands. It was too little for the unicorns, who were not happy to be stranded on shore.

Trina leaned over the side and looked down. And down. "Whoa, there's a lot of... space down there. The water's clear all the way to the bottom."

Gwen was leaning out also, holding onto the mast with one arm. She was using the Sunstone's magic to make wind to move them. "Yeah... Can you see anything that looks like a jewel?"

"Not me." Trina answered, "Hey Tamara, can those animals find it for us?"

"No, they have to stay with their families. Anyway, they wouldn't know what to look for."

"Neither do we." Fallon pointed out from her seat in the front. She collapsed her telescope and stood up to stretch-- carefully so as not to tip over the boat. "We've looked in all the caves that are above water, and we can't get into the others. And,"

"It's probably in one of the others." Trina finished with her. They knew it was a long shot, coming here. The jewel probably was hidden underwater somewhere where they couldn't get at it. And Morgana did know where they were... "The odds here are not good."

"I know." The princess tilted her Sunstone and the wind changed direction a little. They held on while the boat turned against its own wake. "Trina, did you try that finding trick?"

"I tried." Trina didn't look up. "It didn't do anything, but that might mean the wizard jewel's out of range, or shielded somehow, or disguised, or that my Starstone is just in a bad mood." She shrugged and twisted her pale hair back into a knot, which immediately blew undone.

"We need some kind of help." Tamara stated.

Just as she said that, Trina saw a flash of motion underneath the boat. It was only out of the corner of her eye, but Trina would have sworn to a flash of blue more intense than the water-blue. Then a face appeared, coming up right through Trina's reflection in the water. Trina "eep"ed and fell backwards into the boat. A good thing-- the face was followed by a hand that grabbed for her enchanted jewel!

"Hey!" everybody yelled at once.

The blue person reached for Trina's jewel again but she slapped its wrist with a lucky blow. Then the person sighed gustily, folded faintly blue arms on the side of the boat, and looked at the stunned Jewel Riders.

Tamara was first to recover her wits, "Um, excuse me for asking but-- what are you?"

"A mermaid." The blue person said readily. She sounded prissy.

Trina sat up and got a good look at their visitor. The mermaid had short, silky blue hair and faintly bluish skin. She had webbed fingers and crests on her elbows and ears-- which disturbed Trina no little. Trina stared, filing away every detail; curiosity almost overcame her annoyance at this person, but not quite, "What do you want with my jewel?" she demanded.

"That's raaaather a long story. First, you **are** the Jewel Riders out of New Camelot?"

"Yes, we are. I'm princess Gwenevere of Avalon. What's your name?"

"Selace, a princess of the merfolk of the Bay of Storms." The mermaid nodded her head with the same effect as bowing.

Fallon ducked under the mast to look at Selace, "Did you want something with us?"

"Could I borrow an enchanted jewel or two?"

A round of polite but very firm 'no's answered her, but Gwen added, "We can't loan you our jewels but if you tell us why you want them we might be able to help."

Selace winced and looked resigned, like someone taking the very last possibility, "There's troubling magic in the Bay. My father's new... friend is a sorceress who has never been seen before, but I have seen her looking for the entrance to the cave of magic where nobody's supposed to go. She is a law unto herself and my father will not stop her."

"A sorceress." Gwen said.

"Any ideas on who that might be?" Fallon sounded sarcastic.

"Morgana does know where we are; bets it's Kale?" Trina asked in an undertone.

"No bet." Tamara replied, then turned to Selace, "We'd like to help you, but how? We can't breathe underwater."

The mermaid frowned, "Your jewels can't do even that? Huh! Come out tomorrow, I will have something so you can come under the water." She sounded a little breathless, and ducked under water. That was the last the Jewel Riders saw, besides a pair of fanlike tail fins flipping into the air and the vanishing.

"Well!" Gwenevere said.

"She thinks a lot of herself."

"Ssh, Fallon." Tamara said, "We have a chance to search underwater now."

Trina was leaning over the side of the boat trying to see where Selace had gone, "But Kale beat us to it." The boat dipped and Trina got a faceful of ocean and came up sputtering.

Gwen giggled and tossed her friend a towel, "We knew she would. But how can she breathe down there?"

That question stumped all of them.

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Selace got down out of sight and let herself drift above the towers of the merfolk city. She was not pleased; she needed magic, not kids with magic! But if the Jewel Riders wanted to help, by all means let them throw themselves into the pot. It might tip a balance or two. She flicked her tail and dove into an upper door of the palace. There was a spiral swimming shaft to ground level, past Selace's own rooms and those of her family, past the other important rooms of the palace. What she wanted was below ground level, actually dug into the sea floor. The treasure room.

The treasure of the royal family was stored in the traditional way-- on the floor, a knee-high heap of pearls and gold. Selace dug through it until she unearthed a silver box gracefully carved with swirls of seaweed. It wasn't locked, but the room itself was (besides being guarded by electric eels) so thieves weren't much of a problem.

Inside the box were two belts made of pale green scales. Made, in fact, from two past kings who willed their magic to be made into such belts when they died. Selace felt funny about touching them, much less taking them, but she did both. Tucking the belts into her pockets, she reburied the silver box.

There were sounds in the hall, currents in the water that meant someone was coming. Selace ducked into a crevice in the wall, pulling herself farther in as she saw who it was. The king of the merfolk and his new friend.

Selace's father looked laughingly indulgent as the black-haired merwoman dug through the treasure, praising this piece and that one, but looking closely at all of the large jewels. What on earth was she looking for?

"This treasure is very... lovely, my king, but surely your realm holds greater treasure than this. A treasure of magic perhaps?"

The king looked secretive. "There is such a treasure, but not here. You can see it in the enchanted caves."

"Oh-ho, enchanted caves!" The lady said, and then turned back into a coquette as she tried on the jewels and flirted shamelessly with the king. Selace squirmed farther back into her hiding place and waited for them to leave.

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"I wonder what Selace meant we'd be able to come under the water."

Trina giggled, "Fishbowls on our heads?"

The Jewel Riders were on the beach, cooking their dinner over a fire in a pit of sand. Fallon stuck her dagger into the fire and got out a potato. Tamara held out her plate while Gwen tried to scoop out a fish from the other side of the fire pit.

"Not fishbowls." Tamara said absently, "I think it's something magical."

"Maybe it'll be the wizard's jewel!"

Gwen smiled, "Somehow I don't think it'll be that easy, Fallon."

"It might be though." Trina stared into the fire. The shifting flames turned her pale hair orange. "It was that easy with the last jewel, it just showed up."

"That was a coincidence." Gwen told her, and passed around a bottle of juice.

Tamara balanced her plate on one hand and picked up the book she'd been reading, "Hey guys, listen to this. 'Wild Magic inevitably wears away the defenses of any person who stays in the magic for too long. The magic then wears away the person's body, leaving a spirit in a shell of wild magic. But invariably the nature of the person will be warped, towards either insanity or transcendence. Such warping can be seen slightly in anyone who stands defenseless in wild magic for even a short time.'"

"What's transcendence?" Trina asked. For some reason this reminded her of her riddle-dream.

"Being perfect and knowing everything." Fallon said, but Tamara said it meant becoming more spiritual in a big way.

Fallon nodded, "So Morgana and Kale are either getting spiritual or going crazy?"

"And with them it's probably crazy... ugh!" Trina exclaimed, "They were pretty bad before getting dumped into the magic, and it's probably been making them worse. That's bad..."

"Guys--" Gwen said, a strange tone in her voice, "How well is Merlin protected from the wild magic?"

"He'll be fine, Gwen!" Tamara reassured the princess, "Merlin hasn't been lost for long at all compared to Morgana. He can take care of himself."

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It was the next day, a little after noon. The girls were out in their boat, just drifting around the bay sitting under their umbrellas on the boat. Waiting for Selace.

"Hey Fallon..." Trina began, after a long silence. The Moonstone Rider looked over and quirked her eyebrows so Trina continued, "Can you make illusions of other places with your jewel? Ones that shows what's really happening?"

"Sometimes. Want to see something?" Fallon offered.

"Um, yeah. Can you show me... my old house?"

"Well I'll try."

Trina scooted over next to her while Fallon whispered a rhyme to her Moonstone. The violet jewel glowed and an image appeared in the light.

"Wha-a-a-at?!" Trina screeched. The image showed the foundation of a small house-- blackened, with only a few scorched beams rising at the corners. Trina goggled at it. "It burned up. Someone BURNED UP my house!"

Fallon looked darkly at the image, "Someone did, too. Lightning would have taken out a larger area."

Before either of them could say more there was a splash and the mermaid's head appeared over the side of the boat. She blew a spray of water away from the boat, and took a breath of air so she could talk to them. "Here. Got them. Only two though."

"Two what?" Trina stared at the lengths of glittering scales Selace pitched into the boat.

The blue-haired mermaid looked at her like she was incredibly dim. "The belts that turn you into a mermaid. Now which two of you are coming? I want her and her." She pointed at Trina and Gwen, who looked at each other.

"Up for this, Tri?" Gwen asked.

Trina looked uncertain, then curiosity overcame her doubts, "Yeah! ...But are you sure Fallon or Tamara wouldn't be a better choice to have down there?"

The princess thought for a minute, and glanced over at Fallon.

"Go on, Trina. Tamara and I can keep searching up here. I don't really want to go underwater anyway." Fallon said, and Tamara backed her up.

"All right." Trina said, and turned back to the impatient Selace, "What do we do?"

"Get in the water, and put them on." Trina and Gwen shrugged, and dove into the water in their swimsuits.

The bay was cold, but not really cold. Trina kicked to stay up while she pulled the strange belt around her waist. There was no buckle, nothing to keep it on... she touched the two ends together.

Trina vanished in a tiny explosion of sapphire-blue magic. When it cleared, she gasped out, "That **really** hurt." And ducked under to get a breath of water. Her body was changed for breathing liquid instead of air, but her brain was still convinced she'd drown if she tried it. While she was getting up her nerve, Gwen made the change too.

"Wow!" Tamara said from the boat, "That's impressive magic!"

Trina looked up and grinned at her. "It's ok once you get used to it." She said, and realized the nobody in the air could hear her unless she had a lungful of air to talk with. That could get annoying very quickly...

Selace appeared next to her, "Can we go already?" she demanded haughtily.

Trina wasn't listening; instead she was looking down at herself. Her swimsuit seemed to have been cut off halfway, and a few inches below that her skin was replaced by a band of scales going down to a long tail with a fanlike fin at the end. "Wow..." A few yards away Gwen was trying out her tail. The princess came over to them, "I'm ready. But, uh, what happened to our suits?"

Selace giggled, "Gone by magic. Maybe they'll reappear when you turn back, maybe not."

Trina covered her mouth, torn between embarrassment, laughter, and the desire to bop Selace for being so nasty. "So where are we going?"

Selace twirled around in the water, and waved Fallon and Tamara to take the boat away. They did only after Trina and Gwen waved them off too. Then the mermaid turned back to her guests, "The sorceress is searching the enchanted caves today. Gwenevere, can you follow her?"

"I-- sure, but--"

"Trina, you will come with me."

Trina scowled, "Explain your orders!" She said, as she would when the king taught them war games. But Selace was not trying to teach and was not nearly as friendly as King Jared.

"I am a princess and you are not. Not here. So I order Trina to help me investigate in the palace."

Gwen sighed, "Go with her, I'll see if it's really Kale in those caves."

Outvoted, Trina shrugged and followed the blue fan of Selace's tail towards the palace while Gwen swam off in the direction of the enchanted caves.

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Gwenevere found the cave entrance from above just as Selace had said she would. What she hadn't expected was to see a dark red mermaid with a cloud of black hair dive through the opening before she got there. Kale!

Gwen waited until her aunt had had time to get farther into the caves, then dove toward the entrance. Inside, there were two tunnels-- nothing to indicate which way Kale had gone. Between the two entrances was a plaque carved into the wall. Gwen read, "Whoever would find the secret of my magic, take the test before you." Gwen swished her tail in the water and thought, "Sounds like the trials the unicorns use. If I can get through it before Kale..!"

Choosing a tunnel at random, Gwen swam down it as quickly as she could.

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Trina was not sure about this. Really really not sure about this. Especially about Selace. The mermaid struck her as a particularly nasty little person out for only herself. But unfortunately they had no other way of getting underwater. "Selace, are the enchanted caves dangerous?"

"No. A little scary but nobody gets hurt there. What powers does that enchanted jewel have?"

"Um, it opens things, sometimes. And it can find things, sometimes. It probably has some other powers but I haven't discovered them yet." That last wasn't strictly true; Trina knew most of her jewel's powers. But the biggest other power was hugely destructive and she didn't want Selace trying to get her to use it.

"Well can it find traitors?" Selace inquired.

Trina was stumped on that one, "I never tried it for something like that."

"Can it show who's doing what?"

"Not this jewel. Fallon's could, maybe."

"Can it discover peoples' real motives?"

"No enchanted jewel can read minds! At least none we know of. What do you want to do? Tell me and we'll think of a way to do it!" They were facing off, high above the towers of the palace. Trina's silver hair and Selace's blue swirled in the water.

"I want to know who's in on the conspiracy to dethrone the royal family!"

Trina swished her tail, the mer-equivalent to stepping back in surprise. She had not expected to be handed a conspiracy! "What?!"

"Someone in the sea is trying to discredit the king's decisions in council. Someone blocked the channels to the open ocean so our traders lost half the year's profit. And someone made two assassination attempts on members of the royal family." She still sounded prissy, but also very hard. Trina recognized the manner; Selace was a princess all right.

Trina had the strong suspicion that she was out of her depth, in more ways than one.

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Gwen was swimming cautiously through a cave full of seaweed. The weed stood straight up, leaving only a few feet of open water above the forest. Every so often the leaves would ripple, and Gwen couldn't see if it was a current stirring them or the passage of some swimming thing. The princess of Avalon looked back at her mermaid tail, which was a sort of topaz color in the white luminescence. The light was provided by some kind of shell creatures like barnacles that lived in the rock ceiling; she guessed the mermaids had brought them from deeper water where glowing creatures normally lived.

The leafy forest stirred again, showing colors like oil on water where the leaf edges caught the light. The stir was moving, so it couldn't be a current. Something was

definitely down there. Gwen kept her eye on it and reached for her Sunstone, wondering if the whatever-it-was was going to let itself be seen this time.

A head came up out of the weeds. Shaped like a cross between a snake and a fish, it was glowing blue. Really glowing, reminding Gwen irresistibly of the special effects traveling shows sometimes used. The eel hissed, revealing a forked tongue and rows of spines that must have passed for its teeth, and arced through the water towards Gwen.

"By the magic of the Sunstone!" she summoned a shield just as the eel lunged, just in time. The blue head hit the gold shield and-- disintegrated. Fell apart into blue sparks, which went out.

"Whaaaaat?"

Nothing was moving in the whole cave.

The eel dove up at her without warning. Gwen threw another shield at it, and the creature disintegrated again. A minute later it attacked again, and fell apart again.

Then nothing. A long minute later the eel drifted up slowly, its eyes unfocussed. It looked sick. Maybe hitting shields was finally getting to it. The princess considered blasting it with her magic, but decided not to; the creature had a purpose here. She flicked her tail and went on to the next room.

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The palace was beautiful up close. It was grown of living coral, covered with the tiny sea life that inhabited normal reefs. The only things that weren't natural were the huge pearls and gems set into the walls as windows, and the shape of the palace itself; curving spires and arches. The place was ornamented strangely also, roofs given more attention than walls as appropriate for people used to seeing their dwellings from above. The city looked like the kind of castles children made by drizzling wet sand through their fingers, built down from the top and at odds with gravity.

There were very few people about, and all of them swimming like they knew where they were going. Visibility down here was strange, a hundred feet in any direction it faded into a kind of misty blur. Except down, where the whole sea floor showed clearly and up, where the only thing to see was the light of the sun. Trina thought she saw something at the edge of her vision, drifting in and out of sight. Not a mermaid; some kind of fish. A really big fish, or maybe an... (What had Tamara called them?) Sea-mammals, that was it.

"Oh shards!" Selace muttered as a larger group of people emerged from a palace door below them.

"Who are they?" Trina asked her, watching the new arrivals with admiration; they were all colors and their scales sparkled in the lazy sunlight.

Selace was less than pleased. "Half the council and they're looking for me. They shouldn't see you! Go hide, I'll meet you in the pavilion in the garden when I can lose them."

"All right--"

"Go on, quick!"

Trina spun and swam away, as fast as she could. And tried to stop being annoyed at Selace, though she thought being annoyed at Selace must be a pretty normal thing. The group, and the princess, faded into blue, and Trina looked down trying to find the pavilion. She couldn't even be sure what was garden and what was more buildings.

"Whooboy." She muttered.

(Trina,) said a voice in the mental speech of magical animals. Trina jumped and looked around. "Who's there?" The voice had been familiar...

A dolphin appeared from the blue mist. It was at least as long as Trina was tall, dark gray on top and white underneath. It rolled sideways in the water and grinned at Trina. The dolphin had reflective silver-green eyes. (Who's **always** there when you people are looking for wizard jewels?)

"Dare? Of course, should've expected you." Trina wasn't surprised, after the first moment. Trying to keep her voice neutral she asked, "What's up?"

"Can you leave that circus behind for a while? I have to show you something."

Trina scowled, and wished delphine expressions were easier to read. The expression in his voice was clear-- desperate hope. Not unusual for him. "Uh, Dare you **do** work for Morgana who **is** trying to do me major violence. Is it a trap?"

"No. Not Morgana's idea, don't worry. I just hope Morgana doesn't think of it before we're done. You will help me right? Please?"

"Sure." Trina said, with the weird feeling that even if she thought it was a trap she couldn't have **not** helped.

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Gwenevere found herself facing a wizard. Not an actual wizard, but a mosaic cleverly worked in sapphires on the wall of this chamber. And it talked, too, in an echoing magically created voice that boomed through the water. "Why do you seek my secret?" Then in a much less grand tone the voice said, "It's trite but it works. Answer."

"I'm looking for wizard jewels to bring my teacher Merlin back to Avalon, and to stop Morgana from getting them." She tried to remember if M'naan had sided with Merlin or Morgana, but couldn't. "I don't know for sure what Morgana wants with the jewels, but it's nothing good! She's been trying to get rid of us. Among other nastyness."

The sapphire wizard couldn't move, but a wave of light flashed over the gems that made up its form. "Who are you?" The voice said.

"Princess Gwenevere of Avalon, wielder of the Sunstone."

"Truth. Pass then."

A door opened, and Gwen made a hasty exit. For some reason that talking wall frightened her. It had been created by wizard magic, and who knew what weird things wizard magic could do? As she left, Gwen thought she heard the voice say something about "...prove how much you want to see..."

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A human head with silver-pale hair came up into the light of a high cavern. Trina pushed her now-dripping bangs out of her eyes and looked around, then ducked back under, "There's air here!" She exclaimed.

The dolphin came up next to her, then faded into a blur as Dare transformed back into his human form. "It's over here. There's a channel but I'd rather walk."

Trina had noticed the blurry lights filling one wall of the cave; she ducked under and came up in another pool next to it. "What is this thing?"

"One of the sea wizard's creations. I think. It's a door that leads anywhere you want." Dare came over, trying to wring out his soaked clothes and keep his footing on the uneven ground at the same time.

Trina had a sudden itch to try the door out, just to see if Dare was right. "What do you want with it?"

"Morgana has hostages for my good behavior, remember? If they were freed I could escape, or maybe do her some damage. And that portal is the most likely way to get them out. But--"

"But it needs a connection to the wild magic to power it, right? Like an enchanted jewel." Trina finished for him.

Dare nodded and sat down next to her pool. "It seems like every time we meet it's cause I need you for something, but..."

"But you don't have a friend so you're asking me, right?"

"Exactly."

"So how does that thing work?" Trina asked. She took her Starstone off her necklace and tried to get a feel for how they were going to do this.

"You throw magic at it and I try telling it where to open to. You're not even thinking this might be a trap to steal your jewel? I do work for Morgana at least for now."

"I thought of it."

Dare gave her a blank look, then his silver eyes widened, "You trust me?"

"Yeah."

"You really shouldn't."

Trina tried giving him back look for look, but his expression was too serious. She grinned. "I'm your friend, so I trust you. Now let's try getting this door to work before Selace comes looking for me. By the magic of the Starstone!"

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The next cave was only a cave. Except that the entrance closed behind Gwen and the only exit was through a door set in the ceiling. A locked door. In one wall a narrow tunnel was cut, only wide enough for Gwen to get her arm into. The key was at the other end of the tunnel, well within reach. But the hole was lined with starfish; red furry starfish.

The princess reached for the key, and one of the stars dropped lightly onto her hand. It curled tightly around her wrist-- and the fur turned out to be spines. Gwen shrieked and shook the thing off. Her arm felt like it was burning; the pain creeping from her wrist to her shoulder. She bit her lip on another scream, one of pain and sheer terror that the poison might be deadly.

It didn't seem to be; after a too-long moment the burning feeling got less, and slowly faded away to a slight ache. Her head felt a little funny, but that was all. So that was part of the test, having the nerve to reach past the nasty things to get the key. She tried to lasso it with magic; no dice.

Gwen looked into the hole and cringed. There were a lot of the starfish. A lot. "Come on Gwenevere, you have to get that key! And fast, in case there's a chance to beat Aunt Kale to the jewel!"

On the last word, she stuck her whole arm into the hole, groping frantically for the key. She grabbed it and pulled her hand out, just as about five starfish delivered their jolts of poison.

And then for a while Gwen did nothing at all, floating with one hand over her mouth to keep from screaming while tears of pain ran into the water.

Finally she could think enough to get the key into the lock and let herself out of here. She emerged into a long corridor decorated with gemstones and solemnly lit.

Gwen's head felt fuzzy, and she realized those starfish were a lot more poisonous than they looked. Swaying, she saw another door open, and someone dressed in red swam in.

"Why Gwenevere." Said a too-familiar voice, "What on earth happened to you?"

"Some test, those things're..." Gwen said faintly, "...Aunt Kale?"

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The door worked like a charm, which it probably was. Trina directed a stream of wild magic energy at the crystals around the doorway until they glowed, and the sluggish colors in the portal cleared. Dare looked at it doubtfully, then shrugged and walked through.

A very long moment later he reappeared, grinning. And not alone.

Trina watched the people coming through the doorway. The first one to follow Dare through was a tall young man with Dare's black hair and gray eyes. Not much question who that could be! He bowed to her, "You must be Trina. Greetings and all that, I'm Egael. Thanks for getting us out of there."

Trina saluted him, smiling. "Thank your brother, he... found out how to do it."

Dare joined them, teetering on the slippery rocks. "Brother-mine, there is a long story, a very nasty long story that we shouldn't talk about now, behind that. Morgana..."

"Yeah, Morgana." Egael cut him off. "What's important now is getting all these people out of this cavern to safety. Starstone Rider..."

Trina nodded, "I've got a few ideas."

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"Oh...what?" Gwen woke up in the gemstone corridor. Her Sunstone's sense for wild magic was going crazy, and showed Kale's purple-red power all through her body and the water around her. But... "I'm alive. Aunt Kale saved me? Too weird." She filed that one away to think about later-- to think about for a long time later-- and went to see the final chamber.

The final grotto in the enchanted caves was small, round with the floor heaped with gems and pearls. A natural stone pedestal supported an open book. Gwen didn't see anything that looked like a wizard jewel. She didn't even see a place for one. "Maybe there's a map in the book... I hope not; I want to get out of here."

She tried turning to the beginning, but the pages wouldn't move. The book might as well have been a statue there, with only one page open. At least she could read that.

A minute later Gwenevere sank to the grotto floor in shock. What she'd found was not a map, not anything that could help her find the jewel of the sea wizard. Instead it was the diagrams and instructions for a spell to shatter a very powerful enchanted jewel. A controlled shatter, so each piece would have a fraction of the power of the original. To create a new race.

Gwen sat in the treasure on the floor and thought this through. "He shattered his jewel. Dissolved it. So the merfolk could exist. There's no way Kale and Morgana can get it! ...But no way we can get it either. Merlin..."

They could not use the wizard jewels to bring Merlin home, and there might be no other way.

Gwen shook herself, "We'll find a way! But first... how on earth am I going to find Trina?"

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"Selace! Selace, are you here?" Trina called softly into the shadowy interior of the garden pavilion. At least she hoped it was the pavilion.

A moment later two strong hands grabbed the front of her shirt and hauled her in. "I've been waiting for you!" Selace sounded mightily annoyed.

"Eesh, lemme go. I had something to do.. And I have kind of a problem. About three dozen humans trapped in a cave. Will you help me?"

"Three dozen **what**? Where'd you find that many humans? And what about--"

"Wait!" Trina had had a blinding flash, "You need proof that Kale, that sorceress, is bad news right? These people know that, they were captives of the one Kale works for and most of them saw Kale while they were being taken! Your proof."

Selace looked like she was trying to find something wrong with that, but couldn't find it. "All right. You need to get them to the mainland? I'll provide boats if you can get them to the surface. Can that jewel of yours at least do that?"

"Yep." Trina said happily, "Fallon and I practiced that power."

Selace smirked, "Good. Come on then, I have to order out boats."

"What did half the council want?"

"They had to tell me my plan to reopen the trade routes was a great success."

Well that explained her good mood. "You can plan stuff as big as that? Wow, what'd you want us for then?"

"Your magic, of course. Even I know you fight magic with magic."

A flicker of gold appeared in their circle of vision, then they saw it was the princess of Avalon. "Gwen!" Trina shrieked, "What happened to you?!"

Gwenevere smiled tiredly, "A close call. If it hadn't been for Kale..."

"Kale helped you?" Trina and Selace demanded in unison.

"Where are you going? Let's exchange stories on the way."

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The exchange of stories took a while. Long enough for them to order boats sent up for the refugees, for Selace to win an argument with the guy in charge of those boats about her authority to order them out, and long enough that they were still asking each other questions while they ferried people from the caverns to the surface in bubbles of magic. It was the darkest part of night up top, all the better to disappear in.

Trina's Starstone didn't fight her once during the whole operation, which was enough to leave her happy. But there was something else that left her quite the opposite.

"Dare's gone." She told Gwen while they floated, watching the last of the former captives vanish into the forest, "Egae told me he 'shifted back to dolphin and left before we came."

"He'll be fine. With that power he can get anywhere without Morgana finding him." The princess shook her head underwater so her hair flowed around her.

"As long as he doesn't do something dumb." Trina shrugged; she couldn't do anything about that now. "Shouldn't we start back to Fallon and Tamara?"

Gwen nodded and they struck out parallel to the beach. "Selace is being really royal back there. I don't know why she thought she needed us. She's a fine princess."

Trina giggled, "For very short periods of time. Selace wanted magic to deal with Kale. If she had some other reason for wanting our magic, I don't have any idea what it was. And I don't care about much right now that isn't dry clothes and hot food, and you're in much worse shape than I am."

"Ever practical."

A while later Trina said, "I just had a nasty thought. Kale got away, so Morgana must know by now that getting all the wizard jewels is impossible. I wonder what she'll do now."

Gwenevere had no answer; she only pointed out the lights of the inn ahead of them. "Someone's waiting up for us."

The thought warmed both of them all the way back to shore.

Starstone 10/12: As the World Falls Apart, by Stormdance

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As the World Falls Apart

"I'm your friend, so I trust you."

In a nest of tree limbs, very high up, Dare sat and watched that memory again a few times. Then he leaned back and said to the faraway sky, "The Starstone Rider... is a flamin'... idiot!" He knew, vaguely, what proclaiming friendship meant to a Jewel Rider; it meant she would *always* help him, and that was just for starters. "I mean I only betrayed that trust *how* many times? To Kale's magic, to Morgana, to letting her think she was a failure. If she can forgive that..."

Dare shook his head in wonder at-- or so he tried to tell himself-- how illogical Trina was. But if he was only surprised at the illogic, why did the memory warm him like a tiny sun? Deciding firmly not to think about that anymore, Dare started making a mental list of all the things he really needed to do now.

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The flaming idiot in question was sitting on a fence, one of several randomly scattered around the meadow outside the crystal palace. She touched her enchanted jewel and a dilapidated set of shepherds' pipes appeared in her hand. Trina grinned and blew a long note. Tamara could play her flute and make flowers bloom in winter, but her only musical magic was pipes out of nowhere. Still, she could play recognizable tunes and that was good enough.

The pipes vanished into thin air, still playing, as Trina's partner Silverwind trotted over from the tack shed. The unicorn's eyes were merry above the basket she was holding in her mouth. (Good morning dearest.)

"Morning horseface." Trina answered, taking the basket. It proved to be full of horse brushes and combs. Trina grinned, "You can think and brush at the same time.' Right?"

(Exactly. So what all do we need to figure out?)

Trina hopped off the fence and selected a brush. "What don't we? Wizard jewels, Morgana, Kale. Travel Tunnel monsters, dweasles, and why on earth someone would burn down my house. For starters."

Silverwind decided to try the last one first, (Why would someone? Logically... so you couldn't go back?)

"I wouldn't anyway." Trina replied, working out the tangles in Silverwind's aqua-streaked mane.

(So, to make someone else think you were dead? Is there anyone there who would, uh, care?)

"Nope." Trina said positively. "Mom and Daddy are dead and no one else gave a hang."

She did not sound at all unhappy with that, but Silverwind thought she had to be. Trina had lived with those people most of her life; it had to have been lonely... (Tri? If you really had lost your jewel and had to leave...) Trina's hand on the comb stilled, (I would have gone with you. Did you know that?)

"No." Trina whispered, nearly inaudibly. "I mean yes but I didn't believe it. I don't believe in *anything!*" She whispered fiercely, one hand clenched around the Starstone and the pearl necklace she wore it on. "Or in anyone. I want to, but... if I have time to think about it... I'm nothing to them if I'm not a Jewel Rider."

(They're your friends. Friends don't just desert each other. I won't, Gwen and Fallon and Tamara, the king and queen, the Pack, none of them would. Trust me...)

"I do." Trina murmured, looking away, "Really, I do."

They were quiet for a while as Trina brushed Silverwind's snowy fur. Trina shook herself finally, "Well! Where were we? Morgana won't give up; she's got enough wizard jewels to do something nasty, probably several somethings nasty. And we just have to *wait...*"

(No we don't, we can learn. And think. What jewels does she have, what can they do, that sort of thing...)

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In the trackless swirls and currents of wild magic, floated an island with a crystal dome on it. Morgana's castle. Inside, the wizard was working on an elaborately woven net of ribbons that floated weightless in the air.

Lady Kale was baffled. "Morgana, what is that thing you used all my magic ribbons on? And does it catch fish?"

"No, it catches magic." Morgana replied impatiently. "Has the shapeshifter come back?"

Kale scowled. "Yes, he's in his room. Your hostages are scattered over half of Avalon by now, why did he come back?"

Morgana had stopped listening after the first word. "I need the shapeshifter jewel for this." She held out her hand, and Kale reluctantly turned the golden leaf-shaped stone over to the wizard. Morgana hung it in her web, where the other wizard jewels were already tied.

Kale realized the web would probably require her darkstone too, and left quickly before Morgana could take it. The darkstone was feeling strange suddenly, cold... The shapeshifter they'd mentioned was waiting outside, leaning casually against the wall.

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Dare was not real pleased to be here, or sure why he was. He had been hanging around spying on Morgana, simple though that was. After making a long visit to Kale's Thornwoods castle. The castle probably wasn't standing anymore since he'd taken care of a few spells and set free all the people Kale had building her castle. Then he'd returned here to see what he could learn... and suddenly been drawn to this corridor. He was not used to being drawn places by nothing more than a strong feeling, and it was annoying.

Then Kale stomped out, and the entire 'drawn' thing focused on-- the darkstone?! In that instant he and Kale were grabbed in a sphere of red light.

"What the?!" Dare began. Then he heard a voice, a little like Morgana's, whispering... (You have always wished... magic to do..... Justice upon Morgana who hurt all those... care for...) "Whaaaa?" he asked the world, which meant Kale.

The former princess was having problems of her own. The darkstone suddenly pulled out of her hand. Her red jewel armor melted away, leaving her in a long dress. "My darkstone! What is that cursed jewel up to?!"

Dare could hear the whisper more clearly. He smiled coldly, trying not to show his amazement. "It's changing alliances. You're to consider yourself unbonded to the darkstone."

Kale was quick. "In favor of you?! Not a chance! That's my enchanted jewel!"

The darkstone shot red lightning and Kale was pushed back. Something like a Travel Tree tunnel opened and she fell through it.

Dare blinked. That rock could sure get things done. Maybe it could do the same for Morgana... "Yes. I'll be your wielder." He told the jewel, and its energy folded around him...

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Two weeks passed. Peacefully. Entirely too peacefully for Trina's liking. One morning found her, as usual, trying to get some useful work done while she ate breakfast. She was sitting on the balcony outside the city library with books propped open around her, laboriously taking notes.

"Mind if I join you?" came Fallon's voice. Then the Moonstone Rider herself dropped onto the balcony from above.

Trina jumped. "You're welcome to join me, if you tell me how you did that!"

"I climbed up the ivy! Josh dared me to. The Pack's down there, we just came from the palace." Fallon turned and waved.

"You could probably climb over from the palace." Trina stood up so she could lean over the railing and see the three wolf-riders and Moondance waiting below.

"Hey Fallon, ah'right!" Drake called.

"See, told you I could make it up here! Go on without me guys, this looks more interesting than another patrol of the city."

"Ah'right, see you later." Drake rode off down the street, with Josh and Max following as Moondance went back towards the palace.

Fallon turned around and leaned on the rail, looking at the clutter of books. "What are you researching?"

"Wild magic." Trina replied, sitting down amidst the books, "I mean, we use it every day without knowing much about it. Did you know Travel Tree tunnels are protection just like our armor? And all the creatures that live in the magic like gliders and prismfoxes have the same kind of protection or the magic would destroy their bodies and change their spirits just like Tamara's book said."

"Merlin told us a little about that, but not much. He said the wild magic was too strong even for a wizard to take on alone."

Trina nodded and scribbled that down, "I figure. Merlin was pretty mysterious about all this stuff wasn't he?"

"Yes. He was probably doing it for our own good though, so we wouldn't try and investigate. It's the kind of thing he'd do." Fallon reached over two books and a notebook to raid Trina's snack basket.

"Hmfmf. He didn't figure on Kale and Morgana. We need to fight them in the wild magic itself, without getting blown away."

"You're gung-ho to fight all of a sudden." Fallon observed.

"I'm not, really. But if we don't do something about Morgana she's never going to leave us in peace."

"I know... hey, here's something interesting. The best means of using wild magic is through friendship-- we knew that already, it's how enchanted jewels work. But this book says that's why some Jewel Riders can *use power without having their enchanted jewel!* Is that possible?"

"Yep." Trina didn't look at her. "Anj-- the last Starstone Rider before me could do that. I don't think it's good for anything except blasting things though."

"Well explosives do have their time and place... huh?" Fallon was looking down from the balcony, over a line of trees at the road into the palace courtyard.

Trina scrambled to her feet and looked. A brightly painted caravan was hurrying into the courtyard, pulled by two unicorns. A woman with light hair was in the driving seat but was turned around talking to someone inside the wagon instead of driving. "That's Janni's wagon! I thought she was going to travel the Great Plains district!"

"She was! I wonder why she's back here..."

They looked at each other in sudden foreboding. "Trouble." Trina said without hesitation. She hurriedly gathered her notes.

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Back at the palace they found Janni unloading a wagon full of animals, and two unexpected visitors.

"Doc, Charity!" Fallon yelled, waving, when she and Trina were halfway across the courtyard.

At the same moment Tamara burst out the palace doors yelling, "Mom! Dad! What are you doing here?"

"Tamara's *parents*?" Trina demanded of nobody in particular and ran the rest of the way to the big wagon and the only person who wasn't talking to anybody. "Janni, what's going on?"

Janni Shonsea pushed back her gold-and-silver hair and leaned against the side of her wagon. "Big trouble. There's something really nasty happening on the Plains."

"What?" Trina demanded, and Fallon echoed the question right behind her.

"A part of the plains has... dried up is the best way to describe it. Only it's not dry of water, it's dry of *life*. The plants are dead, the animals are either gone or very sick. I wandered into it by accident; the unicorns warned me it was a bad area and we ran for civilization. The nearest civilization was Heartland Farms where I picked up Doc and Charity and more animals than I really wanted. We've been warning people about it on the way here." Janni explained as quickly as she could.

"Good call." Fallon put on her officialness.

Trina grimaced. "The life dried out of the land... could wild magic *do* that?" Gwen had been hearing the same story; she came around the wagon with Tamara in tow, "We won't know until we check it out, and if it's as bad as Doc was telling me we have to check it out *now*. Jewel Riders, let's ride!"

Trina gave a mental shout to Silverwind, and in a moment the four unicorns came around the side of the palace. (What's up Trina? We're on a mission? Where?)

"Great Plains, near Heartland Farms. Something nasty appeared, I bet it's Morgana's work..." Trina explained the situation.

Meanwhile Shadowsong called his friends the gliders, and asked them to take the Jewel Riders to the Great Plains. The little flying squirrels swirled around in consternation before replying, "You can't go there!" "There is very bad for wild magic." "Something had gone very wrong!"

"Yes we know it has." Tamara told them, "We need to go there to find out if we can fix it."

"If you really want to." "I guess it is your job." "You still should stay away." (Trust me, we'd like to.) Silverwind grumbled.

The gliders spun a circle in the air, and the circle widened into a portal through the wild magic. The unicorns jumped through, one by one. Janni watched them go.

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Trina had time to look out at the violet tangle and think, (With jewel armor and the gliders' protection... it still feels like a strong wind. What would it be like to be out there with nothing between you and the power?)

Then they were out, standing in the sunlight with the sweet smell of summer grass all around. Then the wind changed and blew dust in their faces along with a parched non-smell that shouldn't have been there.

"What's *that*?" Fallon asked, and they all turned.

"Oh..." Tamara gasped.

In front of them the plain was barren, the tall grass a dusty mat on the ground. It felt silent suddenly, even though they could hear the buzzing insects in the grass behind them.

Gwen kicked at the matted grass, and it fell to dust, "Feels like a lot of bad magic." The princess muttered.

"If there's something making this, it will be at the center of it." Fallon said.

"We have to go in there?" Trina and Tamara chorused in dismay. Shadow stepped his front feet on the grass and said, (The ground's solid. Yech, if you don't mind the smell.)

Tamara swung herself onto Shadow's back, "Let's go guys. We have to find whatever magical nasty Morgana's got doing this, and fast!"

They trekked into the empty land, hurrying. Trina walked next to Silverwind, watching puffs of dust rise where their feet hit the ground. She looked back, but a rise of the land blocked their view of the living Plains. A flutter of panic stirred in her chest. "The air's different. Anyone notice that, it's hard to breathe."

No one answered her; Fallon was scanning ahead with her Moonstone. "This way... I'm not sure. Are you certain there's an actual physical thing doing this?"

"No." Tamara called from a little distance away, "That's the easiest is all."

"So we might be looking for something that isn't here. Great." Trina grumbled. She was tired, it was hard to lift her feet. "Guys..."

A dry little breeze blew around them, stirring up little dust ghosts. The girls and unicorns were the only spots of color against the grass as it bent in the rising wind. The grass stems started snapping off, whole sticks blowing straight up while they watched. Then the wind faded.

"That... wasn't... magic. I think." The princess said, shaking dust and bits of things out of her blond hair. "This way." She added absently, and led the way.

Trina plodded along, following Moondance's purple tail. She didn't want to look around, and walking took all her energy. It seemed to take all everybody else's energy too, but she couldn't think about that, she felt too awful, all she could do was keep going, they'd find it soon, they had to...

Silverwind stumbled. "Huh?" Trina looked up for the first time in a lot of minutes. "Horseface, are you all..." The word died in her throat. "Guys?"

They all looked up for the first time in a lot of minutes. "...What's happening?" Gwen asked weakly, and swayed against Sunstar's side.

Tamara clapped her hands over her mouth like she was trying to keep in a scream, then relaxed, "Whatever is happening to the land is happening to us. We have... got... to get out of here!"

Trina looked around, at the dead land stretching in every direction and moaned. She felt too awful by half for more walking. She made her feet move anyway. "We are so dead."

Silverwind spread her wings, but couldn't catch enough air to take off. Sunstar tried the same thing, and then they noticed the unicorn's wings were almost transparent. In fact all the unicorns were looking kind of hard to see...

They discovered they could run after all.

Trina didn't stop until a hill rose between her and the dead area. Then she collapsed, pulling the green grass over her. "That was really really scary!"

Silverwind skidded to a stop next to her rider, her wings beating the air for balance. (Yes. I would say that was right. And we walked right into it!)

Gwen was still rational, or maybe was rational again, "Not that stupid, it was very unlikely that a spell to drain land would also drain intelligent creatures, Archie told me..." the princess sat down next to Sunstar. "We have to get back to the palace, do something about this..."

"Something like what?" Fallon asked.

Trina stopped listening; no one was going to have any ideas. Besides that, they weren't in any shape to do anything at all for a long while. "I'm taking a nap." She announced, and did.

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"What happened here?"

Trina woke up to Drake's voice, and squirmed out of her grass cocoon to see the Pack standing around them looking worried. She grinned up at them, "We got in a little trouble."

Josh shook his head, "Looks like, but we brought you more trouble."

Gwen was on her feet ahead of anybody else, "What? What happened?"

"The palace has been overrun with fairies. They say Fairyland has been destroyed by the same thing that destroyed that piece of the plains!"

"And the effect is spreading, not that you can really tell in the Desert." Drake added.

The four girls looked at each other. "We should have known that would happen." Fallon said.

"What would happen?" Max asked, "Is this Morgana's doing?"

"Can you think of anyone else? But why?" Tamara cried.

"And how!" Gwen and Trina chorused.

The princess finished, "I think we need to get back to the palace and decide what to do next. This spell or whatever it is is a threat to everyone in Avalon!"

Trina and Josh exchanged a look. "Marvelous!" they said with much sarcasm.

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The gardens of the Crystal Palace were beautiful in the slanting evening light. Trina lounged on a stone bench trying not to listen to Gwen and Fallon describe what had happened on the Plains. The memory made her want to wrap her arms around the cool stone and hold it tight as if the stone would crumble away otherwise. She shook off that strange feeling; Gwen had finished and Archie was very agitated.

"This is not good! Really really not good, if Morgana is allowed to go on with this she'll drain the magic of life from all of Avalon!" the owl exclaimed.

"We guessed that, Archie. But what can we do about it?" Tamara asked.

"Well, uh... Since we don't have any idea how this is being done and there seems to be no way to counter it from the outside, the only thing I can think of is to... well, get Morgana to turn it off."

Drake asked, "Can't the crown jewels help?"

Archie fluttered a wing at her, "I think this would eat the crown jewels!"

Trina shuddered, "So what you're saying, from all your research, is that we have to confront Morgana... and have to do it now before more of Avalon gets dried up, and we..."

Gwen finished for her, "We have no choice."

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Behind a convenient bush, two dweasles were watching the proceedings. As the girls looked at each other grimly, the dweasles looked at each other also. "Well Jewel Riders, been nice knowing you."

"Come on Rufus you dweasle, we have to move fast if we want to be in Bermuda before all Avalon is slurped up by evil magic!"

The dweasles ran off. Showing, if they did say so themselves, more intelligence than certain Jewel Riders they could name.

Starstone 11/12:

Disclaimer: Such characters as belong to Bohbot belong to Bohbot. Such characters as belong to me belong to me. Like any of you don't know that from the previous ten disclaimers, but I gotta cover my tailfeathers from being sued.

The Gliders left them in a place that looked just like everywhere else. Shifting blue and red light moving across purple threads of power that faded blue-violet into the distance. The thread wasn't solid of course, they flew right through it.

Trina leaned low on Silverwind's back, not looking around. She was afraid.

The gliders stopped, "Here you go." "Now we should go go go!" "The wizard's lair is right down there!" "Let's go go go!" And they went went went.

Gwenevere sat taller. "I'm sensing dark magic. Morgana is there. Guys..." she trailed off.

They looked at each other, all afraid. Gwen wasn't going to say that they didn't have a plan or a chance. Somehow they had to take Morgana out of the picture... no Jewel Rider had ever killed another person in known history, and the idea shook them. But somehow this had to be the end.

Trina put her arms around Silverwind's neck and whispered into the satiny mane, "I love you. I hope we live through this."

(Yes, that would be nice.) Incredibly, there was an edge of laughter in the unicorn's voice. (Whatever happens, I'll still be your best friend tomorrow.)

That, Trina thought, was a very *good* way to say it. She looked up, and at the others. "Guys... Thanks."

"This will be over. I'll see you all tomorrow." Gwen promised.

"We can do it." Fallon said.

Tamara nodded, looking just as scared as Trina felt. The Starstone rider realized, this was bravery. Stupidity too maybe, but bravery.

Four sets of hooves landed on the grass of Morgana's island. A road appeared under their feet, leading to a door in the main dome. The island was in twilight, like the light from outside didn't make it here.

"We're expected." Fallon observed.

"Let's go in." Tamara said and bit her lip. Shadowsong pranced nervously.

It was unnaturally still. They might be expected but nobody was out to welcome them. The whole island looked strange from here with its 'trees' carved out of dusty green glass. It wasn't too late, Trina thought, they could be back at the palace within an hour... but with nothing resolved. Trina set that thought firmly on top of all the others and signaled Silverwind to follow Gwen and Sunstar up the path and into the dome.

As they'd expected, it was Morgana's throne room, domed, white-green. As they'd expected, Morgana was waiting. The wizard sat like a snow queen on her throne. Her white hair was startling, she didn't look old and Trina was the only one with such a light color.. Morgana stood with a rustle of robes. "You finally came."

Gwen took a breath and decided on the direct approach, "Morgana, you have to stop draining the magic from Avalon."

Morgana didn't look particularly worried at the sight of four enchanted jewels raised against her. In fact the wizard was smiling.

When in doubt, brazen it out. Trina had Silverwind step forward, "And we'd like the wizard jewels back too please. Or else." She thought for a second, "And I may be the first person ever to say that with something to back it up."

Morgana's pale eyes narrowed on Trina, "And you, finally."

Annoyance momentarily overcame fear. "Finally nothing!" Trina snapped, "I got lucky and I got the jewel but I'm not Anja! She's dead. So if you're looking for revenge, you've got a problem."

"You're wrong. Anja already broke for me. And what better way to hit Merlin than by killing his beloved students?"

"You wouldn't!" Tamara gasped.

"Not a chance!" Fallon snapped, brandishing her Moonstone.

Gwen and Sunstar came up next to Trina and nodded to each other. Sunstar looked around, (The wizard jewels must be in another room, through there.) She nodded at a door behind the throne.

"Go before Morgana can..." Gwen began.

A white cloud sprang to life behind the wizard, like extensions of her hair. It seethed for a moment then lashed out. Trina shrieked as a strand wrapped too tight around her chest. Silverwind reared, caught around both front legs. Trina fell off, hit the floor hard, was dragged clear by Morgana, and couldn't breathe *at all* for a minute. "Unh! Ow... we're dead, we're so dead, oh please..!"

When she got her head up and looked around, the room was still in chaos. Morgana had caught everybody, Gwen by her neck. All four unicorns were rearing and squealing; Tamara had been unseated and Gwen was clinging for dear life to Sunstar's saddle.

Moondance gave up and dropped to all fours, her sides heaving. Fallon used her Moonstone to blast the strand around her middle, with no success.

Trina scrambled to her feet and Tried the Starstone anyway. She'd seen Morgana's tentacles before so wasn't surprised when the jewel's power had no effect. Of course this wasn't full power... Her thought was cut off when the strand began tugging her towards Morgana's throne. Rather than be dragged ungracefully across the floor, she hurried over. Behind her the commotion stilled; Gwen squeaked like she'd started to say something then decided not to.

Trina looked up to meet Morgana's flat green eyes. "Morgana..."

"You aren't Anja." The wizard smiled thinly, "But you know her... I wonder if she'll feel it when her 'little sister' breaks before me."

Trina gaped, "How did you know she called me that?"

"There are three bonds that last beyond death: your bond to your animal friends, the bond of true lovers, and what binds a killer to the one killed."

Trina was so scared she was past scared, so shaken she couldn't feel it anymore. "You couldn't have. You were trapped here."

Morgana hissed laughter, "Trapped, yes. But then I could work my will in the real world. Would you like to see?"

Trina looked straight at the wizard, she couldn't turn to look at her friends without looking cowardly. But for a long moment she saw Morgana was quite, quite serious... She looked away, looked down, "No-- no."

From somewhere, Morgana produced her crystal ball and held it in front of her captive's face. Trina squirmed, trying to get out of Morgana's magic grip, or at least out of the way of *looking*... then a picture formed in the crystal and she watched it in morbid fascination.

*A human figure walked quietly down a street in the darkness. It stopped in front of a lone street-lantern, revealing a woman heavy with child. She casually tilted back her hat, revealing a familiar face, if ten years older and a lot more solid than when Trina had seen it last.*

"Anje..."

*Anja got her bearings and started walking again. She couldn't move very fast now with the babies almost due. It was late, she ought to get back to the palace before midnight... no, before one, she amended with a glance at the moon.*

*Two streets over, a gang of toughs heard the woman's light footsteps and began to move. Over them like a shadow lay the image of Morgana's face.*

Trina froze.

*Anja heard footsteps and the clink of a chain, and moved faster. Too late; the sounds were next to her, then in front. She stopped and drew her knives, wishing for the sword she hadn't brought. Woodsong was in the mountains with his mate, too far away to help. She tried to call to Cyrrus, but couldn't tell if he heard. But Anja was a Knight of the Realm who should be able to handle a few thugs... or more than a few...*

*A stream of sexist curses came from the darkness, then a half dozen figures congealed into visibility.*

*Hopeless odds. Anja dodged the one with the knife, slashing him badly. Someone grabbed from behind and she kicked backwards, planting the heel of her boot where it would do the most damage. Two down. She leaped out of the way and a chain tangled around her feet. She stumbled, and a blow smashed her to the ground.*

Trina stifled a shriek.

*Anja tried to get up, shouting for help. The chain rose and cracked down. The shouts blurred into screaming.*

Trina covered her mouth, "N-no don't!"

*Half seen, one of them delivered a brutal kick to the fallen woman's middle.*

The crystal went dark.

Trina closed her eyes and screamed behind her hands, "No don't! Anja, no..."

Morgana's voice hissed in her ear, "My final gift.. And through you, the same for Merlin. That final despair that's worse than death, when you see everything around you falling to pieces." She looked from one to the other of the trapped Jewel Riders. "Your beautiful Avalon."

Not looking up, Trina heard, "Your friend. Your enchanted jewel. All of your enchanted jewels. What else do you have to lose?"

Gwenevere's voice rang out strongly, "Is that why you exist, Morgana? Hurting people, and revenge? What good is it going to do you?"

Morgana scowled and jerked her magical leash, pulling Gwen to the ground, "Just evening the score with Merlin, for leaving me here!"

"Then it *is* even! Merlin's stuck here too!" Tamara cried from where she stood by Shadowsong.

Morgana didn't seem to hear. Trina looked up and called, "Logic's a lost cause guys..!" and her heart leaped. The white threads couldn't be cut or blasted off, but somehow Tamara was melting hers, and the way Gwen was curled on the floor hiding her Sunstone...

Trina couldn't melt the strand around her chest; she was right up next to Morgana. So it fell to her to keep the wizard occupied so she didn't notice what the others were up to. "So where's Kale?" she valiantly changed the subject .

The move startled Morgana into answering, "Gone. When I return to Avalon I'll find her and my darkstone!"

"Kale ran off with the darkstone. Cool." Gwen muttered, smiling.

Fallon grinned bravely, "Have fun looking; I think Kale hides out in dweasle dens!"

"She would!" Trina actually giggled at the joke. She was still in shock, trembly and horrified, still hearing Anja screaming...

And that was enough time for Gwen and Tamara to get free. The princess sent a lance of sunlight at Morgana; an ominous rumble of music started around the Heartstone. Morgana whipped out her hand and power slammed the two girls into the wall.

Trina shrieked; she couldn't help it, and somehow seeing that shook her out of her horrified trance. Suddenly the world focussed, and there was only one thing to do. She took the Starstone off her necklace; its light shone out and the white thread around her chest simply evaporated. "Guys, shield yourselves as best you can!"

(Trina, what...) Silverwind didn't finish; she knew.

As the Jewel Riders put up shields, Trina lifted the Starstone above her head, two words on her lips that could probably destroy most of this island. She remembered Archie saying that this attack used all the magic around, and right here there was a lot of magic around. She grinned a bleak non-smile as the wizard noticed her.

Morgana looked at her sharply, gestured, and--  
--the Starstone shattered--

It exploded from Trina's hand in a spray of blue glitter, atomized, hanging in the air around its wielder like mist.

"No!" Gwen, Fallon and Tamara screamed as one, and if a deeper voice echoed them no one noticed.

Trina just stood there, her face the complete blank of someone who's been hit too many times, past bearing, past recovery, past hope... Then she covered her eyes and just crumpled, folding up on the floor silently.

Across the room, Fallon was the only one still on her feet. She jerked out of the last of Morgana's thread as the unicorns shrugged theirs off. New tactics from the wizard, apparently. Unfortunately Fallon was out of ideas. "Moondance, what can we do?"

(I don't know. Gwen and Tamara will be all right in a minute, but I don't think we can beat Morgana.) Moondance replied quietly, (Trina's jewel might have...)

"Yeah... I think Morgana's giving us a break, think quick!"

Indeed, Morgana wasn't doing anything but watch them. Fallon glanced at the others; Sunstar was helping Gwen to her feet, the princess had hit the wall pretty hard. Shadowsong had put himself squarely in front of Tamara who was still down, with blood showing on her armor.

Trina sensed someone behind her, almost as if she could see someone reaching out, a hand over her back but not touching her. She looked quick, but no one was there.

A second later Silverwind landed next to her, (Trina! Come on, get up, we have to fight!)

"With what?" Trina asked dully, but stood up.

(We can't let her beat us!) Silverwind was saying, babbling with fear, (She'll destroy all of us, the King and Queen, Janni, anyone who just wants to live and do something good for other people!)

"Yes." Trina said. There was something unsteady in her eyes. "But what do we do? Without..."

In her memory Anja's voice whispered, "You can't be a Jewel Rider without..."

(Anja took her down without an enchanted jewel.) Silverwind said.

Trina's eyes widened and she grabbed Silverwind's saddle to steady herself. The same thought had hit both of them. "I think it will work." She whispered, stark terror in her voice.

(I'm right here. We'll do it together.)

Trina raised her empty hands above her head, fingers splayed. She felt something start, pressure building up, something *knew* what she was going to try, something was answering... "Please, oh please..." certainty poured into her voice, "Midnight Blast!"

Blue lightning flashed down from nowhere, pooling in Trina's hands. So bright Trina disappeared into the glare, roaring like a waterfall. She threw her hands forward, turning it point-blank on Morgana. The shocked wizard vanished into eye-dazzling brightness.

Gwen shrieked.

Over the roar Trina screamed, "Morgana! You're dead! You died years ago so disappear! Disappear!" The searing light and crackle of power went on, whiting out half the room.

"Trina..!" Fallon shouted, "Be careful! You'll kill yourself..!" She didn't know why she said it, didn't think Trina could hear but had to warn her...

Then they heard above the lightning a wail of, "I can't... not enough! No!"

"What?!" Someone else yelled incredulously, and there was an explosion of blood-red against the white.

Fallon, then Gwen and Tamara, called their power to help.

Trina was afraid. The energy pouring through her hands blinded her, filled her eyes and her lungs. She knew, distantly, that she would die, that human bodies aren't made to hold this much power. It hurt like riding Travel Tree tunnels hurt, like a strong wind trying to tear her apart from the inside.

"Silverwind... I-- can't do it!"

(Hang on! Another second!) Silverwind cried.

"I can't!" Trina felt her legs give up and stumbled. The blue light was fading.

"Trina!" An arm caught her around the waist, supporting her. The person's other hand held out a familiar red-violet jewel.

"The darkstone?!" Trina gasped and looked up-- into silver eyes dyed red by the light, "Dare?!"

He wasn't looking at her but at Morgana, and his handsome face was twisted with fury. Trina's heart twisted. Then recent events caught up, and she fainted.

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Suddenly there seemed to be nothing in the way of the darkstone's magic. The target was gone. *Morgana* was gone! One by one the flares of magic turned off, leaving the room in darkness illuminated by strange little multicolored fireballs. Magical fallout?

A second later Dare felt Trina fall against him, too limp to be concious. Something in him froze.

He dropped the darkstone back to his belt and sat down slowly. Trina was breathing, but wouldn't wake up. If she died-- of all the world, Trina least deserved to suffer any more for all of this.

(It's all right.) a voice said. Dare jumped; he'd forgotten Silverwind could *do* that. (She'll be all right, I think, in a minute...) She trailed off distractedly.

Dare looked at the other Jewel Riders, who were looking around and talking, trying to get their bearings. Gwen met his eyes and they both telegraphed "all right right now."

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Trina found herself... nowhere. Standing in gray mist with nothing else as far as she could see. A light fanfare was heard out of the mist, and then Trina saw someone standing there. Brown. Familiar. Anja. Trina stared at her and couldn't get her thoughts down into any one thing to say.

"You won." Anja's voice was rich and smiling, "Morgana just appeared on our side of the equation."

"Morgana's dead?"

"Morgana's dead."

Trina's brain stumbled over that thought and landed squarely on another one. "Anje-- she showed me..."

The ghost looked away, "Yes. Yes, that was real. That's how I got over on this side of things, though not quite how she made you think."

"Tell me." Trina whispered.

"I... they couldn't save me after that beating. The babies survived it, somehow.

I took poison so they could be delivered safely. But it was all right. I know nothing like that could ever be all right... but it really was." Her eyes were dark, pleading.

"That's a little better. I see." Trina produced a smile.

Anja smiled back, "You will when you come over to my side. But now at least Morgana won't do to anyone else what she did to me."

Trina nodded hard to that sentiment. "So I'm not dead now?"

"Nope! You just seriously beat yourself up and passed out, and ended up here. The problems of the living are still your problems, and Tri... there will be problems."

"Bad times for Avalon?"

"Yes. And I can't help you anymore. This is it-- goodbye, good luck, have fun in that modern mess you people call Avalon." Anja grinned her out-of-place smile, but her voice was more serious.

Trina heard the words, and the words under the words. "I'll miss you too. But if some huge trouble's coming, can't you stay and help? We might need you."

"You won't. Much as I'd like to watch the fun, it isn't my choice. And anyway... you're better at the job than I ever was." Anja stepped back, and a veil of mist swirled in front of her.

Trina was gaping, "I-- what?"

"Your heart knows what you're seeing... goodbye..." Anja simply stepped back again and was gone, back to whatever she was now. Somewhere across the ocean that separates the worlds.

"Goodbye..." Trina whispered."

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Something was funny, Trina realized. She was half sitting, half lying, supported in strong arms. Comfortable, but unfamiliar. Then she realized *who* was holding her, and was embarrassed. But not much. "It's ok, I'm back." She said somewhat coherently, moving over to sit on the floor.

"You're crying." Dare said.

Trina swiped a hand across her eyes, "No I'm not."

"Ok."

Across the room Fallon stood up and called, "You ok? Silverwind said... anyway, it looks like we're all alive. Morgana's gone."

"Morgana's gone *permanently*." Trina replied with some relish. She looked down at herself, noticing her jewel armor had turned back into regular clothes. The Starstone hadn't reappeared then.

"We'd better look around." Gwen said, pulling herself onto Sunstar's back, "Tamara--"

"I'm all right. I'm coming." Tamara said firmly. Through the semi-darkness Trina could see her face was strained but determined.

"I'm not!" Trina said, "I don't care what's here."

Fallon opened a door behind Morgana's throne and the other two followed her through. Their voices rose and fell, exclaiming over something on the other side, then faded off down a hallway.

Trina sagged. "That blue lightning is the most dangerous power, it uses every bit of energy it can get. Trying to use myself as an enchanted jewel was not the brightest thing I ever did, I dunno why I didn't fry myself... And I am about *this* close to losing it and crying, which is really--"

"How anybody would be after the day you just had." Dare said firmly, when Trina had been about to say 'pathetic.'

Trina shook her head, "I'm ok, really, just give me a minute."

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Gwen looked at the net. It was a fantastic piece of magical workmanship, beyond anything else they'd seen here. Archie would just love to see such a thing and tell them later how it was built and what it was for... And there were the wizard jewels. "Anyone know what it does?" She asked nobody in particular.

Tamara reached out and cautiously tugged at one of the ribbons. It came loose then vanished in her hand. "We can take it apart. I've read about webs like these; it's wizard magic and since it's using all the jewels it must be what's draining the life from Avalon!"

Gwen pulled a ribbon, unraveling a section of the net, "Then we have to get it untangled, and fast!" She took one end, Fallon caught the other, and they pulled the thread taut between them. The shapeshifter jewel fell to the floor with a clear ringing sound.

"One down..."

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Trina sat up and stretched, feeling much more on top of things after a long minute of peace. "Ok, I'm better. Relatively." Dare didn't say anything, but Trina could feel him looking at her, so she looked back. And blinked in surprise.

"What, never seen the guys' version of jewel armor before?" Dare asked with a little grin.

"But... You and the darkstone?"

"I guess. It rejected Kale... pretty violently, dumped her through some kind of tunnel. And it picked me."

"But..." Trina began inaudibly, "That jewel is really bad news! You can't use it!" Dare's face hardened, "They won't let me, you mean?" He got up abruptly and headed for the door to the outside.

"Dare--" Trina struggled to her feet in sudden panic. Gwen had told her about the darkstone, who had created it, what it *did* to whoever used it... "Wait!" she all but screamed.

Dare paused at the door and looked back. His expression was pained, "Gods, Trina... you know this is the only chance at a jewel I'm ever going to get."

To her own surprise Trina ran and flung her arms around him. "It was Morgana's, stupid! It'll kill you! Throw it away-- I'll get you a better one, I promise I will!"

Dare looked down at her in confusion, then half smiled. "When you say it... I almost believe you." He opened the door and looked out.

Trina stepped back and opened her eyes, certain she'd failed-- in time to see Dare lean back and heave the darkstone away from them as hard as he could. Without gravity to slow it down the jewel sailed away quickly, off of the island and into the purple haze. They watched it disappear.

A moment later Silverwind snorted in surprise, (Guys, look!)

Trina turned, "What-- oh!"

It looked like a galaxy, a spiral turning slowly in the center of the room, tiny stars flashing with their own brilliant light. Or maybe like the whirlwind of sparkles and ribbons that appeared when someone got their jewel armor on.

Trina squeaked, "Thisisnothappening!"

The spiral had lifted above their heads, and was starting to shrink, pulling into a ball... or something. Trina walked out underneath it, and reached up to the center. Silverwind stepped up next to her and raised her horn.

Dare could only watch in amazement as the light turned downwards, flowing over both of them. He was not at all surprised to see, a long moment later, girl and unicorn standing together in very impressive new jewel armor. Of course something like this would happen.

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In the other room the Jewel Riders were dismantling the last of Morgana's weaving and searching for any more nasty things to turn off. The wizard jewels were wrapped in Gwen's cape to take back to the jewel keep.

Trina came in and quietly unrolled the cape. She got out the shapeshifter jewel and looked at Gwen. The princess nodded, "We owe him."

Trina bowed; it seemed right to, "Thank you." She said, and ran back out to the dome. She was afraid suddenly that he might have left, but he was leaning on the door frame waiting.

"Dare..." Trina held out the jewel, smiling.

His silver eyes widened, "They're letting me have that?"

"Mm-hm. You can really be a Jewel Rider."

"Not yet." Dare grinned at her, "As I learned *very* well recently, it's friendship and not a rock that does it. So I'll go try to find my animal friend."

"What, now?" Trina asked.

"Well, I have a lot to do." He tucked the jewel into his pouch and looked back at her, "Friends forever, right?"

"Of course."

Dare nodded, transformed to fox, and leaped out the doorway. There was a momentary swirl in the air as he 'jumped' back to real world Avalon.

Trina pulled the door closed and went back to help her friends, so they could all go home.

Starstone 12/12: Here at the End, by Stormdance

Disclaimer: These folks ain't mine. 'Cept for the ones who are. So please don't sue. I spent it all on anime anyway.

Here at the End

Trina sat in the top tier in the friendship ring, looking out. She could see the gardens, and over the low wall the roofs of houses and a glimpse of the forest beyond.

In the center of the friendship ring, the other three girls were gathered listening to Merlin talk. *That* had been a surprise, when the Great Wizard appeared among them. Merlin had changed too; the wild magic had done good things for him, he was taller and younger. And gorgeous, the books had been right about that!

Trina caught bits of their words, "...begin putting Avalon to rights as it would have been if it hadn't been for Kale and Morgana." Merlin said in his gentle voice, and Tamara chimed in with a story. They were happy...

Trina looked back at them; for some reason Merlin's words chilled her. The Great Wizard caught her eye and smiled, and Trina shook off the chill. Whatever Anja had been making the dark hints about would probably happen and be very not-fun... but she couldn't think about that now. Now there was only relief that everything was all right, everyone was safe, she was home and just for now there was nothing to be afraid of.

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"So how's the world these days?"

Anja whirled at the unexpected sound, then laughed. "Worth the trouble, Cyrrus. I wish them luck but they don't need it. That girl is amazing, did you see what she *did*?"

"What, re-creating an enchanted jewel that'd been blasted to atoms? Or one of the other impossible things?" Cyrrus asked wryly.

"All of the above. I think I'm jealous for the first time since I was alive."

"Don't be. Her story isn't over and being in a story is generally painful."

"That I do know. Speaking of stories, any news on this side?"

"Is there ever. Aileen's guesses were absolutely right and we needed you back yesterday."

"Oh spirit. I'll talk to her first thing. Then I must find a way to get in touch with Traver and Lady Elodie, they'll be so proud of her..." Anja trailed off, smiling.

"How? Talking to them is impossible from here... oh no, you have a plan."

"In very deed. In fact it might be just what the balance needs, bring back some of history and talk to Trina's parents at the same time." Anja said, and explained.

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Dare came out of the wild magic in a part of Avalon he didn't recognize, with the sea cliff behind him and the forest in front. There was no sign of people and the place felt remote. Perfect.

He'd stopped to spy out the doings in the Crystal Palace, to make sure all was well with the real world. He'd almost been spotted by Merlin, and that convinced him; anything the Great Wizard couldn't handle was far beyond the abilities of one shapeshifter.

Then Dare had gone to his home, Cliffside Keep. The situation there was as good as could be expected: half the population was missing, the other half traumatized, angry, or both. Sooner or later they were going to figure out that Dare was the only one who hadn't been stuck in the cave with them, and start wondering. It would be best to simply not be around for a while. He had stopped long enough to pack a traveling kit: some food, some clothes. His sword.

Dare listened to the wind through the forest and the roar of the surf, and tried to listen with some inner, magical sense as well. How did this friendship magic thing work anyway? Did you just listen, send out some kind of call... *share my adventure*-- He thought he heard a questioning whisper in reply, but it was gone a second later. Probably his imagination.

Whichever; Trina had said there was a special friend for everyone, somewhere, someday...

Maybe it had been an answer.

Dare found a little trail to follow, and in a moment had vanished into the forest shadows.

And so the circle turns.

The end.

*More from the author in 2012!*

*This was not going to be the end of the story. I had a whole sweeping epic planned that I ended up not writing. Just for fun, here's what I remember planning to do. Er, it seemed like good plot at the time!*

*The Evils That Remain*

*Merlin returns to Avalon in a much younger form, able to kick butt in his own right. He also gets an apprentice, a mysterious girl named Summer. The new allies are needed because Merlin's return awoke the ancient wizards from their exile and they start trying to reclaim Avalon!*

*I wrote almost none of this story, but I did find my character notes:*

*The wizards:*

*Reika, the unicorn wizard (color turquoise)--alive-- in the jewel keep  
Chierru, the purple wizard-- alive-- jewel makes motds, never found-- Summer's mother  
Eskar, the design wizard-- reformed & dead?-- in the jewel keep or with Janni  
Teradia, the shapeshifter wizard-- reformed & dead?-- Dare has her jewel  
M'Nann, the sea wizard-- alive?-- jewel shattered  
Stellis-- the teleporting wizard (color beige)-- alive-- jewel never found  
"six of the most powerful wizards in the world" which means there could have been less powerful ones!*

*The second generation*

*Yumei, the dream wizard, black rose jewel, Morgana's daughter (color: black and purple)  
Morgread, the war wizard, Morgana's son (color: black and red)looks like Kal  
Helena, the arrow wizard, Stellis' daughter  
And remember wizards don't age like normal folk*

*I can't remember what I was going to DO with all these people exactly, but they were going to be the enemy. After lots of epic battles the truth would come out-- during his exile Merlin lost his marbles and went over to the side of evil. Didn't he seem kinda creepy in the show? Betrayed from within the Jewel Riders are defeated and put under a curse of eternal sleep. And Trina gets killed by Summer because... uh... because I like killing and resurrecting my characters. I read way too many X-Men comics and they're always dying and coming back, it warped my writing style I tell ya!*

*---Title Forgotten---*

*On earth, four girls find a roleplaying game with plastic Enchanted Jewels. They play the game and find real magic and monsters appearing in their everyday life. After a few chapters they figure out Avalon is a real place and they need to go save it. They find the Holy Grail in a scholar's artifact collection, borrow it, and travel to Avalon.*

*The earth girls use their magic to wake up the Jewel Riders. They meet the Lady of the Lake, who is old and tired of her job and is looking for someone to take her place. One of the earth girls, Kitty, agrees to become the new Lady of the Lake in eighty years or so when her earthly life is over. Trina gets resurrected, yay! The Lady of the Lake makes Dare a wizard, much to his dismay because now he's going to live a thousand years and that pretty much screws his and Trina's chance for Happily-ever-afterness. Poor guy. But the story ends on a hopeful note with everybody alive.*

*---Trina's fate---*

*In case anyone cares- Tri doesn't marry Dare, she meets a guy named Jere and they settle down and have a couple kids-- though one of them has uncertain parentage since Dare was around and it was a party with lots of alcohol and Tri never admits to remembering what did and didn't happen... Possible drunken one-night-stands aside, Trina lives a very happy life with her family and Silverwind and her family. They have many years of adventure and woman and unicorn die together in great old age.*

*Oh, and Trina's daughter is named Bunny. I don't know WHAT I was thinking! She also has two boys, Van and Gareth. Their lives are unknown even to me.*

*---Katin's Story---*

*This last story I wrote and still have and may post to da at some future time.*

*Centuries pass and magic slowly fades from Avalon as industry is discovered. Magic becomes, as it is on Earth, something that happened long ago and far away.*

*Earth is not doing so well. It's overpopulated and using up its resources. Then a scientist discovers how to open a portal into Avalon. This beautiful green country full of resources-- let's invade it and strip mine! The people of earth begin raiding with soldiers and mecha suits.*

*Defense of all that's good depends on a woman soldier with a mecha, the mysterious King's General, and a traumatized child spy from earth. Magic is slowly returning to Avalon, but it's going to return to a dead world if the enemy isn't kept out.*

*In the end the invaders are defeated, the unicorns return, and a new team of Jewel Riders realize Avalon is safe forever and they have a chance to bring magic to Earth.*

*And that's the end. The real, final end.*