

The Legend of Greywinds – Book 1

Isle of Tana

Chapter 1 – The Isle

It was only getting worse. The skies were once again as black as coal. Neither of Yerg's two moons was visible. This was going to be a storm that would claim the lives of those unaware of its presence. It was my family's turn to watch the evening sky. Mother dreaded the times when Assiral storms approached on our watch. Because I was younger and more agile, I would be the one to race to the center of the village and sound the bell that sat there. Those on watch in surrounding villages listened for the distinctive tones. They would sound their own alarm bells warning clansmen to take cover.

After ringing the bell, I rushed home to help Mother and Father secure our cottage and the cottage next door that belonged to Vayda. Then we waited for the storm to pass. After every storm we Shaylee Healers were called on to assist those hurt or maimed by the swirls that descended from these frightening tempests.

Shaylee Hamlet was situated on the northwestern side of Tana. Although our land bordered the breathtaking northwestern shore, our ancestors chose to build their homes further inland at the base of the rugged mountains dividing our hamlet from that of the Gelsey to the north. Each Shaylee cottage had fragrant gardens dedicated to herbs and healing plants. Members of the clan were known as Healers and each carried a sacred pouch containing healing stones. They were called on to heal not only people but also animals, birds and other creatures.

Although it was thousands of years later, we followed the same customs as our predecessors. Simple robes with hand-braided sashes were still the official garb. We also donned herbal wreaths on our heads and maintained the same types of gardens. Shaylee was no different today than it was thousands of years ago—except for the increased devastation from the storm swirls.

Vayda was chosen as the Shaylee representative for the Council of Prophecy. Although she appeared quite youthful, she was the oldest council member — over 200 years old. She was a great Healer among the Shaylee, her connection with healing stones far greater than any other Healer in the hamlet. She was also extremely knowledgeable of herbs and healing plants and their various uses.

Many young Shaylee were sent to her for training and refinement of their skills. She also spent time with other Healers sharing her knowledge and understanding of plant life

and their many uses in healing physical, emotional, and mental conditions. Vayda was passionate about helping others, yet she was very humble and always thanked the grey winds for her gifts. She was highly respected by all clans on Tana.

Vayda and the other Council members had spent the last 100 years or so trying to find a way to eliminate the storm swirls. No matter what they tried, the storms continued.

We huddled together by the stone fireplace in our cottage. The sound of the swirls striking animals and people who had not found shelter was disheartening. Blood-curdling screams kept me awake all night. *Why could the Council not find a way to make these storms go away?* I silently questioned in my mind.

The night dragged on and on. When the swirls and the black sky finally disappeared, it was daylight. The green and yellow sun was already in the sky. The yellow sun with red and orange bands was just climbing above the horizon. What a beautiful sight it was.

Healers began to gather around the base of the storm bell. Teams of Gelsey and Echo began sending messages about the injured needing our help. An Echo about my age stood ready to relay these messages to those of us waiting.

“Laree requests six Healers in the northern part of Echo Hamlet. A herd of goats did not make it back to the stables before the storm struck. Many are dead and over thirty are severely injured,” reported this young, red-headed Listener.

“Maru is requesting the aid of two or three Healers at the base of Riga Mountain. She says four horses were trapped in the small canyon on the Gelsey side of the mountain. They will die unless Healers arrive within the next few hours.”

Vayda motioned for the young Echo to wait before continuing. She turned to address an elder Shaylee.

“Saro. Take five Healers with you and take care of the goats in Echo Hamlet.” Then she turned back to the Echo with a response. “Jaqua, tell Laree that we are sending Healers immediately. They should arrive by mid-morning.”

Then she motioned to my Father. “Nalan, you and Rima head for Riga Mountain.”

“Oh, Vayda, may I go too?” I begged, the words leaving my lips before I could stop them.

“Carena, these horses appear to be badly injured. Are you certain you are ready to deal with that?”

“I would like the chance to help them. Mother and Father will be there to help me should I have any difficulty in completing my task.”

Vayda looked at my parents and they both nodded. “Very well, then.” She turned to the Echo once again, “Jaqua, let Maru know that we are sending three Healers. They should be there in less than an hour.”

Jaqua nodded and relayed her messages to her Echo counterparts waiting for replies.

She was still relaying messages from other parts of Tana when the three of us left the assembled Healers.

Mother gathered the healing herbs while Father prepared the horses for departure. I quickly gathered my healing stones and strapped the pouch to my sash. My heart was pounding in my chest.

This was my chance to show them that I was no longer a child Healer. After today I would no longer be expected to heal only small birds and small animals within the borders of the Shaylee Hamlet. Although tragic, this was a wonderful opportunity for me.

Within minutes Father had the horses at the front of the cottage. We rode at a full gallop. We were on our way to Gelsey, the hamlet to our north.

Father often spoke of Maru, the Gelsey clan, and their mountainous habitat. These northern mountains, although stunning, were quite rugged and not for the faint of heart. Members of the Gelsey clan were known to us all as Protectors. They lived in caves dug out of the sides of mountains. Near each cave was a stable that held each Protector's horses. Gelsey were all fine horsewomen. Some were adept at illusion. Others excelled at equine management. The smallest group consisted of accomplished metal fabricators.

These metalsmiths created weapons for the protection of Tana. Their garb was fitted to facilitate protecting the wearer. Although fierce warriors, they were a peaceful clan unless provoked. As youngsters, Gelsey were matched with horses that complemented their personalities. They were taught not only how to ride but how to groom, feed, and communicate with their assigned counterparts. At the age of seven and every seven years after that, they were matched to another horse. This provided each Gelsey with multiple horses by the time they reached the Age of Protector.

The Gelsey chosen for the Council was Maru, a fierce Protector known throughout Tana. Maru helped develop the current system used to train Gelsey in illusion, weapons fabrication, equine management, defense, and stone searches. She had a strong belief in the role of Protectors and spent every waking hour seeing to it that her clan lived up to that title.

Maru and Laree worked to create teams of Echo and Gelsey that provided protection for the island. Maru personally trained each of the Gelsey on these teams to ensure the highest level of security that Gelsey could offer. She also enjoyed watching the very young trying to find older Gelsey who were hiding and working on their skills of illusion. Maru would quietly watch and occasionally she would notice a youngster exceptionally talented at piercing the veil of illusion. She would then work with that child to develop other skills necessary to become a Master Illusionist. Maru was fierce. She did however have an underlying gentleness that was reserved for the very few – a true Master Illusionist.

As we rode, I wondered if I would have the honor of meeting the Great Protector. Then I began thinking about why we were going to Gelsey. My thoughts turned from Maru to the injured horses as I created images of these maimed creatures. *Whatever possessed you to volunteer for such a gruesome task?* I asked myself as we neared the base of Riga Mountain. Fear began to overtake my excitement.

"We are nearly there," said Father. "Slow the horses. This canyon is dangerous. We do not want our horses to sustain any broken legs."

With Father leading the way, we carefully traversed the rocky canyon. We made our way around a large boulder, and I saw the horses lying on the ground. We moved closer and closer, and I began to realize that my images of the injuries were nowhere near as horrific as what I was now witnessing.

The sides of my jaw began to tighten. Then a cold sweat came over me. Within seconds I felt the warmth of my breakfast burning its way up my throat and out my mouth. Mother helped me off my horse while I continued to vomit. I waved my hand motioning to her to go help Father.

I began to scold myself, *Carena, stop this. You are here to help these poor animals. You cannot help them if you cannot get your emotions under control. Do you want to spend the rest of your life healing small birds in Shaylee?* I finally gathered my composure and made my way to where Mother and Father were working.

"Carena, tend to that hot-blood over there. Use the same stones you used when you healed that injured doe near our cottage that had been attacked by a bear."

Father sensed my hesitation. "Go, Carena. He will die without assistance. Your mother and I must tend to these horses. We cannot help him, so you must." Then he turned from me and laid a poultice on his patient and continued the healing.

I quickly made my way to my patient. Though I was shaking, I took a very deep breath and opened my pouch. As I looked for the stones I needed, a voice whispered in my ear.

"Healer, please save Nissa. We have been together for nearly seven years. I do not know what I would do if he died."

I looked up and there stood a Gelsey a few years younger than me. Her face showed no emotion but the tone in her voice was filled with desperation.

"I will do my best." Then I took to task and feverishly began pulling one stone after another and holding it ever so slightly above the various wounds. I was able to stop most of the bleeding. Then the Echo that relayed Maru's message approached.

"Can you communicate with horses?" I asked her. She nodded. "Please ask him where he is feeling pain?" I requested from the long-haired Listener.

"He says he has terrible pain in his hind quarter." After moving him carefully I noticed a

splintered piece of wood buried deep in his flesh. I removed it and cleaned out the wound. Mother had been watching me and came over to see how I was doing. She handed me a poultice and I quickly applied it to the wound. I explained to Mother what I had done and as she inspected my work a gentle smile formed. "Well done, Carena." Then Mother turned to the Gelsey standing beside me. "He needs rest now. He will be unable to train with you until the beginning of the next cycle of the moons. Is that understood?" The Gelsey nodded and Mother walked back to her charge. "Thank you, Healer. Nissa and I are most grateful for your assistance."

"I am pleased that I was able to help." Then I turned, gathered my stones, placed them in my pouch, and tied the pouch to my sash. I made my way over to Mother to see if I could be of assistance. Both she and Father were already gathering their things.

Father motioned to the Listener. "Please tell Vayda that we have completed our task. Then ask her if there is anyone else that requires our services."

A few moments later the long-haired Echo informed us that Vayda wanted us to return to Shaylee Hamlet. We did just that. Instead of going straight home, Father proceeded to the center of Shaylee where the storm bell stood.

"Look. Laree is here. Let us pay our respects," said Mother.

I had seen Laree from a distance many a time. Today I would get to personally meet the Beneficent Listener. I quickly brushed the dirt from my robe and tried to make myself presentable. Within minutes we dismounted and tied the horses to the frame of the storm bell tower. I followed behind Mother and Father as they approached Laree.

"Beneficent Listener, welcome to Shaylee. How may we be of service?" asked Mother.

"Rima, Nalan, it is wonderful to see you again. This last storm caused more harm than we thought. Perhaps you could advise me on the help that will be needed. The huts by the Grotto..." Laree stopped in mid-sentence. Then she peered around Mother and asked, "And who might you be?"

I stood there for a moment with my mouth wide open and nothing to say.

"Would you mind telling me your name, young Healer?" she asked me in the gentlest of tones.

"I beg your pardon, Beneficent Listener. My name is Carena," I stammered as I awkwardly entered into a lame bow.

"Ah, Vayda mentioned that a child Healer had volunteered to help the injured animals in Gelsey. Was that you perchance?" With eyes and mouth wide open I simply nodded.

"Did you happen to see Maru while you were there?"

I stood there stupefied. Father nudged me. "Oh. No, Beneficent Listener."

"Well, Maru and I both thank you for your service to the clans of Tana."

“You are most welcome, Beneficent Listener.”

Laree then continued her conversation with my parents. My thoughts turned to the last thing she said to me. She thanked me personally! Mother told me that Laree and the Echo were kind and gentle souls and she was right. I thought back to what Mother had told me about our neighbors to the south of Shaylee.

Echo lived along the *Mystical Sands* of Aludat, the sparkling southwestern shore of Tana. The shoreline glistened with a shimmer unseen anywhere else. Simple huts peppering this long beach were home to the members of the Echo clan. Echo lived in huts. Near each hut was a thatched stable that housed at least three creatures—usually those with whom the Echo could communicate. This clan held the title of Listeners. Their flowing blue robes and long black hair were hallmarks of this clan. They were wonderful minstrels, singers and dancers. They were a very likable people who were able to communicate with each other by simply speaking softly, even if the Echo they were speaking to was miles away. Because of their ability to understand the languages of three creatures, farmers on the island sought them out when animals were ill but showed no outward signs of injury. The animals told the Echo what was wrong, and the Echo communicated that information to the Healer that stood by waiting to help.

Laree, a very sensitive Listener was this hamlet’s representative in the Council of Prophecy. She had opened her door to the child of friends who had perished years ago. She provided care, support, and love, becoming a parent to this child devastated by loss. She often worked closely with her neighbors to the north, the Shaylee Healers. In addition, she was sought out by the older Echo looking for advice and guidance as they prepared to depart this world. Her hut was slightly larger than most as she often entertained visitors making their way by land or sea to Echo Hamlet. Laree’s kind smile and soft mannerisms attracted many animals, even those with whom she was unable to communicate.

“Carena.” Mother’s voice was insistent.

I responded, realizing she had called me several times already. “Yes, Mother.”

“Return home now and begin preparing dinner for this evening. I will be along shortly.”

“Yes, Mother.” I turned to Laree. “Thank you for your kind words. They mean a great deal to me.”

“I meant those words, Carena. It was a great pleasure to meet you and I hope we will meet again on better terms.”

I bowed my head to her and to Father, kissed Mother on the cheek, and left quickly with my horse in tow. Our main course that night was to be potatoes boiled in salted herbs with melted cheese on top. Mother said that was a recipe she received from Clar

years ago. Clar said Mother's combination of herbs made it the best in the land. I met the Beneficent Listener, I almost met the Great Protector, and tonight we would entertain Clar, the Renowned Whisperer. What a day this had been! As I peeled potatoes, I thought of Clar and the Celie Clan that lived on the other side of the River of Light.

The Celie occupied the eastern side of the island. Waterfalls were plentiful in this hamlet and the Whisperers took shelter behind the falling waters. Thick green fernlike foliage bordered the pools at the base of each waterfall. Colorful birds and butterflies added the final touch to this most beautiful place.

Celie were telepathic and spent much of their time meditating by the pools, the falls, or other water elements throughout their hamlet. Some Celie were also capable of sending messages to non-telepaths through their dreams. Even as adults, they were small of stature and the light of the two suns above Yerg caused great pain to their fragile skin and lavender eyes. Celie wore white flowing gowns, gold neckbands and matching wristbands.

There was a melodic sound throughout the Celie Hamlet that the clan attributed to Ramo, their male muse. As soon as you ventured into Celie territory, your head would fill with Ramo's wonderful music. These melodies would abruptly cease as you crossed the Celie border into another hamlet.

Clar, the matriarch of the Celie, was serious only when she needed to be. Otherwise she enjoyed Ramo's melodies and regularly made her clansmen laugh. She was exceptional when it came to dealing with non-telepaths through dreams. This ability had been handed down to Clar's ancestors thousands of years ago by Wizard Celie. This clan devoted much of its time to maintaining and further developing communication through telepathy, dreams, and astral travel. Clar, the Renowned Whisperer, was asked to share her insight and method of dream communication with other Celie. She was one of the few able to easily enter the dreams of non-telepaths so other Celie were always looking to Clar for guidance and instruction. She made remarks that set members of her clan to laughing hysterically as she kept her instructions lighthearted in nature. Telepathy could be very intense, so Clar insisted on laughter as a way of creating balance for the Celie. She was a natural choice to represent her clan on the Council of Prophecy.

"Carena."

I screamed as Mother entered the cottage and startled me.

"What is it with you today? You seem very far away."

"Mother, it has been such an exciting day! First meeting Laree, then helping with the healings in Gelsey, and now Clar is coming to sup with us."

"I suppose it has been an eventful day for you."

“And best of all Mother, I am no longer a child Healer,” I proudly stated. Mother smiled gently, hugging me without saying another word.

“The potatoes are ready. May I be excused now? I want to clean up before Clar’s arrival.”

“Go on dear. Your father should be in with the herbs shortly and I will begin preparing the meal. Thank you for volunteering to help today. Your father and I are both very proud of you.”

Mother and Father were proud of me. Those words sent a strange, warm tingle throughout my body. I had washed up and was changing into my favorite green robe when Father called to me to help with preparing the table for dinner. I needed something to do while I waited for our special guest.

I met Clar later that evening. She was very funny. Her stories made us laugh to the point where our bellies hurt, and tears filled our eyes. This was a most memorable day—one of those once-in-a-lifetime moments that I remember as clearly as if it had happened today.

That was nearly two years ago now. Life on Tana changed very little these last two years except for the Assiral storm swirls. The swirls continued to grow in intensity, and we Shaylee were called on more and more to help with the wounded. At times I longed to be a child Healer again, but there was no going back. That day, nearly two years ago, was my rite of passage. I have witnessed many atrocities since that day, but none prepared me for what was to come.