

Late Spring, Boulder, Colorado, the same evening

Slowly rising from the pillow on the floor and flicking her skirt out to straighten it, Marian Hrasta watched GoldenRaven's other students thank the woman and file out the room to the house's entryway. Marian braced herself to talk to her teacher about the strange sounds - chimes, gongs, and chants - that had haunted her this last month.

When GoldenRaven turned back to the living room and saw Marian waiting, her smile faded. Marian didn't like that. She'd always been a good student, and it dented her pride - perhaps even something more - if her profs didn't like her.

GoldenRaven stepped into the room and folded her hands at her waist and tilted her blond head. Her blue eyes were stern. "This was the last session in our endeavor to find your totem animal. You were deep in meditation, Marian and I believe you found your totem, didn't you? Therefore the class was a success in your mind, yes?" GoldenRaven's smile was a little too sharp for what Marian thought of as a laid-back, new age practitioner. But a teacher had asked a question.

"Yes, an owl." Shades of Harry Potter, must have been the movie she'd seen a week before. "A snowy owl."

GoldenRaven nodded once. "Good."

"Uh, GoldenRaven, I know that you spoke the guided meditation, but did you use music, too? Chants and chimes and a gong, for instance?"

"No."

Marian was afraid of that. She wet her lips, but before she could broach the reason she stayed, Goldenraven spoke. "You're like many of my university grad students, studying me and my beliefs rather than the subject - the lifestyle - I want to teach." She started straightening the living room, picking up pillows from the last guided meditation session.

"I'm sorry if you don't think that I take you seriously."

GoldenRaven sighed, took a seat on a broken-down sofa. She was several inches shorter than Marian and even plumper than Marian herself. Unlike Marian, GoldenRaven accepted her body-shape. She gestured to Marian to sit, too. "Marian, you have a great deal of intelligence, and more, just plain magic in you, right beneath the surface. But you dabble. You don't commit yourself to the learning.

Marian felt heat creep up her neck. She'd always been a good student.

"Listen to me," GoldenRaven said, "You dabble, not taking what you learn seriously. Yet I feel a brilliant spark within you, just under the surface." She tapped Marian's chest above her breasts. "Strong magic."

She wanted to believe. Wanted to think that some magic actually worked, but was unable to cast aside the last little nugget of logic and reason.

GoldenRaven sighed. "My belief in magic is integral to my

spiritual beliefs. Life itself is magic - the growing of a babe in the womb, the unfurling of the bud to a blossom, a rainbow. All to be celebrated, all life. And I know that you-" She made a helpless gesture as if searching for words. "I must show her," she whispered to herself. She turned to Marian. "Sit back down and relax. We'll try a little something."

Marian took a seat on the old, soft sofa, sinking into the cushions, leaning back. GoldenRaven closed the room's door and re-lit some of the candles.

"Close your eyes," GoldenRaven said and Marian did.

She relaxed as she'd learned to do, allowing the flow of GoldenRaven's voice to carry her into that state where her body was very heavy, but her mind was clear. Marian had told herself that she wasn't really losing control, GoldenRaven couldn't make Marian do anything she didn't want to. She knew this. More, she trusted GoldenRaven, sensing an ethical woman. Marian had run across enough scams and cons in her exploration of New Age classes to know when a voice didn't sound true.

Thinking of music brought the chimes and chants flooding through her mind. GoldenRaven must have turned on her system again, but that didn't explain why Marian kept hearing the music outside of class - when she was dropping into sleep, or awakening, or even when her mind got caught in a daydream. Must be some sort of conditioning, some lingering game her mind played to send her into the meditative state.

"Why do you continue to take classes like Finding Your Totem Animal, Introduction to the Tarot, Feng Shui, Wiccan 101? Not just for your goal of being a professor of Comparative Religion, I'm sure. Why?" GoldenRaven asked softly.

Marian had told the class of all her other studies during the introductory portion. "Because I'm interested in all those."

"Because the magic you feel inside you pulls you to such studies. Now sink into your core, visualize a root going from the base of your spine through the couch, through the floor and deep into the earth of our world. What do you feel, Marian?"

"I hear an ancient, intricate song," Marian said, confessing for the first time that this melody had been with her for a long, long time, ever since she could remember. And still it throbbed with beautiful rhythm. As she focused on it the chimes and chant and occasional gong seemed to lift and diminish. Interesting trick.

"A song? Hmmmm," GoldenRaven said, and Marian heard the nuances in her voice, too, the initial surprise, the amusement. She was acutely aware of the sounds in the room, the house – the small rush of a table fountain, the tiny hiss of flames as they ate candles. The mewling of a cat upstairs.

"You love this song?" asked GoldenRaven?

What wasn't to love? "Of course."

The song surged and for one shining instance Marian felt completely whole, completely accepted and loved. Total joy

nearing ecstasy.

"That is your connection to Mother Earth, Marian, and just a part of your magic. Don't you sense the winds that swirl around our world, and fire of the molten core, and tides of her oceans?"

"Yes," Marian breathed.

A distant clomping of male footsteps down the stairs broke the moment.

"Time to end this exercise. I will count from ten to one...." GoldenRaven continued with the patter that pulled Marian from her alternative mental state. The ceiling light flicked on, brightening the light beyond her eyelids.

"If you want to fulfill your true potential, and what scholar does not, you must find another teacher. One who will help you with your control and need for perfection issues."

Marian flushed. "Are you starting a new class, soon?" Marian was sure that the Native American spirituality that GoldenRaven taught wasn't what she was looking for, but the woman was the best New Age teacher Marian had ever had.

"I'm afraid not. As a matter of fact, WoodElk and I have decided that we aren't really 'mountain' people. We miss deciduous forests. So we're heading to the West Coast, Oregon or Washington." She shrugged. "Wherever Spirit takes us."

Marian bit her lip. "I need to talk with you."

The older woman returned her gaze to Marian. "I'm sorry, but it's impossible. We can talk a little now, but otherwise, it

will be a while before I'll be settled. There's email, of course."

"I'm having trouble with my meditation. I hear things." She waved. "A gong, chimes, chants." She hadn't wanted to blurt out her problems, but didn't see any choice. And she'd had her hearing checked at the student health center. Nothing was wrong with her ears. She felt as normal mentally as usual, and sensed the problem wasn't one a psychologist could help.

GoldenRaven's eyes widened. She tilted her head. "Then perhaps you should quit for the moment."

"But this thing you said was inside me—" Magic. "Shouldn't I continue? My path—" Marian's tongue felt thick, unaccustomed confusion stopped her.

"We didn't determine your Path, Marian," GoldenRaven's voice mellowed, lowered as if comforting. "We only agreed that your Path and mine are not the same. My training would not fill your needs." She grasped Marian's arm, then stiffened, her eyes going blank and unfocused.

Marian realized then that this was really why she'd come to GoldenRaven, because the woman was a brilliant forecaster, because Marian wanted to be told what to do, what direction to go instead of trying to figure it out on her own.

Understanding her own motives made her feel guilty, but not guilty enough to break away.

"The full moon. Three days." GoldenRaven sucked in a

breath and stepped back from Marian, breaking the physical connection. She shook her head, then met Marian's eyes. "I don't know what it means." GoldenRaven lifted her hands in a helpless gesture. "I can't tell you. Except that this full moon ritual is very important for you. It will free your magic. Life changing. For you and your brother. Ask for your teacher then." She opened her mouth, then shut it and shook her head again. "No, I should not tell you even if I could. I'm sorry, Marian. Go now, and Blessings upon you." With a little duck of her head she glided from the room.

Marian barely saw her go. She had never mentioned her brother, Andrew, to GoldenRaven or anyone in the class. Automatically, Marian picked up her bag, emotions churning inside her. Her feet didn't work well. She stumbled from the living room, over the threshold of the house.

The cold night, wind slapping at her, whipping her long hair into tiny lashes across her face, only increased her inner chill. Though she walked fast, she couldn't prevent shivers.

She might have shrugged off the continuing auditory illusions, might have ignored GoldenRaven's advice to find another teacher. Might have continued to "dabble" in New Age spirituality on her way to receiving her doctorate in Comparative Philosophies and Religion. But she would never ignore any threat to her brother.

If a full moon ritual was that important to him, she'd do

it. And take it seriously by God – or by All The Powers That
Were.