

by Rivkah Raven ©2011 All Rights Reserved

### **“Lineage”**

*“...my mother cried; but then there was a star danced, and under that was I born.” -Beatrice,  
Much Ado About Nothing, Wm. Shakespeare*

Mari turned to Jac with a joyful smile. “Jac, this is Professor Malone.”

Jac had whirled back to the door as it closed, slamming her hand on the thick oak as she heard the key turn in the lock. She bowed her head for a second, then she straightened and turned back to enter the room. “Professor, my upbringing demands that I say ‘nice to meet you,’ but what I really want to say is: Is there a way out of this room? What avenues have you explored?”

As she spoke, she was already whirling around the room, huffing in impatience as the skirts of her red robe tangled around her legs, slowing only enough to grab a handful of material from under her backside, haul up the slight train of her skirts and scoop it all up with her forearm. This fascinating maneuver (performed while still moving rapidly around the room) resulted in freer movement, but her skirts were hoisted nearly to her knees, exposing extremely scuffed and disreputable boots, and above that, much-darned and hole-sprinkled woolen stockings. Mari’s eyes slid over to the Professor at this, but he didn’t notice; he appeared to be only half in the room- lost somewhere in his own mind, a slightly puzzled smile on his face.

“Well?” Jac demanded, weaving in and out of piles of enormous gears, ranging from large and thick and dull to tiny, gleaming and intricate- the room was, depending on how you look at such things, either a jumbled, chaotic mess, or a wonderland of potential experiments. A

workbench with extremely lethal looking tools lined one wall; there was a huge fireplace with a cauldron simmering over it, an anvil, and large iron molds, a long-handled, shallow cup with a lip for pouring...on another wall, there were more tables piled with things like copper wire and tubing; there was another table with what looked like an elaborate chemistry experiment. Ah, Mari thought, that would account for the smell.

The air was hazy in the room as though somehow he had managed to trap steam inside; there was a slightly smoky, metallic smell. Mari licked her lips- they tasted of salt, with a sharp, foreign metal tang; even the very air they breathed was affected by his work.

Jac was on the point of losing her temper again. She whirled to face them, dropping her forearm and tossing the train of her skirts behind her again as she moved. It was a graceful, masterful movement, and Mari was taken aback for a second, remembering that her little Jac had once had a life in society, and had learned all the tricks- even, apparently, the way to use clothing to her best advantage. She was like a little tigress, lashing her tail, practically quivering with intensity. “Come, you two, we need to find a way out. There is something going on here that I really don’t like. The sooner we are out, and can find out for ourselves what is happening here, the better.”

“Go?” Professor Malone’s voice sounded cracked, as though he had not spoken in quite some time, and were trying to remember how to do it. “Why would we leave? I can’t leave yet, I’ve nearly-Oh!” He turned to Mari, his face lighting up, and grabbed her hands, tugging her toward a dim corner of the room. “Finally someone I can tell! And show! I have been working on this for so long, and I think I’ve nearly got it, or, at least, I may have already gotten it, but it has yet to be tried! And you two,” He darted a bright glance back to where Jac stood with her

mouth open, “you are going to be the first ones to see! Oh!” he gave Mari’s hands a little shake, so filled with excitement he was practically dancing on his toes, “How very wonderful!”

Mari’s face was reddening from her attempts not to laugh, first at Jac’s dramatics, and now at the Professor. “What is it, Professor? We’d love to see. Wouldn’t we, Jac?” Jac looked about ready to explode, but she took one look at the professor: his flying hair like a steam cloud around his head, his bright, open, shining face, his huge, dreaming eyes, his entire small person dapper in tweeds - or he would have been dapper, except that they were peppered with small burn holes and miscellaneous spots of grease- she took a deep breath (it seemed to be her morning for deep breathing exercises, poor Jac) and nodded.

The professor towed Mari over to the corner, chuntering away incomprehensibly, so fast that the words tumbled out of his mouth like a shower of bright beads, nearly overlapping. Mari and Jac caught the words: time, relativity, uncertainty, mass, energy, light, sound, threshold, matter, vacuum, chaos...

“Professor. Professor, stop.”

action, reaction, cat, can’t trust that Schrödinger anyway, boundaries, time, space, take the (un) and the (re) away, and you get certainty, you get action...

“PROFESSOR!” Mari was panting by then, buffeted by the deluge of words.

The professor stuttered to a halt and his huge bright eyes turned to her, puzzled. (she had never seen his eyes without goggles. They were very clear- it was like looking into the eyes of an infant.) “Er...yes, m’dear? Did I go too fast?”

“Professor, I don’t understand a word of what you’re saying. I really don’t. I see that you are doing something vastly important here; would you please explain, not the experiment itself,

but the thing you are trying to achieve? The actual object of all ...this..." she waved her hand, indicating the table and its strange contents.

For a moment, all three of them stood in silence and contemplated the table, Mari and Jac with puzzled and somewhat nervous hesitancy, the Professor with pride and awe.

The table was small and square, and sat under an arched window that looked out over a view of impossibly green grass and blue sky, dotted here and there with stands of trees. It looked as though there were no one else in the world inhabiting this landscape. The light from the window gleamed on a pool of water. Not quite a pool- more like a bowl. Two large copper bowls, one face down, and one face up on top of it, so the top of the structure mirrored the bottom. Between and around the place where the bases of the two bowls met, was a strange network of tiny, gleaming bronze and copper wires, intertwining and branching, with ends sticking out all over like twigs- each twig ending in a tiny, sparkling crystal. These strange, delicate little branches were all gently swirling, not only in a circle, Mari saw as she looked closer, but also in a spiral so they appeared to be going in or out of the bowls themselves. Each little crystal was also swirling around the other ones near it, so the whole effect was rather dizzying; it reminded her of models she'd seen of atoms, or the solar system, only spun out even more elaborately; oddly, the big, solid rim of the top bowl, with its evenly spaced bolts, looked exactly like-

"A porthole?" Mari asked. "It looks like one of the portholes from the carriage."

Professor Malone had gotten quieter, his stillness almost alarming, considering how animated he had been just moments before. He turned to Mari, very solemn now.

“My dear, you will have to bring out your willingness to believe. Or at least,” he amended with a twinkle, “Put your doubting adult self away for a moment as I try to explain.” He pulled his tweed coat down with two sharp, short tugs, and stood as tall as he could, puffing out his narrow little chest.

“I have been on the brink of this discovery for quite some time. I have a theory, which,” he hastily added, as Jac made an impatient grimace, “I will explain more fully later, if you wish. I call it Malone’s Theory of Completion. Or Resolution, or Continuously Changing Certainty...” he rambled to a halt and took a breath, turning to look at the odd contraption on the table. It was beautiful -the swirling delicate wires and crystals caught the light from the window and sparkled as they moved gently. The water within was completely still and serene in contrast.

“I have been trying for quite some time to harness travel between the worlds,” he explained, “and that involved understanding the nature of Time itself. Time, and light, and...well,” he amended, eyeing Jac nervously again, “basically, you see me here now, don’t you? I am here, with you, in this room.” Both women nodded, Jac impatient, Mari cautious. “BUT!” his eyes sparked back into life with a childlike wonder “Everywhere and everywhen I am NOT at the moment, in a way I am there too, by very nature of my absence!” he finished triumphantly, looking from one girl to another like an eager puppy.

Mari sighed, “Please, just tell us what this does.”

Professor Malone grinned, “I will do better than tell you; I will show you.” He turned to the bowl again, still chattering. “When I met you, Mari, I had been working on a way between worlds. I had gotten to the point where I thought I knew how to control it for myself. There is a balance, you see. One must push one’s self to the edge where certainty no longer exists. That is

the key of this formula: Uncertainty and Certainty. But that's not all, really- poised between the two, there is a place where both Certainty and Uncertainty exist at once. That is the place when one's reality can shift. Space, time... it is all malleable; the things we think are safe and predictable are just a matter of our perception." He broke into burbling giggles. "A matter. Matter. Of our perception," When he turned to see both women's faces blank, he pulled out a thoroughly grease-stained handkerchief, wiped his eyes, and blew his nose with a high-pitched toot. "Ah well, just my little joke," he said sheepishly.

"I had succeeded in controlling it for myself- I could cross over almost at will. My dear," he turned to Mari, "I am sorry, I was not completely honest with you at our first meeting, that I had done the cross before - but you see," and all of a sudden his countenance shifted; he looked old and crumpled, weary- "the Patron demanded it. The man. He supports my research, so I had to agree- he said, it must be secret. Secrecy above all things. What could I do?"

Mari's heart contracted as she saw those clear, child's eyes clouding, bewilderment written on his face. "It's okay, Professor, you didn't harm me. Who is this Patron?"

The professor's eyes darted around the room, showing the first sign of fear Mari had ever seen in him. "He rules this place. People don't know it, but he does. He is Zimri. He is a Manuscript. "

"Zimri?" Jac blurted, at the same moment Mari said, "Manuscript? You know about Manuscripts?"

"Oh dear," the professor said softly, "I can see we have much talking to do. Yes, Mari, I know about Manuscripts. " He looked so crumpled and weary, Mari did not have the heart to press him further. She laid her hand lightly on his tweed sleeve and said, "But your theory?"

“Yes! Yes! My theory!” As she had known he would, he ignited back into life, his fear and helplessness forgotten. “I think I’ve found the way to move others now! I find, or rather, the Resolver finds, “ he corrected, smiling fondly at his contraption, “People who are outside the normal boundaries of their lives. People who have been removed, somehow, from all their familiar moorings. Then I just...tip the balance a little...by knowing that they are here, and that should do it!” He clasped his hands together and gazed lovingly at his contraption. “I took the principles of a Scrying Pool, and applied the movement of the spheres, and taking Schrödinger’s Cat into account, the Unseen bowl on the bottom reflects...”

“Let’s just try it, shall we?” Mari hastily interrupted, her head beginning to ache. “Yes! Yes!” The professor chortled, “I am so very glad you are here!” He pulled his goggles up from where they lay around his neck, and tightened the leather straps so they rested firmly over his eyes. His eyes behind the slightly green, thick glass were magnified, their clear, childlike wonder glowing with intensity. “Get some goggles, ladies, if you please- I do not know what is going to occur. Safety is, of course, paramount- wooden box under the table.”

They each fished out a pair of goggles, Jac sighing audibly like a put-upon society matron, Mari huffing small giggles out her nose, and fit them awkwardly, taking time to get the hang of tightening the leather straps with one hand while holding the thick, heavy lenses in place with the other.

“Now,” Professor Malone said, his breathing shallow and fast, “all we do is ... I put out my finger like this,” he gently pushed his hand forward, “and I ... make the stars go still.”

“Look into the water, ladies, look!”

As the crystals tinkled along his finger, eventually the friction slowed them, and they stopped. The water began to churn, as though the vibrations from the tiny movement were somehow stirring it up, being magnified. Tiny drops of water showered their faces, burning where they landed; steam rose up from the bowl, and coated their goggles. They wiped them off with their sleeves, and pressed closer, leaning eagerly over the bowl.

The steam began to clear, and as the water calmed, they could see a picture in the bowl. It wasn't reflected in the water- it was almost as though the bowl contained it, or looked onto it like a window. What they saw was so clear, it was as though it had been there all along. Two men with a horse walking along a dusty track, one of them gesticulating angrily.

"Is!" Mari gasped, at the same time Professor Malone clapped his hands together, once, and whispered "Ismael?"

Mari darted a sharp glance at the professor, but was drawn back into the scene unfolding before them. The horse moved aside, and the other man came into clear focus. "Ariel..." she murmured, "What magic is this? Ariel. How can this be?"

She turned to the professor, "Is this real? Is this happening right now somewhere?" The professor watched the bowl, mesmerized, a small wistful smile on his face. "What is real?" He glanced at her and sobered. "Yes, I do believe it is real, my dear. I think so."

As they watched the pool, the ripples in the water died away to complete stillness. They could hear the men clearly. Mari's face grew hot: she felt as though she were spying, seeing something she was not supposed to see.

Is rounded angrily on Ariel. "And you just let her walk away? You didn't stand up and defend her? What kind of man are you? And your wife? You didn't talk to her at all? You

deceived her, too? You deceived them all, including yourself. I can't believe my ears. Do you think you helped anyone at all by hiding everything? In fact, what you've done, my little bantam rooster, is that you've managed to hurt and shatter every single person in your life. Including yourself. You fool!" Mari squirmed uncomfortably, realizing that Ariel must have told Is about her- but she was more concerned for Is' health. If his face got any redder, she thought, she could use it for heating up a pan of water. She giggled softly. Jac slanted a sidewise look at Mari, and Mari felt Jac's arm lightly wind around her. Sudden tears started into Mari's eyes, and she put an arm around Jac and squeezed her briefly, feeling gratitude for the journey that had brought such a friend into her life.

Ariel did not defend himself- he drooped. Mari's heart squeezed painfully as she looked at him. She urged him silently with her mind- urged him to fight, urged him to stand up tall and be the man she had known, the man with a brave, true heart. He was broken, and she could not help him now. Mari turned her gaze to Is, who was taking a breath to continue his harangue, and the mixture of exasperation and fondness that flooded her nearly made her laugh aloud.

"And Mari!" (Jac and the professor both glanced at her this time; she felt very exposed, all of a sudden) "What a wonderful woman! She is honorable, she is all that's pure and bright in the world- what a heart she has!" Is stopped himself and took a deep breath, "Well, I mean, I don't know her all that well yet. But I can see! Anyone can see: she is special. She doesn't hide, and the world has hurt her because of it. But still she opens herself up! She hasn't become cynical or closed like so many do. You were given this extraordinary heart, and you..." Is spluttered, rounding on Ariel and looking as though he were going to hit him, "You threw it

away? You let her be the scapegoat, you let that wonderful woman take the blame for your own deceit, for your own actions? And you call yourself a holy man?"

Ariel shrank even further. Mari's heart constricted in her chest. If only he'd stand up for himself, she thought, if he'd just hold his head up and say...something. Anything. If he'd show passion, fire, determination...but he didn't. Ariel's head drooped, and a few weary tears rolled down his face.

Is stopped in the middle of the road, in complete disgust now. "Yes. feeling sorry for yourself. You did these things. You made selfish choices. Rather than righting them, rather than taking steps to repair or fix things, rather than fighting for the beautiful gift that came into your life, you stand there pitying yourself. By God!" Abruptly, Is' shoulders drooped and he took a deep breath. "By God. I am glad that Mari got away from you. Her heart may be broken, but better it be broken now than spend her life- a life full of incredible potential- with a weak and selfish man like you. She would have given you her life- she would have become a shadow behind you, holding you up, and her marvelous, strong spirit would have faded. Your support, that's what she would have been." Is shuddered. "Thank the Maker that you showed your true colors and stood there, silent, letting her be blamed and scorned. Thank the Maker that she left, and came to Ardenna, to the Mountain, where she could meet...ME." He rounded on Ariel. "Are you looking for her now, you silly fool?"

Ariel wiped his eyes with a fist, and looked up. "I ... I don't know. I had something like that in my mind when I left, but walking away from my home, from my job, my friends, from everything I've known...it's been so hard. I need to...I need to find out who I am. I need to take care of myself now. The things you say are correct, but they are also wrong. You stand there

judging me, but you are not seeing, truly, my heart.” Ariel stood up straighter and looked into Is’ eyes. “You are not seeing the man I am becoming. You are seeing my actions. I reacted, I did not make choices. I did not act. If I tell myself now that I was wrong, that I was bad, don’t you see, I will not become stronger. I will loathe myself even more...and that was the whole problem. That was why I reacted my life in the first place, and did not create my life. I did not love myself. I wanted to please everyone else, I wanted, above all, other people to think highly of me. I was their rabbi- I gave and gave until I forgot how to live my own truth. I forgot how to be strong about what my own heart is telling me is right. You are right, though, in a sense. I should not be here. I long to see Mari, to find her, but that is not where I need to begin. She has her own work to do. I still have more work to do. I ask the Maker to guide you to your destination safely. I ask the Maker to keep Mari, the woman I love, safe, and to guide me...onward. I thank you for saving my life. I will repay you one day, I feel that.”

Is looked at Ariel with new respect. “I underestimated you. I see you are aware...you have a strong spirit. May the Maker protect you, and may you continue to grow. I hope to meet you again, Rabbi Ariel. I will tell Mari...I will tell her not to give up hope.” He clapped Ariel on the shoulder, untied one of the packs from the horse, and handed it to him. Ariel simply nodded his head, shouldered the pack, turned, and walked away. The image in the water stayed focused on Is. He stared after Ariel for a time then shook his head and drew his hand slowly across his eyes, rubbing between his eyebrows. Mari brushed the tears from her eyes, and felt Jac’s arm tighten around her shoulders.

Mari felt deep sadness, watching Ariel walk away again. But somehow, it felt right. My heart isn’t broken, Mari thought. Then, she took a deep breath, a feeling like wonder, or like

warm sunlight, spreading through her. My heart isn't broken! I thought he was the love of my life. Maybe he is. But the man I loved...I wonder if I created him, partially. I wonder if I looked at this man and saw...

Her breath caught as the realization hit her...looked at this man and saw myself. I saw myself; my own heart. I saw something created out of my own hopes, dreams, imagination. He was so kind and gentle, he was the home of my heart, I thought. Until he failed to stand by me... really, I was falling in love with ....

myself. She shook her head. That wasn't it, completely. She smiled. She felt that all was happening as it should; she sent up a small prayer to the Maker that Ariel be protected and guided on his journey to become the man she knew he could be...she had seen his magnificence; it was not an illusion.

Then, in a dreamlike way, the scenery shifted abruptly. Ismael was talking to a man and handing him the horse's reins. The man handed Is a small coin purse, and Is took a large basket off the horse. Then, the water clouded as though fog were drifting past. When it cleared again, Is was sitting in a small boat, navigating the river. In the front, sitting straight as a bossy, black-and-white spotted arrow at the prow of the little boat, was...

"Figaro?" Professor Malone, Mari, and Jac said all at once. The professor's back stiffened. He reached out a finger, and tapped the little crystal stars gently. As they moved, the water stilled and became completely clear and serene once more. He reached up, loosened his goggle strap and lowered his goggles to rest around his neck, then raised his hands to rub his eyes, pinching the bridge of his nose.

“All right,” he said, and turned around, his eyes moving solemnly from one woman to the other, “Before we continue this experiment, we three must talk.” He was different somehow, grave, controlled, more like...an adult. A plain, ordinary, tired old adult. Mari felt a strange pang of sorrow, and stifled it quickly, nodding. “Yes. I would like to know how you know Is- Ismael. How you know Figaro. No one knows about Figaro, the Archive Cat, except-”

“I was the Archivist, Mari. I was... My surname is Zalman.”

Mari gasped, “Zalman! Is’ mentor! But you can’t be, you’re-”

“I am not dead, obviously, Mari. I fled. Yes, I use that word intentionally. I ran away. The Archives, Mari...how do you know about them? What do you know?”

“I...I was...I am still, I suppose - an Apprentice.”

“Ah....” He said, on a long exhalation of breath. He closed his eyes for a few moments, long enough that Mari and Jac exchanged worried glances. He spoke again, opening his eyes slowly. “And Miss Jac? How do you know Figaro?”

They both turned to look at Jac. She cleared her throat, looking suddenly shy.

“I was...I was an Apprentice. You had many, Master Zalman. I should have recognized you before, but you’ve changed so... I was one of a large group that year. I wasn’t really chosen, I fought my way in. My family didn’t like it. I ...I didn’t succeed in the Trial, I guess.”

Mari’s eyes widened. “There are usually more than one Apprentice?”

Jac nodded slowly. “There were six of us. I think Is, the one you call Ismael, Professor Malone...Master Zalman...I think he was among us?” Zalman nodded slowly, his eyes searching Jac’s face. Jac grinned, “I wouldn’t recognize him, I guess it’s been a lot of years.” Zalman Malone met her eyes with a corresponding twinkle, and she continued. “So I guess I’m still in

the Archives? I got lost. I went into the past, I think, and wound up in the woods where I found Cora, and eventually...Mari came.”

Professor Malone sighed. “None of this is an accident, my dears. The Archives are dangerous. But I think you both know this by now. I will have to explain, one day, why I fled, but it’s not time yet for me to tell you that story. If I’m correct in my theory,” his eyes grew bright again, and his face glowed, “They are here! Ismael - I suppose he calls himself ‘Is’ now- and the one you call Ariel, they are somewhere here, or on their way. Like it or not, ladies, we called them.”

Mari thought about Ariel coming to this place, and felt...disappointment. Severe disappointment. This was her life, and her adventure! Then she grinned. She had come a long way from that girl who stood on a bridge in a small town, thinking she could not survive without a man. Without a rabbi, who had proved himself to be just a human being after all; a man deeply in need of the lessons he himself had preached.

Professor Malone (Zalman Malone, Mari thought, pressing her lips together lest any chuckles escape) turned to Jac, his body and face intense again. “Miss Jac, I believe you wanted to find a way out of this room? Now would be the time for us to do that.”

Jac looked at him, raised her eyebrows, then gathered the skirts of her robe up again. “Right,” she said with a grin, and began to prowl, once more, around the room. Mari threw back her head and laughed. “I just love you two,” she chortled, feeling her heart expand in a joy that was almost painful.