



## **The Tablet of Water - 2 Chapter Sample**

D. Dean Harmon

**Published:** 2009

**Categorie(s):**

**Tag(s):** Magic Sound Gospel Fantasy

# Chapter 1

## **An Ailing Son**

Brian Sihdlham drove his horse and his weathered cart over the ridge and through the wall of pine trees in front of him. The ancient evergreens marked the end of the Selva, the great forest of the Eastern Sea, and the beginning of the plains surrounding the capital city of Ubira. As the cart plodded along the road it slowly descended from the forest and into the crescent shaped valley below. Brian smiled as he took in the magnificent sight before him. The land around the city walls had been cleared of trees for miles and miles leaving enormously large areas for farms, fields, and crops. The valley stretched from the Selva on the west to the cliffs at the edge of the sea on the east. It was nearly a day's journey from north to south through the semi-circle shaped lowlands with Ubira right smack dab in the middle.

Large swatches of green and brown colored fields dotted the rolling countryside as their harvest bathed in the hot midday sun. It seemed to Brian that the occasional farm house or barn was thrown in simply to provide contrast with the fields. The random farm machinery provided yet another more subtle contrast to the forest he was leaving behind. The forest was all nature. The valley tried to be and yet no longer was. His farm back home did not have machinery yet. He was the old fashioned kind of farmer, the one who still resisted change. The large evergreens surrounding his house back home practically melted into the sides of his home. The dwelling was completely hidden from the casual observer unless you knew what to look for.

Yet even without the trees and with all the machines going about their business, the scene in front of him still reminded him of his farm at home deeper in the Selva. A farm house was just a farm house. A field was just a field. It was just the natural course of everything in life for progress to be made, and mechanical things did seem to be progress. They had to leave the city eventually and make it easier for the common man, too.

The high walls surrounding the Ubiran capital made a boundary between the city and the plains like the tree line formed a wall holding back the Selva. This was about the only similarity between the city and the valley, though. Where the plains surrounding the city were peaceful wide open spaces, the capital was full of energy and crowded. The valley was painted in the colors of the earth while the city was colorfully draped in bright purple, blue and yellow pennants bearing a golden conch shell. He had heard that the Ubiran Theocracy had wanted to change their crest to something different, a fish instead of a shell, but that the debate had been raging for more than ten years already with no decision in sight.

The thing that stood out the most, though, the thing which immediately caught your eye when you entered the valley, was the Ubiran Monastery. Towering over everything, it was a monstrous earthen colored stone and magic mountain which overlooked the entire city, the valley, and much of the Selva as well. It was the home of both the Great Sage and the Ubiran Theocracy which governed Uбира.

The Monastery, which dwarfed the city with its size, appeared stark and bland amongst the sea of bright colored buildings in the city and the mantle of greens in the valley. With half of the domed building on the cliff with the city and half hanging over the open water, it appeared to sit precariously on the precipice, ready to topple into the sea below. After hundreds, if not thousands, of years, however, the Monastery had weathered the test of time. It was a true testament to the phenomenal power of the Great Sage and his magic. The saying went that you could see the edge of the world from the top of the Monastery. One day Brian hoped to see if this was true.

He unconsciously shook the reins in his hands urging the cart forward. Betsy, the horse pulling the cart, turned her head to look at Brian then turned back to the road with her pace unabated. She was a pragmatic horse. She knew that the young man was not even paying attention to what she was doing at the moment. So Betsy just kept her methodical pace down the road and towards the city. She had ridden this road so many times she could close her eyes and go to sleep and still arrive at the front gates.

It was true, in fact, that Brian was not paying the slightest bit of attention to the horse. His mind was wandering all over the place. His thoughts had him gliding around the lofty heights of the Monastery, which in turn made him think of the Lifts on the cliff side of the city. Without the Lifts, Uбира would not be the major commercial hub that it

was today. He could not see them from the road as he continued to plod along in his cart because they were too close to the ground and shorter than the city walls to boot, but Brian had always been amazed by the four giant Lifts next to the Monastery. They rose and fell from the docks in the bay below and into the city itself. Powered by the rising and lowering tides, the Lifts were astounding feats of mechanics with a little magic thrown in for good measure. With two up and two down depending on the position of the tide, there was a constant traffic of people and goods from the sea and into the city and vice versa. He loved to just sit there and watch the people and the goods in the crowded Lift Plaza ebb and flow.

As Brian's mind continued its wandering journey he thought about the bay at the bottom of the Lifts. The bay that supplied the people of Ubira with a constant stream of trade was created by the Breakers, a set of huge boulders several miles out to sea. Although they could be tricky to navigate around, they had created a calm and spacious cove by stopping the waves and storm surges from crashing against the piers while still allowing for deep waters right up to the walls of the cliffs. The Great Sage was said to have created the Lifts as well as the Breakers, in a single day. It was said that the people just woke up one day and they were there. But it was probably just talk. No single person could have created them in just a day, even with magic. That was simply impossible.

A small and weak cough from behind him forced Brian out of his scattered thoughts. Turning his head quickly to look in the back of the cart, he saw his infant son sleeping restlessly in a pile of blankets. Reaching back, he put his hand to Nathan's forehead to feel his fever. It was hotter than before. The illness appeared to be getting worse again and Brian hoped that he would make it to the Great Sage in time. Covering his eyes with one hand to block the sunlight, Brian looked up into the sky to see the sun starting to descend from its apex. The road through the plains was in much better condition than it was in the Selva, so Brian shook the reins and urged his horse onward towards the city gates at a quick trot. This time, Betsy felt the difference, felt the urgency in the shake, and obliged by going faster.

Traffic along the road gradually increased the closer he got to the cities' southern gate as the number of tributary roads and increasing abundance of farms fed the traffic. The newer mechanical vehicles moved much faster than his ancient yet trustworthy cart. The machines caused much more traffic along the road than he was used to and they forced Brian to go slower and slower until the cart seemed as though it

was not moving at all. His son coughed again and Brian turned around in his seat to make sure nothing was wrong. Nathan's light brown hair, the same color as his mothers, fell across his face. Brushing it back and tenderly touching his son's bright red cheek in concern, Brian turned his attention back to the road. *Hang on little one*, he thought, *I'm going as fast as I can*. Once again he shook the reins urging Betsy to go faster. This time she pointedly ignored him, of course. There was no way for her to go any faster in the throng of people, machines, and other carts. But it made Brian feel better, made him feel like he was doing something.

Up ahead of him, Brian could clearly see the southern Ubiran gates now. With each gate over thirty feet tall and half as wide, the intricately carved wooden doors were simply massive, even at this distance. The left side was a mirror image of the right and both were inlaid with complex patterns of gold, silver, steel, and other metals Brian could not name. The various designs lent a mystical aura to the city entrance. The gates beckoned to Brian with the knowledge that the Great Sage was inside and could heal his ailing son.

Several Ubiran Guardsmen stood off to either the side of the gates watching the steady flow of people go in and out of the great city. Their burnished steel breastplates gleamed in the blazing afternoon sun. There had not been a war with anyone in recent Ubiran history as far as Brian knew. The last one was at little more than a hundred years ago against Jogrom on the north-western border. That did not mean that the Ubiran Guard was not necessary, though. Thieves, murderers and worse prowled the streets of Ubira at night. He had never heard of the Guard ever harming anyone who was innocent, but who was to say who was innocent and who was not? At night and in the dark, you never knew who was the good guy and who was the bad one.

The Guardsmen here at the gates looked to be in much better physical condition than others he had passed on the way to the capital city. They were definitely better than the four who stood watch at home in Tuskel. Their heavily muscled arms and torsos spoke volumes about the punishment they were capable of inflicting should they set their minds to it. The steel long swords and silver numb-bars hanging at their waists emphasized the point even more.

Brian passed through the gates with the throng of people and into the city. The Guards watched everyone impartially, more concerned that the traffic was fluid and did not stop than with stopping someone from entering the city. With so many people coming and going they had no time

to bother with anything else. "Keep it going," said one of the Guardsmen as Brian urged Betsy and the cart through the gates.

All roads in Ubira eventually wound around to the Monastery, but the main road from both the northern and southern gates went straight there. This meant that all the richest merchants and inns were along the main thoroughfare getting progressively more expensive the closer you got to the Monastery. It also meant that lining the road from the gate to the Central Plaza you could find every street vendor imaginable.

To Brian, it seemed that everyone in the entire world was crowded onto that one street, impeding his progress to save his son. The stone buildings, draped in their colorful pennants and painted in pleasingly bright colors, acted like giant furnaces, soaking up the heat from the scorching sun and sending it pounding down twice as hard on those people filling the street. Sweat started to pour down Brian's face as he guided his horse and cart. The sea breeze being funneled down the street by the tall buildings lining the sides did little, if anything, to aid in the reduction of the sweltering heat.

Succulent smells from the food the street vendors were hawking assaulted Brian as his cart plodded slowly through the masses of people and up the road towards the Monastery. Savory meat pies, some with beef, others with chicken, various types of grilled fish, freshly baked cookies and bread, even a sweets vendor with taffy and some hard candies. His stomach started rumbling with the wonderful smells he was experiencing. He had not eaten a good hot meal since he left home two days ago, but had no time to stop. He had to get to the Monastery.

People waved at him and called for him to stop by. Brian responded as politely as yelling above so many people, not to mention the carts or the other mechanical forms of transportation, would allow, telling them he was not here to sell today, he was here to go to the Monastery. Each of them wished him well and the best of luck before going back about their business. Those who knew him better than others tried to usher people out of the way so he could get through faster, although this had little effect. His good friend Tim Soames, the innkeeper of the Pleasant Haystack, even went so far as to send one of his doormen to clear the way in front of him for a few blocks. To these people, Brian called out his thanks again, making a mental note to give them a good deal when he came back to sell wool in a few months.

At last Brian entered and started to cross the Central Plaza. The mass of people thinned out slightly as he approached the gates to the Monastery. Although these gates were not as large as the main city gates, the

Ubiran Guard appeared much more attentive and watchful. They were responsible for keeping not only the Great Sage, but the Theocracy itself safe inside.

A Guardsman greeted him at the gate by holding his hand up ordering him to stop. "State your name and your business," said the bearded Guardsman in a brusque no-nonsense voice as Brian obediently urged Betsy to stop. He opened his mouth to speak just as Nathan started to cry in the back of the wagon. "Sick child, eh?" questioned the Guardsman.

"Yah," said Brian nodding while at the same time reaching back in the cart to comfort his son again. Nathan's face was now pale and sweaty. Brian brushed the little boy's hair from his eyes again and pulled the blanket which had fallen off to the side up and around his son's small body. Of course Nathan promptly pushed the covering back again with an irritated grunt, but he did calm down and stop crying. This fever and whatever other illness Nathan had just did not make any sense. Brian had to get to the Great Sage.

"Tie the horse and cart over there on the left, next to that blue auto-cart," said the Guardsman as he pointed into an open courtyard inside the walls of the gate. "Then come back to this door over here to enter the Monastery itself." This time he pointed to a large set of doors fifty feet in front of the gate. "Once you get inside, go up the main staircase, and talk to the secretary on the first landing."

Thanking the man, Brian shook the reins and did as he was told. As Brian and the cart crossed the threshold of the gate it was like stepping into another world. Although there were still people walking about in every direction, it was quiet after the cacophony of the city. The thick stone walls surrounding the Monastery kept out the various sounds of the busy city. The people were going about their business just like outside the gates, only now they went at a leisurely stride instead of a hastened one. Green grass was well trimmed and purple flowers were in all the flower beds, their fresh clean scent filling the courtyard. A light breeze blew in from the ocean as it had in the plaza, only now it felt cool and refreshing without the heat of the collected in the buildings bearing down on him.

After stopping near the blue auto-cart as well as several other horses and carts, Brian got out of his seat and tied Betsy to a post. Two stable boys came up to take the mare and Brian gave each one a small coin from the srip which hung over his shoulder. Tossing another slightly larger coin at the older of the two boys he said, "Her name is Betsy. Curry her, give her some oats, and then a carrot for a treat." Brian patted

the side of her neck in appreciation to fine work his friend had done. "She's walked a long ways today." The boy knuckled his forehead, bowed slightly, and murmured something that sounded like an acknowledgement. Standing back up he went running to the stables to fetch a bag of fodder.

Brian patted the side of his old friend's neck one more time and she turned around as if to say "you're welcome." Then he went to the back of the cart and carefully picked up his son and grabbed his small sack of provisions. No sense in leaving any sort of valuable thing lying around in the back of an unprotected cart. He then grabbed one of the blankets which had fallen off Nathan and gently wrapped up the small little boy. Brian held his son close to him, letting him know he was loved and that help was on the way. Finally, finding all in readiness, he made his way back to the gate and walked up the short set of stairs to the main entrance of the Monastery.

The entry way for the Ubiran Monastery was wide and lavishly appointed. Brian had heard about the opulence from others who had visited the city, but this was the first time he had seen it for himself. *What a waste of money*, he thought privately as he looked around at the gold and silver treasures displayed everywhere. But he did not have time to sit and ogle the sights. He had his son to think about.

As Brian walked further into the building and turned to the staircase, he saw that there were also Monks in their dark colored robes gathered around a fountain of clear sparkling water. They segregated themselves into small groups. Each group was talking quietly amongst themselves. Brian could catch snippets of conversation as he passed through the crowd of brown robes. Feeling his son's forehead again he found Nathan's fever was back and hotter than ever. It had not broken like he had thought back at the cart. Ignoring the assorted Monks around the fountain, Brian hurried up the stairs.

At the first landing, just like the Guardsman had said, sat a woman in a dark blue dress. She was slightly plump and her long graying hair was tied in the back with a blue ribbon. A pair of glasses sat dangling off the end of her nose. Attached to the glasses was a beaded chain which wound around her neck like a necklace. As he arrived on the landing Brian could see that the desk was covered in various scrolls, papers, books, and several musical instruments. She was using a quill to write something in a very precise script, but stopped and looked up as Brian approached the desk.

"Um, hi. I'm Brian, ma'am. Brian Sihdlham. I'm here to see the Great Sage," said Brian respectfully. "My son is really sick and I'm here to ask the Great Sage to heal him."

The secretary tilted her head back and scrutinized Brian through the pair of spectacles on her nose. She merely glanced at the boy in his arms. Tipping her head forward so she could see Brian without looking through the lenses of her glasses she asked "Appointment?" in a curt voice. Placing her quill in a pot of ink she began searching for something among the many items on the desk. Finding what she wanted, a small ledger, she flipped it open and started thumbing through it methodically, clearly looking for today's date.

"Uh, no," replied Brian cautiously. "I don't have an appointment. I just got here after traveling through the Selva." Brian paused for a second and then added, "I'm from Tuskel."

The secretary stopped flipping pages and looked up at Brian again with the left side of her mouth turned down in a grimace. "Please," begged the young father, "I've been traveling for two days, and my son needs help. I didn't know I needed an appointment. I'm sorry. Can you find an appointment available to let me in to see the Great Sage right now? Will he heal my son?"

The Great Sage was well known for healing sick and injured people. It was a widely known fact. Brian had heard stories of his great power ever since he was a little boy. The Great Sage could heal things that no other shaper could. He had given his uncle back the use of his arm after it was crushed and destroyed in a lumber accident. For more than a year he had been unable to do anything as the muscles were torn and the bone had knitted together improperly. Yet now there was no way to know that it had ever been damaged. A woman from the next village over had had her sight restored by the Great Sage having previously been blind her whole life. There were just so many things that other shapers could not do. His own mother had been blessed by him the day before Brian was born as the Great Sage passed through Tuskel on his journeys.

Brian could have sworn that the Great Sage winked at him personally as he passed through their village again on his fifteenth birthday. The Ubiran Healers did not go out of their way to help anyone, yet the Great Sage made it his personal mission to help everyone he came in contact with. Surely he would help a small innocent child.

With an amused smirk, the secretary snapped the ledger shut, placed it back on the desk, and started to walk around it. When she arrived in front of Brian the woman placed her hand on the child's forehead. She

then took the small boy's wrist and placed two fingers on it. After a few seconds she released his wrist, took a small lightwand from her pocket, and opened Nathan's mouth. She turned it on and pointed the glowing end into his mouth to look inside. Nathan was fully awake now, having been jostled about by the secretary, and began to cry again. Being woken up by being poked and prodded would make anyone grumpy, especially a sick child. The old woman started humming a soft jovial tune and Nathan suddenly became quiet, he even smiled. Brian recognized the sound of magic in her song, but could not tell what it was intended for. As she continued to hum, she gently started to feel his tummy. Nathan reached up to grab the lightwand and started to giggle.

"Tuskel you say?" asked the secretary. Brian nodded, his eyes filling with tears. His son was happy. He had not smiled in nearly a week. He would be healed. "You have food for the boy, I assume?" Brian answered with another nod, a tear dripping down his nose, around his mouth, and onto to his chin before it dropped onto the floor.

Having finished her examination of his son, the secretary carefully extracted the lightwand from Nathan's grabbing hands before turning it off and returning it to her pocket. Placing her hands on her hips and looking up right into Brian's eyes she said, "The Great Sage cannot see anyone who is ill. We cannot afford to have him become sick as well."

Anguish replacing happiness, Brian stood there dumbfounded. His tears of joy turned into those of despair. "Wh- What? You've got to be kidding me? How can he heal someone who is not in front of him?" demanded Brian.

She shook her head and looked down. "Rules are rules, I'm sorry," she replied in a motherly voice that did nothing to comfort the distraught father. Looking back into Brian's eyes she said, "Leave the infant with me, along with his food, and you may talk to the Great Sage. He will tell you what you need to know, Brian."

Brian did not understand how the Great Sage could help his son if his son was not there with him. Powerful or not, the one thing Brian had learned from his limited study of magic, especially sound shaping that involved healing, is that it required you to be in the presence of the person or thing you were magicking. He did not want to leave his son with a stranger, but he needed to see the Great Sage. He needed him to heal his son.

Handing first the bag and then Nathan in his blanket over to the secretary he said, "Nathan. His name is Nathan." With a lingering hand on his son, Brian let the woman carefully take the small boy from him.

Cradling the infant in her arms, the secretary gave a soft smile to the child. "Continue up these stairs, and take a left at the top," she said quietly, without looking up. "The Great Sage is the third door on the right. Remember to knock before entering." She then turned and started walking back to her chair on the other side of the desk. "Nathan will be safe while you are gone and I'll be here when you are finished," she said and started humming again. Swaying her body from side to side as she walked, she let Nathan reach up and start to play with the beaded necklace attached to her glasses.

## Chapter 2

### The Great Sage

Without a second thought about what he was doing, Brian bounded up the staircase to find the Great Sage. The young father would do anything to save his son. The stairs curved slightly to the left as they matched the curve of the Monastery's outer walls. Every twenty steps, Brian counted them between each floor as he ran up, was a balcony breaking up the stairwell that lead to a rail lined corridor for that floor. It seemed like the stairs went on forever as Brian passed level upon level of balconies and corridors in the massive Stone Mountain.

After a few minutes, however, he finally reached the top where he stopped for a moment to catch his breath. It would not be very polite to appear in front of the Great Sage asking for help while gasping and wheezing for air. It was a full twenty flights of stairs he had just run up. The hard work of farming and raising sheep Brian was used to, but running up twenty flights of stairs, not so much.

Out of curiosity to see how high up he really was Brian looked over the edge for a brief second. This ended up being a really bad decision. The brief sight of nothing between him and the hard ground immediately caused him to start to feel nauseous. It was a long way down to the fountained courtyard below and the only thing that stood between him and a fall into oblivion was a stone railing. At that moment in time, though, Brian felt as if it were made of paper. Shaking his head to clear it he walked to the outside wall, the one as far away from the edge as he could get, and leaned against it for support. Heights were not good to Brian.

To get his mind off the plunge of death, Brian looked up and down the corridor. There were doors and windows on the outside wall in both directions, just like on every floor he had seen coming up. On the inside of the balcony was a stone railing which protected you from plummeting down to the courtyard below. At least it was not a short railing. It was easily as high as the middle of his stomach. If it was any shorter he was

sure the Theocracy would have people accidentally falling over all the time. He shook his head again to clear it of that frightful thought.

This was the first time Brian had been in the Monastery and it looked even bigger on the inside than it did on the outside. And that was saying something, because it looked enormous from the outside. When he was about twelve he had climbed to the top of the oak tree in the center of Tuskel, much to his mom's disgust. From the top of the tree you could make out the Monastery even from way out there. Brian found it odd to think about the oak tree right now, it was that experience, well, climbing down from the tree anyways, that made him aware of his fear of heights. That oak tree was really tall. If Mayor Kerr had not climbed up to get him from the tree, who knows what would have happened.

As he sat there trying to distract his mind from being scared he noted that the walls started to curve inwards the higher up you went. It made sense, he supposed, since it was shaped like a mountain from the outside. But he had never seen a building with angled walls before. And yet even at twenty stories up, with each floor becoming smaller and smaller, it was still a good two or three fields wide from end to end. Looking up (which was way better than looking down) Brian could see another fifteen or sixteen stories going up as well. The place was just enormous, no doubt about that. They even had a sun captured in the middle to give light to everything.

Brian blinked in surprise as he realized what had just crossed his mind. A sun? In the middle of a building? It was only then that he realized that it was a massive chandelier that was hanging from the center of the top, one that must have been lit from a million candles it was so bright. He had no idea how the Monks could light all the candles in that chandelier, let alone replace them as they burned out. It was probably some sort of intricate sound shaping ritual, but Brian thought it looked beautiful nonetheless. With a wistful thought he wished his wife was here to see it as well. She would love to see a wondrous thing like this.

Brian noted that his breathing was finally slowing down, in a few more moments he would be ready to go. In the meantime he pulled his eyes from the artificial sun (it even left that bright burn spot in his eyes when he closed them like the real sun did) Brian cast his gaze up and down the corridor that formed this floor of the Monastery. From where he was standing he saw a patrol of Guardsmen walking around doing their rounds. Even as far away as they were he could hear the clank, clank, clank of their greaves pounding on the floor as they walked. Towards the left and at the far end of the balcony was a massive door in

a small alcove guarded by another pair of Guardsmen. At least the Monks here were protected. The two pairs of Guardsmen just on this floor equaled the total number of Guardsmen assigned to the entire village of Tuskel.

There were only a few other people wandering the middle corridors of the Monastery at this late hour of the day besides Brian and the four Guardsmen. Standing motionless, still breathing heavily, and with an exhausted look on his face, the young man caught the eye of a few brown robed Monks as they walked by. They looked at him panting at the top of the staircase and, with frowns on their faces, slowly shook their heads and went back to their hushed conversation. As the pair continued on their stately walk to where ever they were headed Brian noted that they were heading towards a smaller staircase going to the floor above them. Looking around again, he could see these smaller staircases between the all different floors. It appeared that the grand staircase he had just run up was not the only way to get around from floor to floor in here.

Having finally caught his breath, Brian turned left down the walkway and counted out three doors. The third door was unassuming. In fact it was the simplest door he saw in the hall. Remembering the secretary's admonishment to knock, Brian rapped the knocker on the door.

There was no response.

Brian rapped again, and again there was no response.

As he reached up to use the knocker a third time he heard a voice from inside saying, "Did she tell you to wait for a response before entering?" His hand froze on the knocker. Feeling frustrated with himself for not listening to the directions and therefore wasting time, he let his hand fall to the door handle, twisted it, and pushed open the door.

Brian had never thought about what the Great Sage looked like or what it would be like the first time he met him. That would be like pondering what it would be like to meet God. What would He look like anyways? He was tall, white hair, bearded, and with a white robe probably. In reality, though, it just was not something you really considered as you pass through life because it really does not matter. Had he ever thought about meeting the Great Sage, though, the sight before him would not have been it.

The room appeared completely empty with the exception of a tan colored sofa at the far end of the room. A soft feathery piece of string orchestral music filled the air and seemed to be emanating from the general area around the sofa, although Brian could not see any musicians. *This was the Great Sage after all*, thought Brian. *Maybe he just emanated music.*

On the sofa lounged a large elderly gentleman with his head leaning on one armrest like a pillow with his sock-less feet crossed and propped up on the other one. The man was not fat exactly, but at the same time he was not exactly the skinniest person in the world either. He appeared to be relatively tall with broad shoulders. At least he looked tall as he lay there sprawled on the sofa. As the portly old man turned his body ever so briefly to glance at the doorway in which Brian stood, one of his feet fell off the armrest and onto the ground. With no indication that he even saw the man in the doorway he returned his attention to reading a leather bound book propped up on his stomach in front of him.

The man was wearing a pair of short green pants that came down to slightly below his knees and a loose fitting blue silk shirt that buttoned down the front. Although there were no shoes on his feet, a pair of sandals lay in front of the sofa and off to the side a little. A short, well trimmed mop of white hair rested above a clean shaven face. The man's large hands turned a page in the book he was intently reading. Its cover had five symbols on it, four forming a diamond with one in the middle.

At this distance he could not make the symbols out, but the book tugged at Brian and made him want to read it. It reminded him of the pattern he had been taught for the four elements, although the designs on each of the points of the compass were obviously different and there was a weird thing in the middle instead of the directional symbol. In fact, there were books piled all around the sofa. Had they been there a second beforehand?

Without looking up from the strange book the man on the sofa said, "Come in, Brian. Come in," in a grandfatherly kind of voice. Bending down the corner of the page that was open, he closed the leather bound book and laid it face side down on the sofa beside him. With the book cover out of sight Brian blinked a few times and shook his head slightly. The room was empty again, though he had been sure that there had been books lying around not a moment before. Weird. Maybe Brian was coming down with an illness as well. That would be just his luck.

The old man then took his other foot off the armrest and put it on the floor, but did not say another word. He just sat there watching Brian, and the young man stood in the doorway not knowing what to do. The Great Sage picked his glasses out of the pocket on his shirt and smiled pleasantly as he placed them on his nose. "Well, are you just going to stand there?" he asked chuckling.

Shaking his head from out of a fog, Brian stayed in the doorway. "How... how did you know my name?" he asked, belatedly adding the respectful "sir" in response to his question.

"I make it my business to know who is coming to visit the Monastery, Brian, even when it's some fluffy-duffy dignitary. You, though... " he said and started to chuckle again. "You I've been expecting for quite some time."

"Me?" said Brian while putting one hand on his chest in astonishment. "I'm not a dignitary, sir. I'm just a simple sheep farmer who lives a quiet life. I'm here because my son is sick. I came to ask you to heal him." Brian stood still and did not leave his position in the doorway.

The ambient music changed slightly, Brian was sure of it, as the smiling old man beckoned to a high backed chair that was not there moments before. "You sell yourself short, my boy," said the Great Sage softly so Brian could not hear him. With a louder voice he added, "Have a seat, son, so we can talk."

"I'm sorry for being rude, sir, but my son... I don't think I have much time left to help him. He is really sick and it scares me that I can't do anything to make him better. You are my last hope. Your secretary would not let me bring him to see you directly, though. He's down with her at her desk," explained Brian as he slowly walked into the room and over to the chair. He placed his hands on its back but did not sit down. The glow of unfamiliar magic hung in the air, flowing through the music. "Please, can you help me?" pleaded Brian.

The Great Sage sat there for a moment before speaking again. "Nathan, if I'm not mistaken," said the old man while peering intently into Brian's face. "He's a good natured little boy, isn't he?"

"Yes, sir," replied Brian, puzzled by the random questions he was being asked. *He knows Nathan's name too?* "Jenn, my wife, always tells me he's the most well behaved little boy in the whole village."

"Tuskel, right? Small farming community about two days into the Selva down towards the south-west?" asked the Great Sage.

"Yes, sir," replied Brian again, still confused at the line of questions being asked. The music became even softer, but more acute at the same time, changing from feathery, calming string music to a delicate breeze that you would hear through the trees on a warm spring morning. And although the music could be heard, it was so faint that an almost silence hung in the air as the old man examined the younger one before him. Brian could not tell how he knew, but he was definitely under some sort

of examination. The moment stretched on as the Great Sage sat there, looking.

Finally, with the nagging worry for the life of his young son hanging over his head, Brian broke the near silence by asking quietly, almost under his breath, and with all the pleading of a desperate parent without anywhere else to turn, "Sir, will you heal my son, please?"

The old man continued to study Brian's blue eyes and his red hair for a few moments longer before the feathery music returned and the Great Sage lowered his head and replied, "I'm sorry, Brian. I cannot."

"No," said Brian in a whisper. Aghast and shocked he continued to mumble a quiet, "No, no, no, no" while shaking his head and looking down at the ground in defeat. In a slightly louder but still hushed voice he added, "What am I to do now? The Healer in the village couldn't do anything for him so she sent me here. If I do nothing she said he would die!"

Looking up he addressed the Great Sage again. "I can't lose my only son. Is there anything you know of that will help me?" Brian pleaded with tears rolling down the side of his cheeks. "Please..." he begged again, his hands gripping the back of the chair so hard his knuckles started to turn white.

Weaving his fingers together under his chin and leaning forward, the Great Sage once again looked intently at the tall red-haired man in front of him. The music faded away and through the open window Brian could hear the sound of the ocean crashing against the cliffs below. "Find the Tablets of Wefas and follow their instructions," said the aging man in a very serious voice.

Startled and a little taken aback by the abrupt change in tone, Brian asked, "Come again? The Tablet, it will tell me what I need to do to help my son?"

"The Tablets of Wefas are interesting things, my boy. When you read one, it will tell you what you need to do," replied the Sage, all the while nodding his head in response to the question.

"Where can I find this Tablet, sir?" Brian asked anxiously, leaning forward even more on the high backed chair.

Smiling once again, the Great Sage unfolded his hands and leaned back on the sofa. "Some can be found right here in the Ubiran Library. In fact, there's a door to enter it right here in the Monastery. Just go out this door, look right, and you can see it at the end of the corridor."

*The alcove with the Guardsmen*, thought Brian to himself remembering what he had seen while looking around. "Thank you, Great One," said a

relieved Brian as he reached up to wipe the tears from his face again. "Thank you," he said again while bowing. He then turned and ran out the door to continue his quest to help his ailing son.

\* \* \* \* \*

As Brian bounded from the study and down the corridor towards the Library, the Great Sage, one of the most powerful sound shapers alive today, silently congratulated himself. Without revealing anything he had set things in motion, a little early, true, but it was necessary. And it had been Brian's choice. Albeit the choice had been a tad coerced, but it had been his. He had not used any shaping to influence the decision. If everything went well, the world would be safe. *And if it does not go well?* the shaper thought to himself. *Well, it will just have to go well, now, won't it?*

Touching the small sound tablet on his belt he changed it to release a soft whimsical tune. It was one of his favorites, a recording of his wife and her sister playing a song that had not been heard in a public setting for many years. A forgotten memory of a forgotten time. Funny how, as you got older, things could stay the same and yet change at the same time.

As the music shifted from one piece to another, the Great Sage let the Illusion of the empty room go and it fell to the ground like a waterfall. His cluttered study re-appeared as the rest of the spell evaporated. The huge collection of books, scrolls, and an instrument or three lay pretty much everywhere in the room. There had been a point while Brian was in the room that the Great Sage was sure the young man had almost seen through the Illusion. That boded well for the youth's future skills. It was very impressive that he had even come close to seeing through the master shapers aura.

Now that the spell had faded away it was obvious that the only clear path in the room was from the door to the chair and from the chair to the sofa. He sometimes wished that Illusion could actually clean the clutter, instead of just hiding it, but if the clutter was gone he was pretty sure he would never be able to find anything either. Such was the nature of being as old as he was.

Arranging his thoughts in an exercise honed over eons, the Great Sage shaped the new music into a window floating in the air in front of him. Through the window he could see his wife, Anne, sitting in a rocking chair at the far end of a small room, slowly rocking Nathan to sleep. She had always looked stunning in that blue dress, how long ago had he bought her that? Anne was so absorbed in watching the little boy she did

not seem notice the open communication window on the other side of the room.

Smiling again at his wife, he coughed softly. "I hear you old man," she chided. "How could I not hear your song when it entered mine?"

"I figured you did, but didn't want to disturb your reverie with our great grandchild," replied the wizened shaper.

Glancing at the communication window and smiling, Anne said, "There should have been a couple more 'greats' added to that title, Charlie. We're not spring chickens any more. It's been a long time since we've been able to really get to know anyone in our family."

"No, I suppose we haven't, have we?" replied her husband with a chuckle. "Soon, though, we'll be able to at least acknowledge them once again, even if it is only in private. Too much is at stake if you know who finds out who the rest of our family really is." Charlie looked down at his feet. "We've been isolated for a long time. I wonder sometimes if we made the right choices, but it all seems to have worked out in the end, just like we had faith that it would. And now, everything has been set in motion."

Looking directly at her husband, Anne asked, "Are you sure all of this is necessary? All the secrecy. All the hiding. It seems like we've just put our lives on hold for no reason what-so-ever."

"It is what we were told to do," said Charlie while shrugging his shoulders. "I have to accept it on faith that He knows what to do. I mean, after all, so far everything has happened exactly the way we were told.

"Besides, how can I expect Brian to learn faith if I don't exercise my own?" asked Charlie.

"I know. It's just that poor Nathan was in pretty bad shape when I first saw him. His fever was really high."

The old shaper grimaced, "You know that the original 'sickness' was simply an Illusion. It had to be something that was undetectable from a real illness. Something that only I could 'heal,' not the flumpety Ubiran Healers. And we both know that Brian had to come here of his own volition, we can't take away free will. So I cheated a little bit to move things along the way, it's not like our enemies don't do the same most of the time."

Charlie shook his head. "Brian was more stubborn than I had anticipated, though. Kind of like me, now that I think of it. His waiting, his hope that his son would get better on his own, caused Nathan to actually become sick. He also nearly waited too long. The Illusion had already evaporated with all the heat we've been having. In another day or so

Nathan would have gotten better on his own. Brian would have simply gone home without ever knowing his calling."

Concentrating on his small grandson through the communication window, Charlie asked, "When you sung the cleansing wave, it healed the real sickness, correct?"

"Obviously, or I would be in your office instead of rocking my grandchild to sleep," responded Anne. "Nathan is perfectly fine now. I'll summon his mother to the Monastery later tonight. I just wish there was another way." Anne fell silent for a moment, slowing rocking the sleeping child. "Are you sure it's Brian?" she said looking up. "Not that I mind finally having a grandchild to spoil and to hold, mind you, but he's so young still. Just a boy, really."

"A boy who is old enough to have a child of his own, dear." With one more look at his great great great great, well, who knows how many greats there were supposed to be when you were as old as he was. With a look at his great grandson in the arms of his wife, Charlie, the Great Sage, let his communication window close and leaned back in the soft cushions of the sofa. He knew that he wouldn't be able to enjoy them for much longer before he would have to leave. Picking up the book from his side, he opened it to where he had folded down the corner of the page.

"Old enough to have a child of his own," he murmured. Thumbing his sound tablet to a soothing orchestral piece, coincidentally also by his wife, he began reading where he had left off.

# Chapter 3

## **Purchase Information**

The entire book for The Tablet of Water can be purchase from Lulu.com as either an e-book or a hardcover.

Visit <http://www.lulu.com/content/6608891> for purchasing information.



**[www.feedbooks.com](http://www.feedbooks.com)**  
Food for the mind