



LEGENDS  
VOLUME ONE

# TIME OF THE TWINS

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## The Meeting

A lone figure trod softly toward the distant light. Walking unheard, his footfalls were sucked into the vast darkness all around him. Bertrem indulged in a rare flight of fancy as he glanced at the seemingly endless rows of books and scrolls that were part of the *Chronicles of Astinus* and detailed the history of this world, the history of Krynn.

"It's like being sucked into time," he thought, sighing as he glanced at the still, silent rows. He wished, briefly, that he were being sucked away somewhere, so that he did not have to face the difficult task ahead of him.

"All the knowledge of the world is in these books," he said to himself wistfully. "And I've never found one thing to help make the intrusion upon their author any easier."

Bertrem came to a halt outside the door to summon his courage. His flowing Aesthetic's robes settled themselves about him, falling into correct and orderly folds. His stomach, however, refused to follow the robes' example and lurched about wildly. Bertrem ran his hand across his scalp, a nervous gesture left over from a younger age, before his chosen profession had cost him his hair.

What was bothering him? he wondered bleakly—other than going in to see the Master, of course, something he had not done since . . . since . . . He shuddered. Yes, since the young mage had nearly died upon their doorstep during the last war.

War . . . change, that was what it was. Like his robes, the world had finally seemed to settle around him, but he felt change coming once again, just as he had felt it two years ago. He wished he could stop it. . . .

Bertrem sighed. "I'm certainly not going to stop anything by standing out here in the darkness," he muttered. He felt uncomfortable anyway, as though surrounded by ghosts. A bright light shone from under the door, beaming out into the hallway. Giving a quick glance backward at the shadows of the books, peaceful corpses resting in their tombs, the Aesthetic quietly opened the door and entered the study of Astinus of Palanthas.

Though the man was within, he did not speak, nor even look up.

Walking with gentle, measured tread across the rich rug of lamb's wool that lay upon the marble floor, Bertrem paused before the great, polished wooden desk. For long moments he said nothing, absorbed

## DRAGONLANCE LEGENDS

in watching the hand of the historian guide the quill across the parchment in firm, even strokes.

"Well, Bertrem?" Astinus did not cease his writing.

Bertrem, facing Astinus, read the letters that—even upside down—were crisp and clear and easily decipherable.

*This day, as above Darkwatch rising 29, Bertrem entered my study.*

"Crysanía of the House of Tarinius is here to see you, Master. She says she is expected. . . ." Bertrem's voice trailed off in a whisper, it having taken a great deal of the Aesthetic's courage to get that far.

Astinus continued writing.

"Master," Bertrem began faintly, shivering with his daring. "I—we are at a loss. She is, after all, a Revered Daughter of Paladine and I—we found it impossible to refuse her admittance. What sh—"

"Take her to my private chambers," Astinus said without ceasing to write or looking up.

Bertrem's tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, rendering him momentarily speechless. The letters flowed from the quill pen to the white parchment.

*This day, as above Afterwatch rising 28, Crysanía of Tarinius arrived for her appointment with Raistlin Majere.*

"Raistlin Majere!" Bertrem gasped, shock and horror prying his tongue loose. "Are we to admit hi—"

Astinus looked up now, annoyance and irritation creasing his brow. As his pen ceased its eternal scratching on the parchment, a deep unnatural silence settled upon the room. Bertrem paled. The historian's face might have been reckoned handsome in a timeless, ageless fashion. But none who saw his face ever remembered it. They simply remembered the eyes—dark, intent, aware, constantly moving, seeing everything. Those eyes could also communicate vast worlds of impatience, reminding Bertrem that time was passing. Even as the two spoke, whole minutes of history were ticking by, unrecorded.

"Forgive me, Master!" Bertrem bowed in profound reverence, then backed precipitately out of the study, closing the door quietly on his way. Once outside, he mopped his shaved head that was glistening with perspiration, then hurried down the silent, marble corridors of the Great Library of Palanthas.

Astinus paused in the doorway to his private residence, his gaze on the woman who sat within.

Located in the western wing of the Great Library, the residence of the historian was small and, like all other rooms in the library,

was filled with books of every type and binding, lining the shelves on the walls and giving the central living area a faint musty odor, like a mausoleum that had been sealed for centuries. The furniture was sparse, pristine. The chairs, wooden and handsomely carved, were hard and uncomfortable to sit upon. A low table, standing by a window, was absolutely free of any ornament or object, reflecting the light from the setting sun upon its smooth black surface. Everything in the room was in the most perfect order. Even the wood for the evening fire—the late spring nights were cool, even this far north—was stacked in such orderly rows it resembled a funeral pyre.

And yet, cool and pristine and pure as was this private chamber of the historian, the room itself seemed only to mirror the cold, pristine, pure beauty of the woman who sat, her hands folded in her lap, waiting.

Crysanina of Tarinius waited patiently. She did not fidget or sigh or glance often at the water-run timing device in the corner. She did not read—though Astinus was certain Bertrem would have her offered a book. She did not pace the room or examine the few rare ornaments that stood in shadowed nooks within the bookcases. She sat in the straight, uncomfortable, wooden chair, her clear, bright eyes fixed upon the red-stained fringes of the clouds above the mountains as if she were watching the sun set for possibly the first—or last—time upon Krynn.

So intent was she upon the sight beyond the window that Astinus entered without attracting her attention. He regarded her with intense interest. This was not unusual for the historian, who scrutinized all beings living upon Krynn with the same fathomless, penetrating gaze. What was unusual was that, for a moment, a look of pity and of profound sorrow passed across the historian's face.

Astinus recorded history. He had recorded it since the beginning of time, watching it pass before his eyes and setting it down in his books. He could not foretell the future, that was the province of the gods. But he could sense all the signs of change, those same signs that had so disturbed Bertrem. Standing there, he could hear the drops of water falling in the timing device. By placing his hand beneath them, he could cease the flow of the drops, but time would go on.

Sighing, Astinus turned his attention to the woman, whom he had heard of but never met.

Her hair was black, blue-black, black as the water of a calm sea at night. She wore it combed straight back from a central part,

## DRAGONLANCE LEGENDS

fastened at the back of her head with a plain, unadorned, wooden comb. The severe style was not becoming to her pale, delicate features, emphasizing their pallor. There was no color at all in her face. Her eyes were gray and seemingly much too large. Even her lips were bloodless.

Some years ago, when she had been young, servants had braided and coiled that thick, black hair into the latest, fashionable styles, tucking in pins of silver and of gold, decorating the somber hues with sparkling jewels. They had tinted her cheeks with the juice of crushed berries and dressed her in sumptuous gowns of palest pinks and powdery blues. Once she had been beautiful. Once her suitors had waited in lines.

The gown she wore now was white, as befitted a cleric of Paladine, and plain though made of fine material. It was unadorned save for the belt of gold that encircled her slim waist. Her only ornament was Paladine's—the medallion of the Platinum Dragon. Her hair was covered by a loose white hood that enhanced the marble smoothness and coldness of her complexion.

She might have been made of marble, Astinus thought, with one difference—marble could be warmed by the sun.

"Greetings, Revered Daughter of Paladine," Astinus said, entering and shutting the door behind him.

"Greetings, Astinus," Crysania of Tarinius said, rising to her feet.

As she walked across the small room toward him, Astinus was somewhat startled to note the swiftness and almost masculine length of her stride. It seemed oddly incongruous with her delicate features. Her handshake, too, was firm and strong, not typical of Palanthian women, who rarely shook hands and then did so only by extending their fingertips.

"I must thank you for giving up your valuable time to act as a neutral party in this meeting," Crysania said coolly. "I know how you dislike taking time from your studies."

"As long as it is not wasted time, I do not mind," Astinus replied, holding her hand and regarding her intently. "I must admit, however, that I resent this."

"Why?" Crysania searched the man's ageless face in true perplexity. Then—in sudden understanding—she smiled, a cold smile that brought no more life to her face than the moonlight upon snow. "You don't believe he will come, do you?"

Astinus snorted, dropping the woman's hand as though he had completely lost interest in her very existence. Turning away, he walked to the window and looked out over the city of Palanthas, whose gleaming white buildings glowed in the sun's radiance with a breathtaking

beauty, with one exception. One building remained untouched by the sun, even in brightest noontime.

And it was upon this building that Astinus's gaze fixed. Thrusting itself up in the center of the brilliant, beautiful city, its black stone towers twisted and writhed, its minarets—newly repaired and constructed by the powers of magic—glistened blood-red in the sunset, giving the appearance of rotting, skeletal fingers clawing their way up from some unhallowed burial ground.

"Two years ago, he entered the Tower of High Sorcery," Astinus said in his calm, passionless voice as Crysania joined him at the window. "He entered in the dead of night in darkness, the only moon in the sky was the moon that sheds no light. He walked through the Shoikan Grove—a stand of accursed oak trees that no mortal—not even those of the kender race—dare approach. He made his way to the gates upon which hung still the body of the evil mage who, with his dying breath, cast the curse upon the Tower and leapt from the upper windows, impaling himself upon its gates—a fearsome watchman. But when *he* came there, the watchman bowed before him, the gates opened at his touch, then they shut behind him. And they have not opened again these past two years. He has not left and, if any have been admitted, none have seen them. And you expect *him . . . here?*"

"The master of past and of present," Crysania shrugged. "He came, as was foretold."

Astinus regarded her with some astonishment.

"You know his story?"

"Of course," the cleric replied calmly, glancing up at him for an instant, then turning her clear eyes back to look at the Tower, already shrouding itself with the coming night's shadows. "A good general always studies the enemy before engaging in battle. I know Raistlin Majere very well, very well indeed. And I know—he will come this night."

Crysania continued gazing at the dreadful Tower, her chin lifted, her bloodless lips set in a straight, even line, her hands clasped behind her back.

Astinus's face suddenly became grave and thoughtful, his eyes troubled, though his voice was cool as ever. "You seem very sure of yourself, Revered Daughter. How do you know this?"

"Paladine has spoken to me," Crysania replied, never taking her eyes from the Tower. "In a dream, the Platinum Dragon appeared before me and told me that evil—once banished from the world—had returned in the person of this black-robed wizard, Raistlin Majere. We face dire peril, and it has been given to me to prevent it." As

## DRAGONLANCE LEGENDS

Crysanía spoke, her marble face grew smooth, her gray eyes were clear and bright. "It will be the test of my faith I have prayed for!" She glanced at Astinus. "You see, I have known since childhood that my destiny was to perform some great deed, some great service to the world and its people. This is my chance."

Astinus's face grew graver as he listened, and even more stern.

"Paladine told you this?" he demanded abruptly.

Crysanía, sensing, perhaps, this man's disbelief, pursed her lips. A tiny line appearing between her brows was, however, the only sign of her anger, that and an even more studied calmness in her reply.

"I regret having spoken of it, Astinus, forgive me. It was between my god and myself, and such sacred things should not be discussed. I brought it up simply to prove to you that this evil man will come. He cannot help himself. Paladine will bring him."

Astinus's eyebrows rose so that they very nearly disappeared into his graying hair.

"This 'evil man' as you call him, Revered Daughter, serves a goddess as powerful as Paladine—Takhisis, Queen of Darkness! Or perhaps I should not say *sewves*," Astinus remarked with a wry smile. "Not of him. . . ."

Crysanía's brow cleared, her cool smile returned. "Good redeems its own," she answered gently. "Evil turns in upon itself. Good will triumph again, as it did in the War of the Lance against Takhisis and her evil dragons. With Paladine's help, I shall triumph over this evil as the hero, Tanis Half-Elven, triumphed over the Queen of Darkness herself."

"Tanis Half-Elven triumphed with the help of Raistlin Majere," Astinus said imperturbably. "Or is that a part of the legend you choose to ignore?"

Not a ripple of emotion marred the still, placid surface of Crysanía's expression. Her smile remained fixed. Her gaze was on the street.

"Look, Astinus," she said softly. "He comes."

The sun sank behind the distant mountains, the sky, lit by the afterglow, was a gemlike purple. Servants entered quietly, lighting the fire in the small chamber of Astinus. Even it burned quietly, as if the flames themselves had been taught by the historian to maintain the peaceful repose of the Great Library. Crysanía sat once more in the uncomfortable chair, her hands folded once more in her lap. Her outward mein was calm and cool as always. Inwardly, her heart beat with excitement that was visible only by a brightening of her gray eyes.

Born to the noble and wealthy Tarinius family of Palanthat, a family almost as ancient as the city itself, Crysania had received every comfort and benefit money and rank could bestow. Intelligent, strong-willed, she might easily have grown into a stubborn and willful woman. Her wise and loving parents, however, had carefully nurtured and pruned their daughter's strong spirit so that it had blossomed into a deep and steadfast belief in herself. Crysania had done only one thing in her entire life to grieve her dotting parents, but that one thing had cut them deeply. She had turned from an ideal marriage with a fine and noble young man to a life devoted to serving long-forgotten gods.

She first heard the cleric, Elistan, when he came to Palanthat at the end of the War of the Lance. His new religion—or perhaps it should have been called the *old* religion—was spreading like wildfire through Krynn, because new-born legend credited this belief in old gods with having helped defeat the evil dragons and their masters, the Dragon Highlords.

On first going to hear Elistan talk, Crysania had been skeptical. The young woman—she was in her mid-twenties—had been raised on stories of how the gods had inflicted the Cataclysm upon Krynn, hurling down the fiery mountain that rent the lands asunder and plunged the holy city of Istar into the Blood Sea. After this, so people related, the gods turned from men, refusing to have any more to do with them. Crysania was prepared to listen politely to Elistan, but had arguments at hand to refute his claims.

She was favorably impressed on meeting him. Elistan, at that time, was in the fullness of his power. Handsome, strong, even in his middle years, he seemed like one of the clerics of old, who had ridden to battle—so some legends said—with the mighty knight, Huma. Crysania began the evening finding cause to admire him. She ended on her knees at his feet, weeping in humility and joy, her soul at last having found the anchor it had been missing.

The gods had not turned from men, was the message. It was men who had turned from the gods, demanding in their pride what Huma had sought in humility. The next day, Crysania left her home, her wealth, her servants, her parents, and her betrothed to move into the small, chill house that was the forerunner of the new Temple Elistan planned to build in Palanthat.

Now, two years later, Crysania was a Revered Daughter of Paladine, one of a select few who had been found worthy to lead the church through its youthful growing pangs. It was well the church had this strong, young blood. Elistan had given unstintingly of his life and his energy. Now, it seemed, the god he served so faithfully would

## DRAGONLANCE LEGENDS

soon be summoning his cleric to his side. And when that sorrowful event occurred, many believed Crysania would carry on his work.

Certainly Crysania knew that she was prepared to accept the leadership of the church, but was it enough? As she had told Astinus, the young cleric had long felt her destiny was to perform some great service for the world. Guiding the church through its daily routines, now that the war was over, seemed dull and mundane. Daily she had prayed to Paladine to assign her some hard task. She would sacrifice anything, she vowed, even life itself, in the service of her beloved god.

And then had come her answer.

Now, she waited, in an eagerness she could barely restrain. She was not frightened, not even of meeting this man, said to be the most powerful force for evil now living on the face of Krynn. Had her breeding permitted it, her lip would have curled in a disdainful sneer. What evil could withstand the mighty sword of her faith? What evil could penetrate her shining armor?

Like a knight riding to a joust, wreathed with the garlands of his love, knowing that he cannot possibly lose with such tokens fluttering in the wind, Crysania kept her eyes fixed on the door, eagerly awaiting the tourney's first blows. When the door opened, her hands—until now calmly folded—clasped together in excitement.

Bertrem entered. His eyes went to Astinus, who sat immovable as a pillar of stone in a hard, uncomfortable chair near the fire.

"The mage, Raistlin Majere," Bertrem said. His voice cracked on the last syllable. Perhaps he was thinking about the last time he had announced this visitor—the time Raistlin had been dying, vomiting blood on the steps of the Great Library. Astinus frowned at Bertrem's lack of self-control, and the Aesthetic disappeared back through the door as rapidly as his fluttering robes permitted.

Unconsciously, Crysania held her breath. At first she saw nothing, only a shadow of darkness in the doorway, as if night itself had taken form and shape within the entrance. The darkness paused there.

"Come in, old friend," Astinus said in his deep, passionless voice.

The shadow was lit by a shimmer of warmth—the firelight gleamed on velvety soft, black robes—and then by tiny sparkles, as the light glinted off silver threads, embroidered runes around a velvet cowl. The shadow became a figure, black robes completely draping the body. For a brief moment, the figure's only human appendage that could be seen was a thin, almost skeletal hand clutching a wooden staff. The staff itself was topped by a crystal ball, held fast in the grip of a carved golden dragon's claw.

As the figure entered the room, Crysania felt the cold chill of disappointment. She had asked Paladine for some difficult task! What great evil was there to fight in this? Now that she could see him clearly, she saw a frail, thin man, shoulders slightly stooped, who leaned upon his staff as he walked, as if too weak to move without its aid. She knew his age, he would be about twenty-eight now. Yet he moved like a human of ninety—his steps slow and deliberate, even faltering.

What test of my faith lies in conquering this wretched creature? Crysania demanded of Paladine bitterly. I have no need to fight him. He is being devoured from within by his own evil!

Facing Astinus, keeping his back to Crysania, Raistlin folded back his black hood.

"Greetings again, Deathless One," he said to Astinus in a soft voice.

"Greetings, Raistlin Majere," Astinus said without rising. His voice had a faint sardonic note, as if sharing some private joke with the mage. Astinus gestured. "May I present Crysania of the House of Tarinius."

Raistlin turned.

Crysania gasped, a terrible ache in her chest caused her throat to close, and for a moment she could not draw a breath. Sharp, tingling pins jabbed her fingertips, a chill convulsed her body. Unconsciously, she shrank back in her chair, her hands clenching, her nails digging into her numb flesh.

All she could see before her were two golden eyes shining from the depths of darkness. The eyes were like a gilt mirror, flat, reflective, revealing nothing of the soul within. The pupils—Crysania stared at the dark pupils in rapt horror. The pupils within the golden eyes were the shape of hourglasses! And the face—Drawn with suffering, marked with the pain of the tortured existence the young man had led for seven years, ever since the cruel Tests in the Tower of High Sorcery left his body shattered and his skin tinged gold, the mage's face was a metallic mask, impenetrable, unfeeling as the golden dragon's claw upon his staff.

"Revered Daughter of Paladine," he said in a soft voice, a voice filled with respect and—even reverence.

Crysania started, staring at him in astonishment. Certainly that was not what she had expected.

Still, she could not move. His gaze held her, and she wondered in panic if he had cast a spell upon her. Seeming to sense her fear, he walked across the room to stand before her in an attitude that was both patronizing and reassuring. Looking up, she could see the fire-light flickering in his golden eyes.

## DRAGONLANCE LEGENDS

"Revered Daughter of Paladine," Raistlin said again, his soft voice enfolding Crysania like the velvety blackness of his robes. "I hope I find you well?" But now she heard bitter, cynical sarcasm in that voice. This she had expected, this she was prepared for. His earlier tone of respect had taken her by surprise, she admitted to herself angrily, but her first weakness was past. Rising to her feet, bringing her eyes level with his, she unconsciously clasped the medallion of Paladine with her hand. The touch of the cool metal gave her courage.

"I do not believe we need to exchange meaningless social amenities," Crysania stated crisply, her face once more smooth and cold. "We are keeping Astinus from his studies. He will appreciate our completing our business with alacrity."

"I could not agree more," the black-robed mage said with a slight twist of his thin lip that might have been a smile. "I have come in response to your request. What is it you want of me?"

Crysania sensed he was laughing at her. Accustomed only to the highest respect, this increased her anger. She regarded him with cold gray eyes. "I have come to warn you, Raistlin Majere, that your evil designs are known to Paladine. Beware, or he will destroy you—"

"How?" Raistlin asked suddenly, and his strange eyes flared with a strange, intense light. "How will he destroy me?" he repeated. "Lightning bolts? Flood and fire? Perhaps another fiery mountain?"

He took another step toward her. Crysania moved coolly away from him, only to back into her chair. Gripping the hard wooden back firmly, she walked around it, then turned to face him.

"It is your own doom you mock," she replied quietly.

Raistlin's lip twisted further still, but he continued talking, as if he had not heard her words. "Elistan?" Raistlin's voice sank to a hissing whisper. "He will send Elistan to destroy me?" The mage shrugged. "But no, surely not. By all reports, the great and holy cleric of Paladine is tired, feeble, dying. . . ."

"No!" Crysania cried, then bit her lip, angry that this man had goaded her into showing her feelings. She paused, drawing a deep breath. "Paladine's ways are not to be questioned or mocked," she said with icelike calm, but she could not help her voice from softening almost imperceptibly. "And Elistan's health is no concern of yours."

"Perhaps I take a greater interest in his health than you realize," Raistlin replied with what was, to Crysania, a sneering smile.

Crysania felt blood pound in her temples. Even as he had spoken, the mage moved around the chair, coming nearer the young woman.

He was so close to her now that Crysania could feel a strange, unnatural heat radiate from his body through his black robes. She could smell a faintly cloying but pleasant scent about him. A spiciness—his spell components, she realized suddenly. The thought sickened and disgusted her. Holding the medallion of Paladine in her hand, feeling its smoothly chiseled edges bite into her flesh, she moved away from him again.

“Paladine came to me in a dream—” she said haughtily.

Raistlin laughed.

Few there were who had ever heard the mage laugh, and those who had heard it remembered it always, resounding through their darkest dreams. It was thin, high-pitched, and sharp as a blade. It denied all goodness, mocked everything right and true, and it pierced Crysania’s soul.

“Very well,” Crysania said, staring at him with a disdain that hardened her bright, gray eyes to steel blue, “I have done my best to divert you from this course. I have given you fair warning. Your destruction is now in the hands of the gods.”

Suddenly, perhaps realizing the fearlessness with which she confronted him, Raistlin’s laughter ceased. Regarding her intently, his golden eyes narrowed. Then he smiled, a secret inner smile of such strange joy that Astinus, watching the exchange between the two, rose to his feet. The historian’s body blocked the light of the fire. His shadow fell across them both. Raistlin started, almost in alarm. Half-turning, he regarded Astinus with a burning, menacing stare.

“Beware, old friend,” the mage warned, “or would you meddle with history?”

“I do not meddle,” Astinus replied, “as you well know. I am an observer, a recorder. In all things, I am neutral. I know your schemes, your plans as I know the schemes and plans of all who draw breath this day. Therefore, hear me, Raistlin Majere, and heed this warning. This one is beloved of the gods—as her name implies.”

“Beloved of the gods? So are we all, are we not, Revered Daughter?” Raistlin asked, turning to face Crysania once more. His voice was soft as the velvet of his robes. “Is that not written in the Disks of Mishakal? Is that not what the godly Elistan teaches?”

“Yes,” Crysania said slowly, regarding him with suspicion, expecting more mockery. But his metallic face was serious, he had the appearance, suddenly, of a scholar—intelligent, wise. “So it is written.” She smiled coldly. “I am pleased to find you have read the sacred Disks, though you obviously have not learned from them. Do you not recall what is said in the—”

## DRAGONLANCE LEGENDS

She was interrupted by Astinus, snorting.

"I have been kept from my studies long enough." The historian crossed the marble floor to the door of the antechamber. "Ring for Bertrem when you are ready to depart. Farewell, Revered Daughter. Farewell . . . old friend."

Astinus opened the door. The peaceful silence of the library flowed into the room, bathing Crysania in refreshing coolness. She felt herself in control and she relaxed. Her hand let loose of the medallion. Formally and gracefully, she bowed her farewell to Astinus, as did Raistlin. And then the door shut behind the historian. The two were alone.

For long moments, neither spoke. Then Crysania, feeling Paladine's power flowing through her, turned to face Raistlin. "I had forgotten that it was you and those with you who recovered the sacred Disks. Of course, you would have read them. I would like to discuss them with you further but, henceforth, in any future dealings we might have, Raistlin Majere," she said in her cool voice, "I will ask you to speak of Elistan more respectfully. He—"

She stopped amazed, watching in alarm as the mage's slender body seemed to crumble before her eyes.

Wracked by spasms of coughing, clutching his chest, Raistlin gasped for breath. He staggered. If it had not been for the staff he leaned upon, he would have fallen to the floor. Forgetting her aversion and her disgust, reacting instinctively, Crysania reached out and, putting her hands upon his shoulders, murmured a healing prayer. Beneath her hands, the black robes were soft and warm. She could feel Raistlin's muscles twisting in spasms, sense his pain and suffering. Pity filled her heart.

Raistlin jerked away from her touch, shoving her to one side. His coughing gradually eased. Able to breathe freely once more, he regarded her with scorn.

"Do not waste your prayers on me, Revered Daughter," he said bitterly. Pulling a soft cloth from his robes, he dabbed his lips and Crysania saw that it came away stained with blood. "There is no cure for my malady. This is the sacrifice, the price I paid for my magic."

"I don't understand," she murmured. Her hands twitched, as she remembered vividly the velvety soft smoothness of the black robes, and she unconsciously clasped her fingers behind her back.

"Don't you?" Raistlin asked, staring deep into her soul with his strange, golden eyes. "What was the sacrifice you made for *your* power?"

A faint flush, barely visible in the dying firelight, stained Crysania cheeks with blood, much as the mage's lips were stained. Alarmed at

this invasion of her being, she averted her face, her eyes looking once more out the window. Night had fallen over Palanthas. The silver moon, Solinari, was a sliver of light in the dark sky. The red moon that was its twin had not yet risen. The black moon—She caught herself wondering, where is it? Can *he* truly see it?

"I must go," Raistlin said, his breath rasping in his throat. "These spasms weaken me. I need rest."

"Certainly," Crysania felt herself calm once more. All the ends of her emotions tucked back neatly into place, she turned to face him again. "I thank you for coming—"

"But our business is not concluded," Raistlin said softly. "I would like a chance to prove to you that these fears of your god are unfounded. I have a suggestion. Come visit me in the Tower of High Sorcery. There you will see me among my books and understand my studies. When you do, your mind will be at ease. As it teaches in the Disks, we fear only that which is unknown." He took a step nearer her.

Astounded at his proposal, Crysania's eyes opened wide. She tried to move away from him, but she had inadvertently let herself become trapped by the window. "I cannot go . . . to the Tower," she faltered as his nearness smothered her, stole her breath. She tried to walk around him, but he moved his staff slightly, blocking her path. Coldly, she continued, "The spells laid upon it keep out all—"

"Except those I choose to admit," Raistlin whispered. Folding the blood-stained cloth, he tucked it back into a secret pocket of his robes. Then, reaching out, he took hold of Crysania's hand.

"How brave you are, Revered Daughter," he commented. "You do not tremble at my evil touch."

"Paladine is with me," Crysania replied disdainfully.

Raistlin smiled, a warm smile, dark and secret—a smile for just the two of them. It fascinated Crysania. He drew her near to him. Then, he dropped her hand. Resting the staff against the chair, he reached out and took hold of her head with his slender hands, placing his fingers over the white hood she wore. Now, Crysania trembled at his touch, but she could not move, she could not speak or do anything more than stare at him in a wild fear she could neither suppress nor understand.

Holding her firmly, Raistlin leaned down and brushed his blood-flecked lips across her forehead. As he did so, he muttered strange words. Then he released her.

Crysania stumbled, nearly falling. She felt weak and dizzy. Her hand went to her forehead where the touch of his lips burned into her

## DRAGONLANCE LEGENDS

skin with a searing pain. "What have you done?" she cried brokenly. "You cannot cast a spell upon me! My faith protects—"

"Of course," Raistlin sighed wearily, and there was an expression of sorrow in his face and voice, the sorrow of one who is constantly suspected, misunderstood. "I have simply given you a charm that will allow you to pass through Shoikan Grove. The way will not be easy"—his sarcasm returned—"but, undoubtedly your *faith* will sustain you!"

Pulling his hood low over his eyes, the mage bowed silently to Crysania, who could only stare at him, then he walked toward the door with slow, faltering steps. Reaching out a skeletal hand, he pulled the bell rope. The door opened and Bertrem entered so swiftly and suddenly that Crysania knew he must have been posted outside. Her lips tightened. She flashed the Aesthetic such a furious, imperious glance that the man paled visibly, though totally unaware of what crime he had committed, and mopped his shining forehead with the sleeve of his robe.

Raistlin started to leave, but Crysania stopped him. "I—I apologize for not trusting you, Raistlin Majere," she said softly. "And, again, I thank you for coming."

Raistlin turned. "And I apologize for my sharp tongue," he said. "Farewell, Revered Daughter. If you truly do not fear knowledge, then come to the Tower two nights from this night, when Lunitari makes its first appearance in the sky."

"I will be there," Crysania answered firmly, noting with pleasure Bertrem's look of shocked horror. Nodding in good-bye, she rested her hand lightly on the back of the ornately carved wooden chair.

The mage left the room, Bertrem followed, shutting the door behind him.

Left alone in the warm, silent room, Crysania fell to her knees before the chair. "Oh, thank you, Paladine!" she breathed. "I accept your challenge. I will not fail you! I will not fail!"