



Celtellina –Book 4

**Glimpses of CELTELLINA
—and the Wonder Hill Orb—**

*There are secrets and mysteries imbedded in these tales,
that the wise hearted with alert minds just might decipher.*

BOOK 4

AN ELEGANT EVENT—Part 1

“Oh! It’s a letter from Aunt Lully!” Celtellina exclaimed, when she opened the envelope that her mother handed her. “The messenger passed by this morning and gave these to us—one for you and one for me,” Mother Grenda explained. “He’ll be back tomorrow again to pick up any return letters, to pass them along. I do wonder what my sister has to say. I saved reading it until we could both open our letters together.”

After reading their notes they exchanged comments. “It’s an invitation to a ball, where ladies get to be ladies, dressed up in the most exquisite costumes—all provided for by the organisers of the event!” Celtellina announced.

“That’s interesting, my note is asking if I want to attend the ‘Lady’s Parade’ that’s taking place the day before the ball. She said we could stay with her in her house there and get to attend both the events. Sounds great!” said Mother Grenda. “I would like to see my dear sister again. It’s been months since we were there last.”

Celtellina was delighted at the idea, and immediately began counting the days until they could visit. “Let’s see, the events begin in 10 days from now... and it will take a day to travel there... then we should stay at least a day or two before hand to just enjoy being together... so that means we could leave in about a week! How fun!”

At last it was her turn to go on a trip. It might not have been as long as the one Emilda went on, but she was delighted with this special surprise trip.

Father Moustour and brother Roden would stay back in order to mind the field work and the house, the needs of the neighbours and such. Besides, Roden had his own bit of fun coming up later on. Next month he was going to stay at Father Baufin's camp for young men—his yearly visit. This time he would take part in advanced fly-riding lessons and learning extra skills needed that would prepare him to be a responsible partner and father to his own hoped-for family one day.

“Oh! Don't you look ever so lovely in that gown, my dear!” Aunt Lully complimented Celtellina as she was dressed and ready to attend the ball. Mother Grenda and her sister Lully, would attend as well, and assist with serving refreshments, or be on call to help any of the young guests.

“One, two, a one, two three now...” the band leader led the musicians in the opening number, while the guests streamed into the elaborately decorated room, fit to entertain royalty.

Celtellina felt a tad bashful as she walked into such a large room filled with lovely ladies, as well as equally handsomely dressed young gentlemen. However, she didn't have to wait for too long wondering where she fit in, and with whom she would share some graceful dances.

Aunt Lully, together with some of the older ladies had met and discussed this in detail—how to make each of the guests feel at ease, and to have as little of those uncomfortable feelings that young ones often feel. It was decided that, unbeknownst to the ladies, all the gentlemen were to show up ahead of time, for they had a special part to play in the ball. Since men generally need less time to prepare for such an event, and ladies like plenty of time to brush their hair and beautify their appearance, it was easy to have the young men arrive early.

The men picked numbers ahead of time—numbers for how many ladies were attending—and arranged themselves in number order, according to the card they had picked. Then as each lady entered the hall, the next gentleman, whoever's number was next, would step up to the door and would offer the

lady his hand, willing to accompany her for the first few songs. By that time, all the guests should have arrived, and everyone would be feeling comfortable by then. The guests could then comfortably change partners and enjoy the time with everyone.

Knowing in advance just how many women attendees there would be, it was easy to calculate how many young men were also needed. Each one was personally invited, and each one had confirmed their attendance. Also, unbeknownst to the ladies, the chosen and invited gentlemen had attended several dance practices and instruction classes in the week before the ball. Bernardo's father, Estrado, was an excellent dance teacher, besides being a great sailor. He often would teach skills of dance to the young men attending Father Baufin's training camp, among the other things he could teach. He had come to this town a week in advance of the ball, and led the dance classes.

Accommodations were made for those men that lived far away, to be able to stay in the town for that week, with food and a place to stay provided. In return for this special opportunity, the gentlemen offered to help in whatever ways they could, lending a helping hand to those in the area. Crops were harvested, house handyman jobs were taken care of, streets and parks were cleaned up extra well, children were taken out for fun outdoor play giving the mothers more focused time with their little ones, those elderly ones who needed assistance were visited, other miscellaneous jobs attended to, and so forth. The coming ball was helping everyone in the area have a great time.

AN ELEGANT EVENT—Part 2

A handsome gentleman, who had mastered the art of dance proficiently and was dressed smartly, awaited the next young lady to arrive. He had pulled number 27. He watched as the gentlemen before him walked up to take the hands of the young ladies who had entered. Each man had his own unique way of speaking and introducing himself and offering companionship for a few dances.

As he was deciding just what he was going to say, suddenly he was nudged by the man beside him, "Your turn, friend; what a lovely one you've got." The young man pointed out a red haired young lady, dressed in a flowing white ballroom gown trimmed with gold.

Feeling shy at first when she walked in, Celtellina was contemplating using her gift of blending in with surroundings and hiding from obvious view. She spotted the white drapes that also were gold trimmed. "It would be so easy to camouflage myself here... until I get used to all the new faces and feel comfortable..." she thought. But she didn't have long enough to enact her plan. And it would have been disappointing indeed to the man who would have missed out on his partner--for every man and woman was accounted for and paired up. There would have been one man left at the end, still holding his number, without a lady to greet, if Celtellina had shyly chosen to disguise herself and hide.

Sir Consort the Second swiftly moved to her side, and on his way plucked a lily out of a flower vase. With one arm around her waist, he offered the beautiful flower with the other. "A flower for you, my dear, though it pales in contrast to your beauty. And may I have the pleasure of holding you in a dance, rather than merely holding this small and temporal flower?"

Celtellina was taken by surprise. Before she knew what to say or do, she felt whisked away in time to the music by the smooth, confident, and gallant gentleman. She hardly could utter as much as a word, for indeed she felt speechless, and her breath was taken by this one who was treating her with such royal care.

After the first song ended, Sir Consort offered to show her to the buffet of edible treats. There were delightful snacks and refreshing drinks. After a glass of fruit-flavoured ice water, and a few strawberries, the pair was off to enjoy another dance together.

Celtellina looked over at Aunt Lully who was chatting with a few of the women. She glanced Celtellina's way and saw the look of enjoyment in her eyes. She could sense that feelings of tenderness and love could sprout in such a greenhouse. She smiled. It was good to see her niece joining in with

other young people, and having a refreshing break from the loneliness she had felt over the past few months—especially since someone she loved had moved on.

Aunt Lully was one of the organisers, and so had not planned a partner to arrive for her—for she wanted to be available to help the guests. She was surprised when a charming voice, and attractive manly presence stood beside her. “Where could I get a ticket to attend this event, and to dance with the lady I am speaking with?” a man spoke to her.

Recognizing the voice, and sensing the hint of playfulness in his voice, Aunt Lully looked over and saw it was indeed someone she knew. “Bernardo, how nice to see you. Well, since you are the son of the dance teacher, this gives you free entrance. You can be granted the freedom to ask any lady to dance, if they so please to join you, you are welcome to do so.”

“Thank you kindly. Then without further delay I shall make the request to you. Would you be so kind as to join me in the next dance number?” Bernardo asked Aunt Lully.

“It shall be a pleasure. What a pleasant surprise,” she agreed. Shrugging her shoulders and looking over at the ladies she was speaking with, including Grenda her sister, as if to say, “What can I do about it? I’ll see you later.”

Bernardo, too, was smooth and skilled in dance, and a great time was had with the lady of his heart’s choice. They had met on many social occasions before, but this was the first time to have time getting acquainted in a more personal, one-on-one way, even though it was in the middle of a room filled with many others.

By the time the evening ended, Bernardo was sure, more than ever, that Lady Lully was the one for him, and he would one day request her hand in marriage. Maybe not yet, but he had no reason to look any further for his life partner. He knew, in his heart, she would become his wife. At least he deeply hoped so.

This time it was Celtellina who glanced her way. She knew from the look on Aunt Lully’s face, that she was enjoying and relishing every moment of it.

“How is the ball going for you, my dear,” Mother Grenda asked her daughter, as they met by the snack table.

“I’ve danced with a few of the gentlemen, and they have been most courteous to me. I’m truly enjoying myself,” Celtellina responded.

Just then, the first man who had welcomed her to the ball, was there beside her, helping himself to a few of the snacks—hoping that she would notice him. Celtellina had indeed, for as soon as she looked up and saw who was beside her she felt a slight heart flutter, and drew in a quick breath, in a gentle and nearly silent way. But not silent and slight enough to be unnoticed by her mother, who quickly slipped away so as to leave them a chance to make conversation.

A few moments later the pair were again arm in arm dancing beautifully.

“I rather enjoy your company,” said Sir Consort. When seeing the shy smile on Celtellina’s face he was emboldened to continue, “I think I should enjoy it just as much if we were in a different setting, for example a picnic in the forest with our families, or perhaps a walk along the lake, or any of your favourite activities.”

Celtellina knew what he was probing at.

“I do like walking in the field nearby my house, when the flowers are in bloom. I like sitting under my favourite tree, that has almost been like a friend to me. And I do like eating mother’s special fruit pie together with my family under the stars on a summer evening,” Celtellina replied. It was her own way of asking if he was keen to enjoy any of those with her.

“I think those activities just became my favourite,” Sir Consort smiled, with a laughing smile in his eyes.

“Then you’re welcome to ask my parents if you can stop by for a visit some time,” Celtellina said, giving him the underlying approval for sometime in the future to get to know one another better, if her parents would agree to such as he asked them.

“That I shall do, before the evening is up,” Sir Consort committed. And he kept his word too, for before Mother Grenda left the ball that evening, a hand-written note was passed to her.

A short while later Celtellina was speaking with Aunt Lully and her mother, standing somewhere near the fireplace when she caught sight of someone else attending the ball that was very familiar in deed.

The gentleman was just finishing a dance with a lovely lady, and as she walked away Celtellina walked over to him. “Roden! How did you get here? I thought you had to stay at home and help Papa.”

“I thought so too, however plans changed, and rather suddenly too. A few hours before this ball today, a certain Bernardo suddenly arrived, landing on our property with his fine flying steed. He came with an invitation to both father and me to come along. For some reason, some of the gentlemen guests had not been able to come after all, and they needed replacements,” Roden explained.

“But how did you get here so quickly?” Celtellina was curious. But just then a lady was seen standing without a partner, so Roden said, “I guess I better attend to that fair maiden, that’s what I am here for. Father is over there speaking with mother. He’ll tell you the story. I see you later, Sis,” Roden said, and was off.

It was lovely to see her father taking a gallant bow and asking her mother for a dance. Grenda extended her hand, and did a small curtsy, and her elderly parents were soon on the dance floor, flowing gracefully in time to the live music being played by the classical ensemble. Different groups of musicians played throughout different parts of the evening, keeping things interesting and lively, or mellow and relaxing. Something for everyone was woven into the special evening.

“I’ll ask him later, he seems to be cherishing this moment,” Celtellina thought to herself.

AN ELEGANT EVENT—Part 3

At some point in the evening, as the ball continued, Celtellina turned to walk in the direction of the fresh juice being served she accidentally bumped into someone.

“Excuse me..”

“Oh, I’m terribly sorry...”

They both said at the same time.

“Manly-Lane!”

“Celtellina!”

“A pleasure to see you here.”

“And you too. I didn’t know you were coming; what and who and how did you get here?” Celtellina inquired. As far as she remembered he was back with his family, helping to care for his younger brothers and sisters.

“I came with your brother; there was a need for more gentlemen. Since we both had taken dance classes before and knew the steps, we were asked to come. My parents were glad to let me attend. It was their way of thanking me for helping out. A bit of surprise fun is good for everyone. You never know when it will show up here in Wonder Hill,” Manly-Lane replied.

Celtellina’s question still wasn’t fully answered, so she waited.

Manly-Lane realised she wanted a longer version of the story, so continued explaining. “Shall we?” he first offered, and proceeded in a simple dance with her, while they chatted.

“Getting here was the funnest part, though, I’ll admit. Bernardo and a few of the herd of flying horses showed up to get me, and your brother and father. Since all of us had experience in fly riding, we hopped on, took off, and were here pretty fast. I think the team of horses is near your Aunt’s house. There’s plenty of grazing area there. We’ll ride home first thing in the morning. She

has a few cottages there where some of the visiting gentlemen have been staying. There were beds to spare.” Manly-Lane finished his short account.

“A ride through the sunrise! What a lovely way to start the day!” Celtellina said. Oh, but what of our home, and the animals there?”

“Oh, Emilda and your closest neighbours said they would help out. She would care for the animals and watch the house, and the neighbours would be around to assist her in anything she’d need help with.” Manly-Lane explained.

Celtellina felt a warm feeling of love for her dear friend. She was probably wishing to be at such an exquisite and delightful party, but chose to do what she could to provide fun for others. That was Emilda—a truly caring heart.

Later on in the evening, when at last speaking with her father about the sudden surprise of the rest of her family being able to be there, she found out more about why there was the unexpected absence of some of the planned young men guests.

It was at a break for fresh air, a time when the musicians had a chance to rest and have some refreshments, that she and her father walked out on the starlit terrace to chat. They found a marble bench beside the rose garden to sit on. Father Moustour got right to the point, knowing the curiosity of Celtellina and the shortness of the break before the dancing resumed.

“There’s been a move in the air, for the past while, maybe you have noticed or perhaps it has escaped you, a move to resettle Orchard Pass. It has been abandoned for quite some time, and for good reason too.”

“Isn’t that where the volcano transformed the landscape, long before I came to live in Wonder Hill?” Celtellina asked.

“Yes. So, the young men that were unable to attend tonight are out exploring the liveability of Orchard Pass. It has remained uninhabited for quite some time, due to the volcanic activity, and also huge flooding that occurred a few decades ago. These combined have left new lakes and water ways. There was a team of explorers that was at last heading off, and these young men wished to go along.

“If it proves to now be safe, there is a chance that they will wish to begin setting up places for their future families by first of all getting some crops started. It is incredibly fertile now, unlike what it used to be. The young men are visionaries and think-aheaders, and didn’t want to miss this chance—a rare one indeed. Who knows what the future holds? Men need challenge, and they need to know they have done what they can to provide for a family, or are working towards helping others families have what they need.”

Celtellina nodded as she pondered the news. It was interesting hearing about new possibilities, and young people exploring ideas and places, and wishing to find ways to make the wild zones habitable and useable again. She was sure her brother would have liked to go exploring on this mission too, had he known about it and been prepared. Though it would have been nice to meet these young men at the ball, she was glad that they too, like Emilda, were ready to give up an evening of fun in order to help others, in one way or another.

The first night they were all home again, after the ball, Celtellina had a most vivid dream.

“Darling, girl...” the whisper came from her mother. Celtellina sat up, though in fact she was still in the world of dreams. She saw her mother and father in the room with her, dressed in the same clothes they had worn to the ball, looking their best.

“We came to tell you that the time will soon come when we will move to the Enchanted Dome. There is much work for us to do there. And you, darling, along with your brother and friends, and other loved ones, have much yet to discover and learn while living in Wonder Hill. It will seem like a short time until we will again be reunited. And though we are gone from your view, we in no way are gone. We will exist as real and vibrantly as we live today.

“We’re just having an address change, in a way, and an upgrade in work assignments.” Her parents took turns saying these things, and Celtellina took it all in, in quietness.

The words rested and nestled in her heart and mind as she woke the next day. It was a very moving announcement, and came quite completely unexpected. She needed some time to think and ponder, and knew just the place to go.

With a blanket, a jug of water, some fruit, and a notebook and pen, she walked out to the field beside her house and made her way over to her special tree. She remembered the first time she sat under its branches.

Her memory took her back to when she and her family had recently move to this place. It was a new town, with new friends, and new everything. Celtellina and her parents had been walking around the property, taking a look around and exploring the area.

“Mother, mother! The tree waved at me!” young Celtellina had exclaimed to her mother.

The wind had been blowing, but the wave of a single branch in the most friendly way gave Celtellina a warm welcome. Then as she looked at the trunk of the tree it seemed as if it was smiling to her. Something came over her and she ran over and gave the tree a hug.

In a funny way, the tree was her first friend—though just a tree. For some reason she did feel a sense of peace and tranquillity whenever she sat under it. Over the years, Celtellina and her friends spent much time there.

AN ELEGANT EVENT—Part 4

Before leaving her Aunt’s house, the day after the ball, Celtellina had been able to take some of the extra food that was served, to bring back to Emilda. She and her brother wanted to have a way to show her some appreciation for her part that made it possible for their whole family to enjoy the event. They both wrote a note, and placed these in a basket.

Now that they were back, she could hardly wait to bring this little gift to her friend. It wasn’t much compared with the fun that Emilda missed out on, but her friend was far too kind to have ever gotten sulky about it. For her it was

fun to know that she was helping others have a good time. A smile on someone else's face, that she had a part in placing there, felt the same—or even better—than a smile on her own face from something fun she was doing.

Roden and Celtellina walked to her house and knocked on the door. “Knock, knock!” the sound was heard, however no response replied.

“Hmm, maybe she's out,” Celtellina wondered.

“Let's try the Quauf's home. There's a good chance she is there,” Roden suggested.

Indeed they were right. A peek in the window showed both Mother Shaulic as well as Emilda were there, fully occupied with entertaining the children. Not wanting to disturb the moment, they pondered what to do. Just then Emilda—being the sensitive one that she was—knew that someone was wishing to speak to her. Her eyes then met with Roden's peering eyes in the window, and she waved for them to come on in.

After hugs to the cheerful children who came bounding over to them trying to eagerly see just what was in the basket, they made their way over to Emilda. The children respectfully, quietened and waited to hear what the visitors had to say.

“Just a little thank you from us...” Celtellina and Roden began.

Emilda knew what they were trying to say, and nothing more needed to be said. She smiled and gave them each a hug. “It was a pleasure. But this is so thoughtful of you. I do appreciate it.”

As the basket contained plenty of treats to be nibbled on, and since it was just about snack time for the young ones, Emilda offered for them all to share it together. “This is to thank you, children also, for sharing your older brother with others who needed his company. Let's enjoy this now, all together.”

“Yea!” all the children said, and began to spread a blanket to sit on.

Mother Shaulic smiled and winked a thanks, as the two then left.

SKY'S BLUE EYES—Part 1

The magnificent underwater castle, with sea flora gardens was decorated with special flare today. The day of the underwater parade had come. Every child who knew how to swim had been invited to assist “Mother Shaulic” as they called her, in setting up the place.

A deep and crystal-clear lake had been the chosen location for artistic and useful construction. The castle had been in preparation for a few years now. Today the young adept swimmers, clothed in shiny swimwear, were allowed into the secret zone, to put on the finishing touches to the underwater castle decorations. Ribbons and coral were attached here and there; bells and lights were positioned in all the planned locations. Children laughed as they splashed and played, and joyfully helped to set things up.

This castle had a special entrance way. Visitors would be invited to swim through the clear waters and through the sea garden, along with colorful and beautiful fish. Then, when they arrived at the castle, there was an opening, a special type of door they could go through. This would lead them to an air-filled, dry interior of the castle. One could walk or float through it. Water was only on the outside; inside it was set like a royal elaborate palace.

It seemed there were countless rooms to the children who had fun exploring each corner of this castle with Mother Shaulic. Some rooms had gorgeous furniture for sitting on, or for displaying amazing artistic designs, or furniture for sleeping on.

Some of the beds with elaborately carved woodwork and shiny bed covers, were so big that several children could fit on it all at once. There were even hammocks hung up high near the ceiling in some rooms, for playful children to fly up with fairy wings and rest in.

The view out the windows, rather than showing grass, mountains, gardens, trees or meadows, showed instead a view of tropical fish, sea plants and creatures, and perhaps a diver or two swimming past might say hello. The

light from the sky would shine down into the water and make dazzling displays of light.

About mid-day, the children changed from their water garments into their welcoming parade costumes. Flowing dresses and wreathes of flowers were on the girls; vests and shirts with matching pants and boots, and tasselled felt hats were donned by the boys. The boys and girls were to lead the way for everyone to follow. The girls would hold baskets of rose petals and sprinkle them in the air, singing and dancing as they went. The boys would play on musical instruments—drums, flutes, trumpets, and such, as they walked to lead the way.

The large bell in the town was rung, and all knew that the parade and celebration was beginning. People of all ages were seen to trail out of the houses, or come in from the fields, or leave their workshop to come and join in the merriment. Before too long all had reached the water's edge, and sounds of joy were heard, as they got to see for the first time, the full view of the underwater castle, and the beautiful water garden.

A welcoming speech was made, and all who wished to enter the castle were invited to dive in and swim. The children (who had, indeed, another dry set of shiny swimming clothes under their costumes) were quickly changed and ready to lead the way. Mother Shaulic had helped to prepare a closet full of new, fancy, dry clothes for them to put on when they re-entered the castle, if they wished.

Splash! Splash! Splash! Children and town's folks were diving in and the parade continued—this time under the water. Music was played in a way that those under water could hear it. With graceful swimming, and in awe, the visitors made their way to the entrance of the underwater castle. The castle was far bigger than it looked to those peering into the water from the banks. The water was very deep, in actuality, but being that it was so very clear it was hard to tell the depth. The rocks on the bottom could be easily seen by those looking in.

Down under the water all those who chose to enter, swam, as their clothes waved in the refreshing water. The children led the way. In Wonder Hill

swimming and water travel was blithely easy. People could move with ease, and without the need for air for a long while. The parade through the sea gardens on the way to the castle must have lasted at least fifteen minutes, but it was time that went by quickly.

One-by-one each participant entered through the castle door, and were soon on their feet again, breathing and talking, and walking up the steps. The steps led to the main large hall in the center of the castle. The air in the castle was such that everyone's clothing dried very quickly, and no one felt the least bit cold.

The ambiance of the main room embraced each one with a warm welcome. Chandeliers were hanging and shedding cheery and warm light. An orchestra was playing heavenly melodies as the visitors entered. There were snacks and food displays on tables lining the grand room. People were invited to mill about, nibble and chat with each other—ensuring that all felt included in this friendly time of celebration.

Tours through the vast castle were led by the children who had quickly learned their way around, while setting things up earlier in the day. And all who wished to stay overnight, were welcome. There were enough rooms and sleep accommodations for any and all who chose to linger on in this lovely place of splendour.

There were special underwater vehicles that could help mothers and fathers transport the smaller children and babies who didn't know yet how to swim. The very young ones could be transported in such a way that they didn't even get wet.

Everything one would need if choosing to stay for the night would be well supplied. Mother Shaulic who helped to set things up had a caring and practical mind, and could foresee what a family, children, mothers, fathers, or adults of all ages might have need of. Bit by bit over the past few months she had overseen that the last elements of the interior set up were completed.

Some folks had to leave and could not stay the night, due to the animals on their property that were in their care, or other needs that compelled them to

do so. The majority of the visitors, however, welcomed this surprise and chose to stay for as long as possible. For those that needed to leave overnight, they were invited, if they desired, to return in the morning for the grand breakfast buffet that would be served.

SKY'S BLUE EYES—Part 2

That night Emilda and Celtellina settled into a cozy room together. They sat by a glowing fire and had much to talk about. Meanwhile, Roden and Shane shared a neighbouring room. Shane, though relatively new to this side of Wonder Hill, had been there long enough to become fast friends with Roden. They both shared the same joy of travel and adventure. After all, that is what brought Shane to this part of the land.

He wanted to explore the area, and ended up never wishing to leave—at least not permanently. The air in Wonder Hill was clean, and the people friendly. There was nothing that compelled him to go on. Though his family lived many miles away, he was grown up enough now and wished for change and discovery.

Father Baufin, a wise old man who had lived, it seemed, at least a century, had allowed Shane to stay with him on his large estate. Father Baufin was Bernardo's Grandfather who had turned over the running of the flying horse training camp to his son and in time his grandson would also take charge of it. He liked now living closer to where most people had settled, in Wonder Hill. Shane, who now stayed with him, made himself a welcome guest by offering to help the aged man with work that needed to be done on his property.

Roden and Shane sometimes would plan theatre shows for the town, during times of special celebration. It would keep the children entertained, while giving the parents and older folks time to sit and chat. Since Shane had the gift of being able to appear in any form of a man or boy, for a short time, he could play many roles in the shows—much to the children's delight.

Tonight as these two young men sat in the living room of their large, two-room suite, they were planning a show to be performed next month. They

chose to call it, “The Sky’s Blue Eyes”. Some ideas they discussed were jotted down, for detailed planning later on.

It was a show about nature—and how all colours blended together and complimented each other to make a beautiful world for us to enjoy. If everything were all and only yellow, or pink, green or purple, brown or maroon, the splendour of nature’s hues could not be seen.

Much in the same way, the variety in the colour of people’s eyes, and the shade of skin and choices of clothing, add variety and an artistic touch to the world. If the sky were always and only blue, what beauty would that hold? The changes in colours of the clouds, made it a breathtaking canvas of heavenly art to be seen; and the dark night sky allowed Earth’s inhabitants to see the sparkling stars.

Roden thought of the variety in appearance sported by him and his closest friends and relatives. He had dark brown, charming and warm eyes, with shoulder-length straight brown hair. His sister, Celtellina, had long wavy red hair, and green eyes. His friend Shane had curly blond hair, with pale blue eyes.

Then there was Emilda, who had copper-colored skin, frizzy black hair, and dark colored eyes that seemed to match. Then he smiled, though, as Shane could for a time be anything really, when the occasion was right—anything from a hairless baby, to a greying old man. He was fun to have around when doing plays on stage. They paused their discussion about the coming performance.

Roden knocked on the semi-open door to the room his sister shared with her friend—the one he now loved dearly and hoped would one day be his wife. He was invited in. He saw Emilda using the golden brush that had been set on the dresser, to gently brush Celtellina’s long locks. The fire in the hearth flickered and shed golden light, making his sweetheart standing there look more lovely than ever.

“I just wanted to see if you both have all that you need. You know there is a bowl of fruit and a jug of water in the hallway ...” Roden said softly, eyes twinkling. He was glad for a lovely family, and friends.

The ladies thanked him and confirmed they were fine. As they each got into their huge and soft beds, they enjoyed the view outside the picture window that was lit with underwater lamps. It looked so relaxing. Into dreamland they soon drifted—and so did all the other visitors in this amazing underwater castle.

Perhaps the night was the shortest for Mother Shaulic, as she had chosen to be the one to prepare and spread the feast for breakfast. Although it wasn't to be served too early in the morning, giving time for those who wanted to join them in the morning from the town to get there in time, still there was much to be done. Emilda and Celtelina promised to help her as soon as they could.

“Not before you have some time of quiet, communing with the King of the Realm...” insisted Mother Shaulic, with a wink. She knew the young ladies would rather have a special time of peace in this lovely setting, than feeling the need to start work too soon the next morning.

And so, the following morning they did just that. After their time of tranquillity and listening to the whispers the King was able to transmit to their hearts and minds, there still remained plenty of time to calmly get all the delicious foods prepared and set out on the table.

Perhaps that is the reason why it all worked out well, for they took a time of peaceful meditation and communication with the King first thing, before work began. Everything seemed to fall into place then.

By late morning all the guests from the rooms of the castle, as well as those who returned from the town, met once again in the grand hall, to eat and enjoy the company of each other.

Before they began eating, an aged and wise man they all knew well and loved, with a smile on his lips and a twinkle in his eyes stood up. “It's Father

Baufin...he's come... listen he wants to say something," whispers were heard around, and soon a hush came on all.

"I propose a toast to all that are present here," Father Baufin held up his glass of water, and all others followed suit, with whatever manner of glass, or mug, or cup they were holding.

"Let us toast to love—love in all its beautiful forms!"

"Cheers to love!" everyone called out enthusiastically.

Father Baufin continued,

"And to each of the rose buds beginning to open, and each of the new gardens of love beginning to flourish," he said, as he seemed to look over at Roden who was standing near to Emilda, then moved his gaze to a few other engaged couples around—such as Lully and Bernardo, his adult son, who had come to town for this event, "I wish you the best in every way!"

Father Baufin continued, as he seemed to scan the faces of each one there and rest his gaze, looking kindly into Celtellina's eyes, "And for those of you who still merely hold the seeds of love to be yet sown, and grown in the future, and are waiting for the right season and situation, keep heart. The sun will shine into your lives, and before too long the roses of love will bloom for you, too."

Celtellina felt a warm tear trickle down her face. These words were just the encouragement she needed. She quickly turned away to face the table of food that was behind her. While wiping her cheek with her one hand she grabbed a nibble with the other.

She thought she'd gone unnoticed, but Father Baufin gave her a wink when she turned back again. A ray of hope shone in her heart. He was wise; he knew things would work out well, as each one chose the ways of love.

FOUR FRIENDS—Part 1

When the time came for Celtellina's father and mother's journey to return to the Enchanted Dome, Roden took charge and care of the property. Shane had decided, since the time of the lovely welcome from this family on his arrival, that he didn't want to move too far. He decided that he'd like to keep visiting with Roden, who became his best friend; and he enjoyed getting to know his beautiful sister too.

However, since Shane had the need in his soul for challenge and change and travel, when he heard about Father Baufin's place for training young men, and teaching fly-riding, he knew that was the place for him.

Father Baufin was glad to have someone around to help out on the large property. He helped with the horses, with the crops, with cleaning the stables, chopping wood, hauling water, cooking, mending saddles, having long chats with Father Baufin by the fireplace, and washing the dishes and the clothes. He knew how to do—or learned to do—just about everything. He certainly earned his keep.

Every week or two he would visit with Roden and Celtellina. The young men would go horse riding sometimes, and come back for a fine meal prepared for them by Celtellina. Sometimes Emilda would join them for the meal, and singing songs together. The four of them became fast friends. Though each of them were busy much of the time, it made it all the more enjoyable when they did take time to stop everything to just be together and be each other's company.

Father Baufin became like a grandfather for them all, and sometimes would invite the four of them, along with Mother Shaulic, up to his place out in the country. The ladies would prepare a great meal for the young men who were there to receive training. Sometimes Aunt Lully would be there too, to spend time with her fiancé, Bernardo. During these times together it felt like they were all a big family, though in reality, they weren't all related. But somehow it just felt right.

Roden and Celtellina would wonder, at those times, who their life-long partners were going to be, but for now they decided not to waste time trying to figure it out. For now, they would just enjoy the friendships and family they had. During this time, Celtellina kept up a line of communication with Sir Consort. He would write, and she would respond. They hadn't seen each other since the ball, but memories were fresh in her mind, of the splendid night it had been, and how he had made it so pleasant for her.

One day a coach pulled up to the house. And right before her eyes, out stepped who she had now called secretly, "My beloved Sir Consort." Her heart sprung into action, and love was running through her energetically.

Roden answered the door and allowed the visitor and his sister Sessilda into their humble dwelling place. By the looks of the coach and the well-dressed guests they could assume their life style was a little different than here. The driver waved, and said he'd be back to get them in an hour or so, and off the horses trotted.

"At last I've found the time to visit," Sir Consort began. They all knew each other from the ball—the two sets of brothers and sisters, and no time was wasted; they got right into talking.

Roden, sensing his sister would appreciate some time alone with Sir Consort, offered to show sister Sessilda the beautiful gardens, fountains, and sit with her on the swinging bench. Being a perfect gentleman, he offered a glass of water and some fruit. They sat and chatted and enjoyed the beautiful setting. She was indeed a beautiful lady, and had perfect manners. "What a fine lady," Roden thought to himself.

Meanwhile, Celtellina and Sir Consort sat comfortably in the sitting room, trying to think of things to say. It would have been easier if they could have been dancing, for that is how they last held a conversation.

At last Sir Consort stood up, and offering his hand said with a playful smile, "May I have the honour of this dance, Miss?" Celtellina, happy to play along, stood and joined him. Somehow the music of their hearts was enough, and in time to it they danced and swayed, and at last were able to chat—as long as

their feet were moving. Once they were seated again, nibbling on some fruit, Roden and Sessilda came wandering back in.

When it was time to go, the driver found the four of them again, gathered in the sitting room.

“Well, it appears we must be going, for we are indeed passing through to tend to business in a town another hour away. In a few days we’ll be making our way back again. If you are here, we’ll be happy to visit again,” Sir Consort said, glancing over at Celtellina, as if asking for permission.

Before she could get a word out, Roden spoke for them, “Please stop by any time. If I am not here, Celtellina most certainly will be here to welcome either or both of you on your way back.” This was his way of giving permission for Sir Consort, should he so wish, to come by and visit. This time, for a meal alone with Celtellina. They were all quick to pick up on the message, and a flutter of joy was felt in her heart.

Roden would be happy, if this man was the right one for his sister to become engaged to. But time would tell, and they’d have to wait and see. And would the sister of Sir Consort be the one for him? He didn’t know her well, but from what he did see of her, she was a lovely lady.

Each lost in their thoughts and questions and wondering just what the love-future held for each of them, they bid each other farewell. “I hope to see you before too long,” Sir Consort said, as he placed a simple kiss on Celtellina’s hand.

“Enjoy your trip,” Roden said, giving a kiss to Sessilda’s extended hand, and then opening the door for them.

The coach was waiting, and as soon as they were sitting, it quickly sped away. As they faded from sight, Roden placed his arm around his sister’s shoulders. He knew she was feeling a million things, and had just as many questions unanswered about her life ahead. A tear rolled down her cheek.

“Come Sister! I think it’s time for your riding lesson,” Roden cheerily offered. Now, they didn’t have “riding lessons”, but occasionally Celtellina did go for

short horse rides. “Today I’m going to take you to a special place,” he continued.

Happy for something fun to do, the two packed up some water, bread and fruit, grabbed their jackets and hats, and were off to the stables. Today Roden would take Celtellina to his special place where he goes to get quiet and think and pray about life. –Just like she did beside the tree she liked so much.

His place was a short ride away and was beside a trickling brook. They got off the horses, tied them to a tree, and sat watching the sparkling water in the sunlight. It felt as if the tension and emotions were whisked away with the flow of the brook. A lot had happened over the past year. They were growing up at a very fast pace, almost too fast to keep up with, it seemed. But they had each other, and were glad for that.

Celtellina soaked her feet in the water, and they nibbled on what they had brought to be their supper. They enjoyed a simple life, and would make it through the ups and downs. Whatever life held next for them, they could face it.

FOUR FRIENDS—Part 2

When Sir Consort and Sessilda’s coach pulled up this time, a few days later, it was when Roden was working the field.

“If Sir Consort comes today,” Roden had told Celtellina, “Go ahead and serve him the meal you have prepared for you and me to eat. I’ll get something later.” Celtellina looked at him with an, “Are you sure?” look, then got an idea.

Before her brother took off for the work with the crops, she packed up a picnic for two, along with their nicest picnic blanket. “Here, take this. Just in case Sessilda chooses to stroll out and visit you there, you’ll have something to share.”

Roden looked up quizzically; this thought hadn't occurred to him. But he took the basket anyway. One way or the other, his meal for the evening, after a hard day's work, would be covered.

It was about the middle of the afternoon when the sound of an approaching coach was heard nearing the house. Celtellina had just finished setting the table, and the food was in the oven keeping warm. Unknown to Celtellina, before pulling up to the house, Sessilda had gotten out when she spotted Roden waving to them from the field nearby. Sessilda had said to her brother. "Why don't you go ahead to their house and keep Celtellina company. I'll come join you soon."

So when Sir Consort pulled up to the house, he was the only one to walk through the door. The driver took the coach elsewhere to feed and tend to the horses. A shy smile greeted him as he opened the door. Sir Consort glanced over and saw a lovely set table, prepared for two.

"Were you expecting me?" he asked.

"Maybe, maybe not, I wasn't sure..." Celtellina replied. "Please come, you are welcome to dine with me. My brother has his food and isn't due to return for a while yet. A good hard worker is he."

"So he is," Sir Consort said, attempting to hide his soft, uncalloused hands on his lap.

"Gravy?" Celtellina offered.

"Please," her most welcome guest responded.

For nearly a full hour the two of them were together, dining, and chatting, and walking in the garden.

"This is a nice place," Sir Consort commented. "So much character, so much love has been placed into each small corner."

Celtellina sensed that he was quite possibly more accustomed to larger grounds, but rather plainer, with less of a personalised touch to them.

“Tell me more about yourself,” Celtellina’s heart wished to say. But she was too timid. There was much about his life that she didn’t know. He did seem to care about her, or so his letters let on. But there was a far away feeling in him now, as if he didn’t know how to express things, personal things, in person. It would take plenty of time and patience, and care until he felt comfortable sharing with her the things of his heart.

Sessilda had found Roden happy for her company. She blushed and was surprised when he offered her a picnic and spread out the blanket. She had simply thought to say hello to this fine, hardworking young man. She didn’t expect this treat, but was more than happy to go along with it.

Though they chatted, it seemed she too, had a hard time getting into conversation that went below the surface. It seemed she was saving the precious thoughts of her heart for a certain someone one day, and until then, would keep her thoughts and feelings quite to herself.

Later that evening, when guests had gone, and brother and sister sat by the fire, they were glad they felt free to tell each other what was honestly on their heart. “I’m glad I can tell you things, all kinds of things,” Celtellina expressed.

“Yes, Sis, I like talking with you. There’s nothing put on or pretend about you. You are honest, yet kind in your words.”

They both pondered why it might have been hard for them to hold deep conversation with these ones they were getting to know. It’s not just because they hadn’t known each other for long—for even a first time meeting, if it’s at the right time, and with the right person, can yield a deeper glimpse into each other’s heart. Perhaps it was they that needed to start by being open with their thoughts, and then asking the right type of questions that would give another person the reason to speak what was on their heart.

Or perhaps something had changed in their own hearts and thoughts. Maybe their own needs were different, since that memorable evening a few days back. Perhaps more communication with these fairly new friends would sort

things out, or help them see things from the same point of view. Or perhaps not.

The next day both Roden and Celtellina chose to write letters and thank Sir Consort and Sessilda for gracing them with a visit, and wishing them the best success in life. The offer was made for a trip into the country, to stay at Aunt Lully's place where there were cottages that could be used for visits. A comment was made in the letter about the need to get away from stress, and particularly the pull of things; how friendship and love was a more fulfilling thing to enjoy, rather than wealth that couldn't satisfy the needs of a human heart.

Roden and Celtellina gave the letters to the messenger, who would see that they made it safely to Sir Consort and Sessilda. They earnestly wondered what was in the hearts of these friends they wished to know better.

As the months went on, a few short and scattered letters came in and went out. It was clear that there wasn't a keen and focused interest on pursuing more solid friendship, in a lasting way, on the part of Sir Consort and Sessilda. Yet on the other hand, there were glimpses of possible interest in future visitations.

All Celtellina and Roden could do was keep on the best they could, work hard, explore ideas, help others, and learn all they needed to before the time of youthful preparation gave way to the more mature life they would one day walk into.

They often wondered what their immediate and distant future held. There were so many challenges and choices as they manoeuvred their way through the unexplored maze of growing to full maturity and adulthood. Just what the coming years would unfold they didn't know, but they were glad for the friendship and support that they could offer one another as brother and sister.

In time the fleeting friendship and further queries with these new friends slowed and then came to a haul. The questions remained, what opportunities would open for the life-long partners this brother and sister longed for?

THE PRESENCE

Celtellina was feeding the chickens and watering the vegetables when all of a sudden a bright light shone around her. She thought the sunlight was bright—until this new type of light caught her by surprise. She spun around, looking this way and that, but could not see the source of it. It was as if she had been in a dimly lit room and the light had been turned on.

She began to continue making her way to pick the tomatoes for the dinner, with little else she could do about this light, and hearing nothing or seeing nothing else, when a voice spoke. “May I join you for dinner tonight?”

“Uh..what?” she thought. Whoever it was, if they were not visible, how could they join her; how could light come into her home and share a time of friendship. But there was a presence of brilliance asking to come in to her humble home.

Taken back and not sure how exactly to respond, she did sense that the right answer, the preferred answer was, “Yes”. If it had been the sun in the sky asking, the answer would clearly be “No”, for it would do nothing but burn and ruin if too close, and far too big, naturally. She knew the voice came from something or rather someone far brighter and bigger, yet in a mysterious way, able to gently enjoy company with humble folks as her.

“Who are you?” she asked, almost feeling silly, as if perhaps she was but imagining things.

It wasn’t long before the answer came, like a whisper, not audibly, but within her heart. It wasn’t even in words, however it was clear, more clear than if someone had said it aloud to her, that the light came from the one who knew more about Wonder Hill than anyone living there that day; in fact anyone that had ever lived there, old or young. And the being was not at all too big, if they wished it, to slip into her house and enjoy a time of friendship.

The more Celtellina talked with this light, the more she felt not only the desire for this being to be with her, and in her house to talk with, but for

some unexplainable reason, didn't want them to ever go. It was the first time since her parents left that she felt really, fully, at peace and well known; known like no one else knew her.

"How could a being of light looking right into her heart and see all that she felt—and even care?" she wondered. But she wasn't going to wait longer to give her official invitation.

"You may come in and be with me and my brother. We are honoured to have you. For you seem to be the very source of love, and life itself. How I wish to be with you always."

At that moment the light faded, the garden resumed its regular appearance, and the sun shone its usual brightness—dim in comparison. Though the light was not seen with her eyes, there was a lightness in her heart that shone brightly. Somehow she knew that the light had entered her very being, and as she walked in to the house, the light and love from the glorious presence was coming along right with her. Light shone from her face, through her smile, and out of her eyes—a special light.

When Roden sat down to eat with his sister, he noticed it right away. After a candle was lit for their relaxing meal, the glow seemed to radiate a new light.

She then felt in her heart, and in the air around her, the very real presence again of the being of light, the source of life and light, right there in the room with them. Though the lighting then in the room was little more than a candle glow, Celtellina knew that her saying "Yes" had brought this wonderful being into her house and heart.

Somehow the darkness that was clouding her view was shattered and faded into departing shadows, as light and a feeling of being greatly loved filled the corners of her heart.

Roden recognised the special light, not in the room, but on his sister's face. Celtellina saw it shining out again from her brother's eyes. They had both invited the light of life and love to dwell with them, and things were only going to get better from then on; if not easier or simpler, at least they'd have the enhanced energy to face it all.

PART OF ART

“Look, look!” some children shouted as they gazed up into the sky. “It’s a sign! I wonder what it will say?”

Forming in the clouds was a sign being made by a combination of butterflies, fairies and flower petals. The different colour groups were taking their places to form a welcome sign. But just for whom, the people of the village didn’t know. Perhaps it was to be kept a surprise.

Sometimes the wind up there started to blow the sky sign out of place a bit, but then they would get readjusted again and the words continued to take shape.

“Welcome to Wonder Hill...” it said.

Those who could see the sky were calling friends and neighbours and everyone to take a look. Everyone was abuzz with excitement. They hadn’t heard of anyone new or important coming to visit; travellers came through regularly, but that was just part of life.

Was something new happening—or were regular parts of life just being expressed in new ways, like with sky art? Questions were going around, but no one seemed to know, that is except the ones taking part in the artistic display.

Distracted with what was happening above, it at first passed being noticed, that the rolling hill over by the lake was also coming into colour. With colourfully dressed children, large flowers, branches, and huge pumpkins, words were forming there too, so that a sign could be read from quite a distance. The words on the hill said: A Happy Day!

This was sudden and mysterious. All worked stopped, and the town folks were soon laughing and chatting out in the court yards, and in the meadows, and at the park with the children.

Indeed, it was true that no one quite knew what was going on, for the Celebration of Nature’s Colours and Artistic Displays was being put on by a traveling team of artists. Soon after Roden and Shane had chosen the theme

of the next performance they were to put on—celebrating the variety of the colours in the world, expressed in nature and in people—they heard of this artist team. They took a trip to their village to meet with them and plan something surprising and spectacular. And this was part of it.

To make it as fun and unexpected as possible, Roden and Shane had kept it a secret that the artistic team would be visiting their town, and display colours and designs in lovely and meaningful ways.

The sign in the sky changed to represent the shapes of familiar animals, or things of nature. The sign on the hill remained as it was, but there were more and more things popping up around town. Dancers dressed in colourful clothing, and of all shades of skin colour and hair types, began prancing through the walking streets spreading flower petals and twirling streamers. Autumn coloured leaves began to flutter down and swirl around, as if dancing to the tune of the wind through the trees.

Tables filled with fresh foods were displayed in such a way that all shades of the colours of the rainbow were represented, in striped fashion.

At last it was announced, and the news spread fast, that there was to be a stage play that afternoon in the town square—hosted by Roden and Shane and their helpers. This team had been planning and practicing for some time now, and today was the opening day. It would be put on for several days, so all who wanted to would have a chance to see it.

The colourful signs had faded away, the participants been dismissed, as the town readied itself for the show. People moved toward the seats provided. A team of musicians marched around the streets, as a way to let people know the time for the show had come. Those who wished to attend could simply fall in line and walk with them to the town square.

At last all were seated, and the show began.

It opened with a white backdrop, nothing at all but white; and sitting on the stage was a figure dressed in a drab, faded black coat. Beside him was a black dog, a black cat, and on his arm sat a large black bird. The figure was Shane, who had great control and a way with animals. The stage he sat on was of grey stones.

Roden trotted out from behind the stage, sporting his grand horse and buggy. The horse was covered in a grey coat, the buggy was painted all and only grey, and Roden had on his grey suit and grey hat. Sitting next to him was a lovely lady (played by Emilda). She was wearing a puffy grey dress, holding her delicate grey parasol.

“Good day to you,” Roden tipped his hat to Shane, “A grey-t” day it is.

“And to you too,” came the reply. “Glad to have you black. I mean back.”

Both seemed to have puzzled looks on their faces.

“I dare say,” said Roden from his buggy to the audience, “Something seems to be amiss, doesn’t it?”

Emilda nodded, and so did everyone watching. Shane jumped up from the stage and ran close to the front row.

“Any guesses? You, you there, what do you think is missing on this lovely day?”

“The colour is all gone! Where is the green or yellow?” the person responded and asked.

“Ah! The colour!” Shane responded, while the horse and buggy continued on to go behind the stage, and the actors would begin preparing for the next act.

“So you think this lovely world here on stage is lacking green and yellow? Well, we’ll have to change that, won’t we!” And off he zipped, leaving the audience wondering what would happen next.

A lovely lady—played by Celtellina—in a lovely yellow dress walked out with her yellow parasol in one hand and a huge bouquet of yellow daffodils fresh from her garden. A man, Roden in green overalls, wearing a green shirt and a green hat spread out some green artificial grass over the grey stones. A lady in a green dress placed some green plants in pots on the sides of the stage. They then went again behind the stage to change into another costume.

“Come my dear,” Shane invited the yellow-dressed lady. “Let us have a picnic on the grass. I have just the things you most like,” he said, while opening a large yellow basket. “Here are some green apples and pears; a bowl of freshly

picked peas. A cluster of green grapes, some green lettuce and celery, and of course a jar of pickles.”

“Why, thank you very much,” the lady said, then with a puzzled look, turned to the audience.

“It just seems something is missing... I just can’t imagine what it is. It’s the perfect day for a picnic, with the yellow sun shining, and there’s lush green grass to sit on, and a full basket of good foods to eat...”

Some called out, “There’s no red, no brown or orange, or purple!”

The gentleman looked surprised into the picnic basket and scratched his head.

“Say, say! I say you are absolutely correct!” Shane said.

“I’m so sorry, my dear. I do think I have forgotten a few things. Give me a moment and I shall be back. Enjoy gazing at the... ah...greenery of nature while you wait.” Shane was off the stage, taking the basket with him.

Walking around, looking first at one tree and then the other, the lady soon tired and began to stroll farther away, looking for something interesting and more colorful to see.

In walked Mr. Red. He was selling all sorts of goodies fit for a picnic. “Going on a picnic? I’ve got just the treats for you...!” Roden called out, dressed, of course, in red from head to toe. In his cart he was pushing there was a vast array of foods: tomatoes, strawberries, red bell peppers, red apples, pieces of water melon, radishes, cherries and so forth. “I’ve got all you need, take and enjoy your time outdoors!”

His assistant was a very red dressed lady, holding red bags to fill with food should someone desire it.

Shane and Celtellina both found themselves meeting up with this cart salesman to choose some foods. Soon a red bag was filled with a bit of everything, and off they walked to enjoy their picnic again. A basket with red and green did make it somewhat more interesting.

After they settled on the grass, one by one new people, items, and animals came on to the stage, each adding new colour. Things entered or were brought, such as a bright coloured parrot and a spotted dog. A peacock strutted out, and some white lambs were led to the stage. The black animals from the first scene found a spot, as well as the grey mare.

A huge bowl of fruit and veggies that showed a wide array of colours, flower pots and plant pots of all kinds of colours and shapes were set out to be seen. Even some grey and brown large rocks and boulders were rolled out to take their place. A large blue sheet was spread like a tent above the stage, displaying a sewn-on cloth rainbow. Before too long it looked more like proper nature—flowers and leaves of varying colours; animals and birds of different colours. Then other couples and families came out to picnic as well, with different shades of skin and types of clothing.

The show ended with all the players standing up to sing and do a choreographed dance to a newly written song that Emilda her mother Shaulic had written. They also chose the dance steps to this performed song.

When it ended, the crowd all cheered! It was clear that the world and its people were all part of a great big work of art, and each colour and shade was needed to add variety and contrast, and complement one another.

Too much of one thing, and it would cease to be appreciated. Not enough of another, and it would be missed, and something would seem lacking. Everyone in Wonder Hill, no matter what their eye, skin, or hair colour, added to the beauty of the land, and contrasted well with the colours of the nature surrounding.