

Lieutenant Helen Andros, a military physician, is caught in theocratic machinations that almost cost her life. Illegitimate, presumed orphaned, she learns her father's identity as one of Azgard's powerful Toltec lords and remains a target for the Temple of Kronos.

The Vision--Green Stone of Healing(R) Book One

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Green Stone of Healing® Series

The Vision

Book One

By C.L. Talmadge

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## FOREWORD

*“Quickly, Consort Mother! We sail or we perish. Now!”*

*Where mountains should stand tall only a mountainous wall of water hurtles toward us. The noon sky blackens; the ground groans and roils. I try to run. My legs cannot master the wild beast bucking beneath my feet. I stumble to my knees. The relentless harbinger of doom rolls on, drowning everything...*

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Gasping, my hands at my throat, I snap upright in my bunk. For a while all I do is breathe, in and out, over and over, relieved to be taking in air. *The nightmare again.* Tears slide down my cheeks.

I fumble for a light-stick and flick it on. The privilege of a private cabin cannot cheer me. It is a cell, jammed with a sleeping berth, a tiny desk, and one hard chair.

My home for the time being is packed with things that are now useless, like the dead link on the tabletop close to my head. There is nothing to link to anymore; no one is at the other end or anywhere else, for that matter. The light-sticks may still work, yet they cannot be replaced. The secret to their fabrication died out in ages past.

*Will we who survive become as forgotten as the thoughtsmiths who forged these devices so long ago?*

I cannot stand even the thought of that prospect. I cannot bear it if those who come after this nightmare truly ends do not recall who and what preceded them. If they do not understand where and how we went wrong, they will repeat our fate, just as we now suffer the downfall our ancestors might have endured had it not been for Kronos the Deliverer.

I surrender to despair, crumble into sobs. *Damn you, Kronos! You did us no favor. You should have left the Toltecs to die. There was a good reason they were being hunted to extinction.*

“That is perilously close to what some might call blasphemy, Little Consort.”

I shiver at the sound, reedy and echoing. In the gloom I can just make out the wall enclosing the foot of the bunk. It ripples and shimmers. A mist flows into the cabin and takes a stick-like shape. Soon the footless form

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floats before me, swathed in dark cowl and robe. Mercifully I cannot see the face or eyes. The voice is bad enough.

“Since when did the Mist-Weavers care about blasphemy, Maguari? And how did you get here? We must be a hundred fathoms below sea level. Should I inform the captain we have a stowaway?”

The cowl bobs from side to side. “I will not be staying long, Little Consort. And I have not the inclination to teach you fully about energy, so I cannot answer any of your questions.”

My breath hisses through my teeth. He is so irritating. It is a strange blessing to feel annoyed rather than devastated. Maybe that is his intent.

A disembodied smile pops into my mind. “I visit only to remind you that always there is hope, even in the darkest hour. Beyond destruction, life prevails. That is the way of energy.”

I am reduced to sniveling. “Did the green stone bring this about? Did we use it unwisely?”

The cowl swishes again. “No and no, Little Consort. The stone’s only power is to focus and direct energy. The choices made by spirits exercising their free will brought you to this place.”

I choke back more tears. “No one will remember us, Maguari. We will be forgotten and lost.”

He lifts one of his arms toward me. “Not so, Little Consort. You must tell the story of the Toltecs—and the Turanians. Through you and your words those who are born into humankind in later years will remember. You will stir their soul memories.”

“I can’t do it, Maguari. Where do I even begin? The full story is so much bigger than I am.”

“Yes, you can. Start with your dearest friend, the child of Kronos-Thunderhand. She inspired you to the greatness that helped you save from total annihilation those who chose to pay heed to your warnings.”

He refers to Helen Andros, the great-grandmother of my own granddaughter. “She married the only man I ever loved, Maguari. I probably should have hated her.”

He emits a strangled cackle, the Mist-Weaver equivalent of laughter. “Such pettiness of heart and spirit is not within you, Little Consort. I will leave you now to begin. I will not go far if you have need of me. Be at peace and relay the tale.”

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I find myself at the desk, in a seat that has no mercy on an old woman’s backside. I stare at my withered hands, at the primitive sheaf of wordskin

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before me. A Gridslate is also useless without the Grid. I will have to set this down the old- fashioned way.

I quail again. Who am I to talk about the destinies of nations and of worlds? I am Lady Mary Atlas. I was once Consort of Azgard, heretofore the richest, most powerful nation on earth. Is that enough? Does that give me the right to proceed?

*"If you do not have the right, then who does?"*

"Confound it, Maguari! Go away. I'll do it."

Yes. I will write, although maybe not in peace. I will write to remember, no matter how painful. I will write lest those who follow forget our legacy, flawed as it may be, because they did not live it as I did. I will try to give the honor to Helen and our descendants that they richly deserve but so rarely received. I will present truth as I know it. It may not be *the* truth, whatever that might be; even so, it is *my* truth, and the truths of those who shared their experiences with me.

May those who have passed beyond forgive my presumption in telling their story.

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