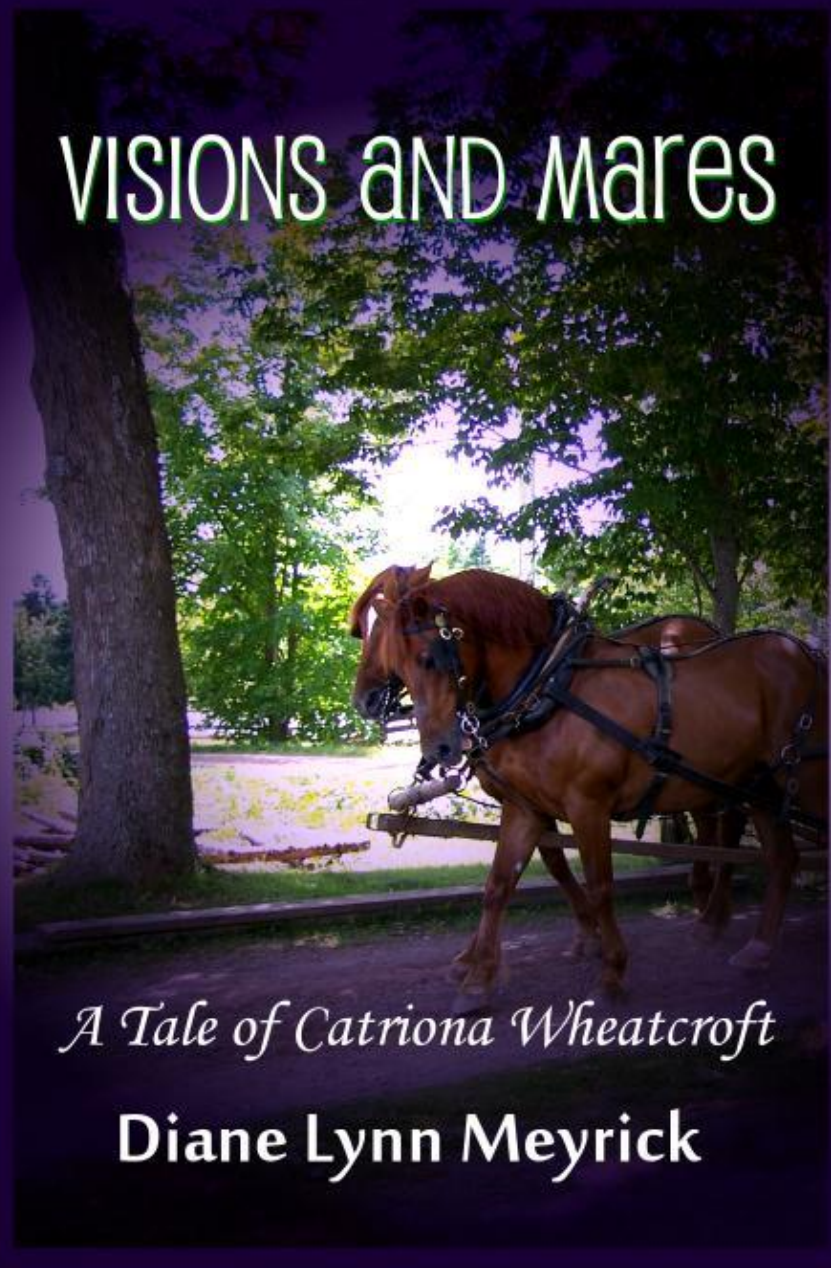


VISIONS and Mares



A Tale of Catriona Wheatcroft

Diane Lynn Meyrick

Visions and Mares by Diane Lynn Meyrick

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Please note

All places and characters in this book are fictitious.
This short story was written using Canadian spell

[About the Author](#)

Visions and Mares

Diane Lynn Meyrick

 Catriona slammed the book shut. What did Rod know about magic? He'd been an imbecile all his life, a regular sty in her eye. Little brothers irked her, and unfortunately, she had two of them.

 She'd show Rod. Just because he called magic stupid and said she had a better chance of marrying the duke of Petra than casting a spell, it didn't mean she wouldn't be a master sorceress someday. If anything, his words fuelled her desires.

 Grabbing her shawl, Catriona left her bedroom and raced downstairs where she found her mother preparing the evening ration.

 “You're not going out at this hour, are you, dear?” Her mother, adorned in a simple house dress, tucked a loose hair behind her ear as she studied her only daughter. “Your father will be home shortly. Evening arrives earlier these days and you shouldn't be out after dark.”

 Catriona rolled her eyes. Her mother always made excuses for her not to leave the dwelling. If she believed her elder, evil perched on the doorstep, waiting to snatch every innocent citizen of Maskil. Her mother thought of her as a child still, but at seventeen years old, she could take care of herself.

 “Momma, I'm going to Sari's to pick up a scroll. I'll be back before Papa arrives. Promise.” She didn't wait for her mother's protest, and slipped out the front door and onto the streets of Maskil.

 The small town had been settled more than two hundred years beforehand, but its population was small compared to southern towns. Catriona believed the war against the evil wizard Lindrum had reduced the number of inhabitants and discouraged others from settling. Although Maskil had won the battle, it hadn't been victorious. The constant threat of random attacks by Lindrum and his henchmen kept everyone on alert.

 “That all happened before I was born,” mumbled Catriona to herself as she made her way along Tintally Street. No one could honestly say Lindrum continued to threaten Maskil and its Aruam Castle. The man hadn't been seen for more than sixty years. But that didn't matter. If a horse vanished, a

building burnt or someone went missing, the citizens accused Lindrum.

When more severe crimes occurred, the people spoke of the prophecy. *The prophecy.* Catriona chuckled. *What a fantasy.* The dozen or so lines of Maskil's destiny had been written by a half-crazed man who claimed he'd been lost in the Caves of Confusion for fourteen years. By the time he returned to Maskil, he looked like an old man though he declared himself to be only thirty-one.

A company of Aruam Castle soldiers had set out to find and explore the mysterious Caves of Confusion, but no one ever found them. They weren't on any map in the castle archives and no official records existed of explorers visiting them. Still, stories from long ago passed through the years by word of mouth told of explorers finding the caves.

They were also fantasy, made up to entertain and scare small children, thought Catriona.

A female haufin with her arms brimming with bags didn't see the young girl and Catriona had to quickly side-step to avoid her. The short haufin measured only half of the human's height. *Oh, no.* Catriona rolled her eyes. *Another haufin without shoes. Didn't they know how rude it was to walk around town barefoot?*

Catriona believed the worse part of the prophecy was the fate of her home supposedly rested in the hands of dirty haufins. They were going to save Maskil and rid the land of the evil wizard. *The prophecy was a joke. Humans would reclaim the town for themselves.*

After all, humans made up over half the population of Maskil. They were the dominant race. The rest of the inhabitants consisted of a mixture of races and half-races. Dwarfs and elves were more predominate than haufins. Occasionally, a gnome, orc or other strange beast took up residence. These creatures, as Catriona liked to think of them, were always scrutinized by the castle guards to make sure they stayed within the Laws of the Land.

Catriona cringed every time she happened upon such a creature. They weren't natural. Her father agreed though he never came right out and said so. The look on his face betrayed his thoughts. Her mother wouldn't have such talk in her home; she saw all beings as equal.

Tintally Street appeared busier than usual and Catriona had to be careful not to bump anyone. With the end of this session's work term on the horizon, many visitors were inside

the town walls to shop and visit and to be entertained. Visitors came from all around but mainly from the outlining settlements and the nearby towns of Flasten and Petra.

Continuing on, she found Masonry Lane less congested. Sari's dwelling wasn't far now. Catriona hoped her teacher would allow her to practise her first serious incantation. As a student she had performed a few simple tricks, but she wanted to do more than jiggle a spoon and ripple a page in a book. She wanted to try something marvellous like levitate off the floor. *Now that would be enchanting.*

Four days ago, Catriona had asked again if she could borrow the scroll to learn levitation and once again, Sari had said, *No. You're not ready to perform the difficult incantation.*

But I am ready. I rippled pages for an hour today just to practise, Catriona had contended.

Crossing Masonry Lane, Catriona entered Pathway Suw, a narrow lane only wide enough to accommodate a single horse-drawn cart. Sari's dwelling nested between two larger structures. She knocked on the door and waited for an answer. When none came, she peeked in the front window.

"Hmph," she said to herself. "She's not here. That's just great." As she prepared to walk away, she heard a noise inside. "Maybe she *is* home." Catriona knocked again and tried the door handle. It turned. Opening the unlocked door, she called out, "Sari, are you here?"

No one answered. Catriona stepped inside for a better look. "Sari, are you here?" Looking around, she found the room empty. Everything appeared fine, but something didn't feel right; the sorceress never left her front door unlocked while away.

"Sari?" Catriona walked deeper into the dwelling and peeked into a small bedroom. It lay empty, too. "This is strange."

Scanning Sari's home, Catriona didn't detect anything out of place. Then she noticed scrolls unrolled on the table. "I suppose *this* is unusual," she said. "Sari doesn't leave scrolls lying about."

Although forbidden to read scrolls without permission, Catriona couldn't help herself and approached the table. She glanced at the open door to the outside, looking for any sign of Sari. There were none. She read the title on one of the scrolls. "Teleportation. Oh, my great goodness!" Rumours amongst the apprentices claimed Sari capable of teleporting herself to another location, but Catriona had never witnessed

this feat. "I wonder if she used this spell today." *It would explain the unlocked door. She hadn't left through it.*

Catriona read the next scroll. "Talk With Animals. If I wanted to do that, I would study Hauflin." She chuckled to herself. "Now here is an interesting one. Bigsby's Hand. Mmm, I could use this on Rod when he won't shut up." When she read the last scroll, she couldn't believe her eyes. *Sight Visitation.* She had mooned about working this spell.

She glanced at the door, the window and then around the room. *Should I? Yes, I should. I'm definitely ready. I'll surprise Sari by mastering this spell and make her proud to be my teacher. I'll be her best apprentice.* She rolled up the scroll and tucked it inside her skirt pocket then drew her shawl around her. After straightening the other scrolls, she went to the exit. As a last thought, she set the lock on the knob and closed the door behind her. She had done Sari a favour by securing her dwelling.

Catriona hurried along the dusty lane, anxious to get home and work on the incantation. She made the turn onto Masonry Lane and looked ahead to the crowds bustling along Tintally Street. She placed her hand on the outside of her shawl and felt the bulge of the scroll beneath.

As she entered Tintally Street, a dwarf bumped into her and almost knocked her to the wooden sidewalk. He frowned at her for not watching her step and continued on his way.

Scruffy and rude, she thought. *And no shoes. They were almost as bad as hauflins. So what if they were a little taller and had lived amongst humans longer.*

Suddenly, people in the crowd ahead screamed. Catriona looked up to see four large horses galloping down the centre of the street. The male riders wore armour and wielded swords. They swung at innocent bystanders too slow to get out of their way.

Catriona watched a citizen fall victim to the blade. She felt like screaming but covered her mouth. She had to get home, but she needed to pass the horses and fighters to do so.

Pushing her way toward the nearest shop, Catriona fumbled her way along the building, hoping to keep the wall of people between her and the intruders. Others had the same idea and soon, she found herself shoved toward the street. She stumbled along the sidewalk, looking for a chance to escape.

Finally, she came upon an alley. After tripping over a woman who struggled to keep her child near, she managed to

flee into the passage and behind the stores. As she ran, the noise faded in the distance. Terrified the fighters might rein their horses in her direction, she ran blindly past several buildings until she tripped over a wooden crate.

Picking herself up and pushing her skirt into place, she looked around to see how far she had come. "Barker's Leather Store," she said, out of breath. "Almost home." She turned to run, but an unknown force abruptly shoved her against the side of a building.

"Luvly. A beautiful woman with something I want." The dwarf who held her firm was barely tall enough to hold the dagger to her throat. His unkempt beard covered most of his face but could not hide the gaping hole created by two missing front teeth.

Panic stricken, Catriona stared at the man. She felt the cold steel against her skin and tried to stay as still as possible. "Wh...what do you want?" she stammered.

"Whatever you have." He grinned. "A few coins, a ring, a pretty trinket. If you have it, I want it."

Catriona swallowed hard. The only things she possessed were the small ring her mother had given her for her birthday and Sari's scroll. "I don't really have anything," she said, almost in tears. "I don't have any coins."

"Everyone has something," he said, warm spit spraying her chin. With his free hand, he poked around her shawl. When he felt the bulge, a smirk spread across his face. "Ah, everyone has something."

"You can't have that. It's not mine. I have to give it back," cried Catriona. "Please, don't take it!" Her knees began to weaken and cold needles pricked at the back of her neck.

"I'm making you sad," the dwarf appeared sympathetic. He ripped open her shawl and pulled out the scroll. "But you see, everyone has something."

Suddenly, the dwarf jerked forward and fell unconscious to the ground. Catriona looked up and saw her brother Rod. He had struck the dwarf in the back of the head with the hilt of his sword.

A wave of relief washed over her and although weak from fear, she stumbled forward and hugged her brother.

"I know. I know. I'm a hero," he gloated. "Just doing my duty."

Catriona pulled away and smacked him on the shoulder. "He scared my senses out of me and all you do is stand there and brag."

“It’s what I do best according to my sister.” Rod grinned. His tan-coloured hair shaded his eyes as he stared at her.

The dwarf moaned, but didn’t move.

“We better get out of here before he wakes or we’ll have more of a headache than him,” said Rod, turning for home.

Catriona picked up the scroll that had fallen to the ground, tucked it back into her pocket and drew her shawl tightly around her. She looked down at the dwarf’s feet. At least he wore boots.

“Another spell?” asked Rod as he led her toward home.

“Of course.”

“I hope it’s not for changing brothers into newts.”

She smiled. “Maybe it is.” There were times when she appreciated having her royal pain of a brother around.

“Momma sent me for you,” he said. “She worried because of the approaching night.”

“Did you hear the commotion?”

“Yes.” He looked at her. “It looked unfriendly, so I took the alley. It was luck.” He grimaced.

“Not destiny?” she quipped. He always said destiny governed their lives.

The smile returned. “You’re right. It had been written seasons ago that I’d rescue you and that you’d repay me by cleaning my armour.”

“I think you better reread the Book of Destiny.” Catriona smiled at him sideways.

Rod led the way between the buildings and climbed onto the board walk in front of their home. When he reached for the door knob, Catriona pulled at his sleeve.

“You’re not going to mention any of this to Momma, are you?”

“And become your personal body guard? Naw.” He shook his head. “That is not in our destiny.” He grinned and walked inside the dwelling.

The evening ration filled the table by the time Catriona and Rod entered the kitchen. Their mother ushered them to the basin to wash their hands and then to the table.

“You shouldn’t have been out,” her mother scolded. “Papa told me about a tragic event on the street. What if you had been caught up in that?” She shook her head. “I raised you to be responsible, but it takes only a second for Lindrum’s henchmen to destroy what we have.”

“Momma, you shouldn’t worry so. I’m fine.” If her mother knew about the dwarf in the alley, Catriona would be house-bound for weeks. “I went to Sari’s for only a minute.”

“I told your Papa we should settle at Callaw. It’s a fine city to raise a family. We’d be safe from all this violence.” She placed the last dish on the table and took a seat beside her husband. “Emerson, we should leave Maskil for safety’s sake.”

“Kathleen, we have been over this a hundred times. I can’t leave. Nor do I wish to. Maskil is our home. We can’t abandon it because we are afraid. If we do then Lindrum has won.”

Catriona agreed with her father. Maskil was their home. She’d been born here and wished to stay forever. She wanted to carry the conversation further but decided to concentrate on eating instead. The sooner she finished, the sooner she could escape to her room to work on the Sight Visitation scroll.

When the last bite of ration entered her mouth, Catriona removed her dishes from the table and put them near the washing basin. She slipped from the kitchen and went to her bedroom where she flopped on the bed to read the scroll.

“Sight Visitation.” She rolled the name off her tongue. It sounded enchanting. She began reading the ingredients needed to work the spell. Water. *We have plenty of that.* Oil from the green olive. *Momma has a vile in the cupboard.* Whole seeds from yellow rattle grass. She was unsure she’d recognise this plant if she saw it. Fennel grounded into a rough powder using a pestle of agate. *Where will I find an agate pestle?*

Catriona rolled onto her back and stared at the ceiling. Perhaps this would be more difficult than she’d thought. As the minutes ticked by, she wondered if she would ever be the great sorceress of her dreams. She imagined other sorceresses coming to her for advice and even the Lords of Aruam Castle seeking her consultation. Were these aspirations just fantasy? They would be if she gave up on every incantation.

She forced herself to continue reading the scroll and made a list of the items she’d need to purchase. By the time she finished, her mother peeked into the room to say good night.

She hid the scroll in a small box at the bottom of her closet and placed the supply list beneath her hair brush on the bureau. Then she changed into her nightgown, extinguished the oil lamp and crawled into bed. For a long time, she stared at the dark ceiling dreaming about what

images she might see in her vision. Maybe she could spy on her brother, or view a lord in the castle or see where the evil Lindrum hid. She chuckled at the thought of being able to see what her friends were doing and taunt them about it later. Then they'd take her magic seriously.

Catriona nodded off and dreams filled her sleep. Most night images amazed her. One horrified her.

* * *

Catriona tried and failed to shake the dream that kept replaying in her mind since she had awakened two hours beforehand. Again she saw the terrible image of a young man tied to a tree and struggling to break free. The branches of the tree grew thick roots, slithering down the helpless body and planting themselves in the soil. Inch by inch, the growth consumed him until he disappeared from view. The look of horror on the man's face as the roots enveloped him haunted her.

Why had she dreamt of such a tree? Nothing like it grew inside the walls of Maskil and she had never read about it in the many books that were forced upon her during her lessons. She wondered if one truly existed.

Catriona shook her head to release the images. She had to concentrate. The supply list and the few coins she owned were in a small satchel belted around her waist. She hoped the coins were enough to buy everything she needed to work the Sight Visitation spell. Stepping into Forest Bakery and Herbs Shop, a small bell rang overhead. A woman wearing a neat dress looked up from the other side of the counter.

"Good morning, dear," she said with a smile.

"Good morning." Catriona smiled back at the dwarf. She wished another shop in Maskil sold the quality herbs needed for the incantation but none did. She tried to frequent shops operated by humans, but today, she needed the proper herbs. Sari always spoke highly of this shop and to make the Sight Visitation spell work, she needed quality herbs.

Walking down the aisle, Catriona pulled the list from her satchel. "Whole seed from the yellow rattle grass, eyebright, fennel," she mumbled to herself. She scanned the labels of the sacks, bottles and packages. There were so many.

"Do you need some help, dear?" The shop owner had come around the counter.

“Oh, I don’t know. I’m just looking for a few things,”
Catriona stammered, looking down at the dwarf.

“What is it you need?”

“Yellow rattle grass. I mean, whole seed from yellow rattle
grass,” said Catriona. “Do you have that?”

“Yes, we do. We have whole seed in packets of three sizes.
My mate gathers it to the south, along the Shulie River. How
much do you need?”

Catriona checked her list. “Just a teaspoon.”

“The small packet will do then.” The owner pulled a
packet from the shelf. “Anything else?” She waited for
Catriona to check the list.

“Fennel. I need about a tablespoon of fennel root.”

“Spring or autumn root?”

Catriona bit her lip. The scroll didn’t say. Then she
remembered what Sari had said, autumn roots were stronger.
Sight Visitation was a strong incantation; it must need the
strength of autumn roots. “Autumn root, please.” She
beamed, proud of herself for remembering that fact.

“Mum!” A voice from the back interrupted the two. They
looked up to see a male dwarf enter the shop. Catriona
recognised the plain blue uniform he wore as that of a regular
soldier in the Lords’ Army.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t know you were with a customer.” The
young man nodded at Catriona.

“I’ll be with you in a minute, dear,” the owner said to her
son.

“I have to go.” He pointed toward the door. “All ranks
have been summoned to the castle.” He spoke as if he did this
every day. “I’ll probably miss the evening ration.”

“Go then. It’s your duty.” As he turned to leave, she
added, “Argon, please, be careful. We never know when
things are serious or seriously exaggerated.”

Her son’s smiled lit up his face. “Of course, Mum.” He
gave a little wave and left.

The shop owner helped select the rest of the ingredients
on the list. Thankfully, Catriona had enough coins to pay for
the items. On the way home, she wondered about the
commotion at the castle and why all the soldiers were
summoned. She had been to the castle on several occasions,
but had only been as far as the foyer and the Throne Room.
Her father worked as a cartographer for the Lords, but she
was not permitted to enter his work space. Not that she
wanted to. She had no use for maps.

She wondered if the evil wizard, Lindrum, was somehow involved in the fuss at the castle. But how could he be? He had to be dead; after all, he was only human, not an elf who could live four hundred years. Still, her curiosity piqued. Why were all the soldiers summoned to Aruam Castle?

When she arrived home, she found the dwelling empty. This gave her plenty of space to work the incantation without interruptions. She took the stairs to her room two at a time. Once inside, she tossed her shawl and satchel on the bed and went to her work table. She laid each ingredient on the wooden surface and aligned them in the order they appeared in the incantation recipe.

“Whoops! I almost forgot about oil of green olive.” She went downstairs to the kitchen and measured one cup of oil. Back in her room, she continued measuring and aligning the ingredients until everything was ready.

Catriona paused and looked at the many dishes in front of her. If she mixed them correctly, she’d work her first worthy spell. Steadying her hand, she carefully picked up the oil of green olive and poured it into the wooden bowl. She stirred it three times with a wooden spoon, just like the recipe instructed. *This is like baking a cake*, she thought.

Next, she picked up the fennel. “Fennel grounded to a rough powder using a white agate pestle in a clay mortar. Huh? What’s so special about crushing it with a stone? I’ll just use the back of a spoon. That’ll do.”

She held the small dish in her hand and crushed the fennel root with the utensil. When she was done, she admired her work. “Looks great.” She added this to the oil in the bowl.

For almost a half hour, Catriona added, stirred and crushed until all the ingredients were mixed together. She stared at the finished concoction. *I hope this works. If it doesn’t, what a mess to clean up.*

Following the directions on the scroll, she made a circle with the mixture in the centre of the room. The recipe instructed her to use the entire potion except one tablespoon to make the vision circle. Once completed, she sat cross-legged in the ring. The tablespoon of mixture and the scroll lay in front of her.

“Rub the remaining potion on the palm of the hands,” read Catriona. She poured the mixture into one hand and then gently rubbed it onto both palms. It felt sticky and warm. She continued reading from the scroll. “Concentrate on a person or place you would like to see. Well, now, this is the

difficult part. What or who should I spy on?" She giggled thinking about the possibilities.

"Wouldn't it be something if I could envision Lindrum? I could tell everybody the old man was dead if I see his grave." *Lindrum*, she thought. Would she really be able to see him? Surely he must be long gone. Expired. As she thought, she continued to rub her hands together. The potion began to warm her palms.

"It's silly, but I wonder what he looked like." No, she thought, there were better things to see than an old man who terrorized Maskil so many years ago. Still, she wondered if he still lived? For a moment, her thoughts consumed her as she pondered what vision she wanted to see and if Lindrum remained alive.

Her hands became painfully hot and she stopped rubbing them. "Ouch!" She looked at her palms and saw a yellow light begin to glow. It grew until it covered both hands and flooded into the air.

"It's working! I have to think of something quick." She could hardly sit still knowing she had performed the difficult spell. Now, she had to think of what vision she wanted to see. As she tried to think of something, she noticed walls taking shape in the yellow light that now stretched from the floor to the ceiling.

Looking deeper into the image, the walls became clearer. They were black stone. She saw two figures facing each other. She sat back, wondering whom she was watching. The middle-aged man in the long black robe held a white staff in his hand. The image became clear enough for her to see a red-stoned ring on his out-stretched hand. He spoke to the person in front of him ... no, gave them orders.

She looked at the other person, a woman in a flowing green dress and short black cape. Her blonde hair whirled around her face as if the wind came from every direction.

Catriona gasped and cried out, "It's Sari!"

Suddenly, the sound of wind filled the small bedroom and the two figures in the image looked at Catriona.

"Sari!" she cried. The wind began to blow her hair about her face as she watched her teacher.

"Catriona! Close the vision!" commanded Sari.

The robed man grinned at the intruder. Something in his dark eyes terrified Catriona.

"Catriona, you must close the vision!" repeated Sari.

Catriona didn't know what to do. *How do I close the vision?* She stared at her hands. *Maybe if I wipe the potion from my palms, it'll close.* She stood and looked around for something to clean her hands with. When she tried to walk out of the circle, she found her feet stuck to the floor. Small items in her room began to take flight and whirl around her.

Panic stricken, she tried in vain to move her feet. Wicked laughter filled her ears. She looked up and the man in the robe pointed his staff at her. An unknown force began to draw her into the vision. In desperation she attempted to remove the potion from her palms by rubbing her hands against her dress, but it wouldn't come off.

She looked to Sari for help, but her teacher had problems of her own. Three large men dressed in armour surrounded her. The sorceress made circular motions with her hands and Catriona believed she attempted to cast a spell.

The unknown force drew Catriona deeper into the vision. The wind increased and the coolness from the stone room made her skin tingle. She could do nothing to stop her body from entering the vision. She screamed with terror as her feet lifted off the floor.

All at once, her bedroom door flew open and Rod dashed in. He took one look at his sister floating toward the vision and threw himself at her. Catriona flew against her dresser and dropped to the floor. When she looked up, she saw her brother standing in the Sight Visitation circle with his sword drawn.

The robed man stopped laughing and stared with deep-seeded interest at Rod. He whirled his staff above his head then pointed it directly at the boy. A flash of red light appeared and in an instant flung Rod into the vision. His sword fell to the bedroom floor.

Catriona screamed. "Rod! No! Let him go! Rod!"

The mysterious man grasped the boy in front of him, smiling a cynical smile. Then he glanced at Catriona, gave a wave with his staff and the vision disintegrated.

"No!" screamed Catriona. She ran to the circle and picked up the sword. Looking around her feet, she noticed the potion on the floor disappearing. The potion on her hands had also vanished. She couldn't reopen the vision.

Catriona dropped the sword and ran from the room. She needed the Lords' help. She raced through the streets of Maskil, taking the shortest path to Aruam Castle. Out of

breath, she dashed through the front doors and looked for the passage to the Throne Room.

A castle guard stepped in front of her and she came to an abrupt stop. "State your name and business."

"I need help," she breathed. "Someone took my brother. I need to see the Lords."

"Who took your brother?" The guard spoke calmly.

"I don't know!" She searched her mind. *Who was he?* "He's about 40 or 50. Human! He wore a black robe and had a magical staff! Sari was with him! She'll know who he is!" *If she escapes. What if she doesn't?*

"Where did you see him?" asked the guard.

"My bedroom! In a vision!" she cried. "I cast a Sight Visitation spell revealing this man in a dungeon or something! I had to think of someone to visit, but I must have done something wrong!" Then it came to her. She *had been* thinking of someone: Lindrum. *Impossible! It couldn't have been. But who else could it have been?* "I think it was Lindrum," she sobbed, dropping to her knees. "Oh, my great goodness. I think Lindrum captured my brother."

A great pain filled her chest. The commotion in the castle foyer became unbearable. It blurred her vision so she could not see, swelled her nose so breath could scarcely pass and throbbed in her ears until she believed the pressure would make her head explode.

Lindrum had captured Rod because of her spell. She'd never see him again. The pain grew intolerable and Catriona collapsed to the ground.

~ * The End * ~

About the Author

Diane Lynn Meyrick was introduced to fantasy when she was thirteen years old. Since then, she's had one foot in the fantastical world and one in reality. She loves creating worlds to rule over and meeting characters of all races living on the edge.

Diane lives in Nova Scotia, Canada. She's currently working on a series of fantasy novels. *Visions and Mares - A Tale of Catriona Wheatcroft* is a short story about one of the characters found in the fantasy novels. Diane wrote it so she could better understand the young woman.