

The Gathering

Cecelia Smith

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The Gathering

She Who Need Not Be Told looked carefully at all the activity around her and smiled. It is said, by those who know, she has the most understanding smile anywhere. The time appointed for the Gathering was at hand. She must notify She Whose Name Cannot Be Spoken. It is also said that She Whose Name Cannot Be Spoken knows the hour of the Gathering. Nevertheless, it was her duty to notify her that the Gathering which would change everything was now. She would fulfill her duty. That was the law.

Marita, who held the ancient office of She Who Need Not Be Told, sang the call, a rippling sound which caused all activity to stop and everyone to listen instantly. She sang again a long, sustained note which gave the invitation to prepare for the big event. The playful activity of her court immediately changed to one of purpose and preparation. The long awaited Gathering was about to begin and each member of Marita's court knew exactly what their particular function was. It seemed that in an instant the court was changed from one of playful fun to one of purposeful preparation. Marita rose from her seat in one flowing movement, her majestic robes of shimmering fabric with all the colors of the rainbow shone around her. To those in the far corners of the court she did resemble a rainbow, or did her graceful flowing robes changed her into a butterfly with rainbows streaming from her gracious figure. They were not sure.

The throng in her court parted on cue to form an aisle as she seemed to float to the door on her way to the domain of She Whose Name Cannot Be Spoken. Three were the number of the ones whose duty was to manage the Gathering. One was the number who would attend without being told. After she informed She Whose Name Cannot Be Spoken, then together they would go to the court of the Silent One, then all three would travel to the place of the Gathering for the great event.

Marita knew exactly what she was feeling. It was almost a new feeling. A tingle, an anticipation, an excitement and almost the urge to hurry. Hurry is not a tool she needed now, so she laid it aside and moved with calm excitement to the edge of her domain where she knew the Opposers would do their duty and attempt to delay or detain her. This part of the well planned event had to be. The Opposers appear unpleasant, but their work was also a part of the grand plan leading up to the Gathering, and must be done. Their work was also the law. They would do all they could to delay or divert her as she crossed their domain, which she had to do to reach the domain of She Whose Name Cannot Be Spoken. They were almost fair and as the rules state they had to remain in their own domain, but they were clever and would set traps at both borders. She had held the office of She Who Need Not Be Told for an eternity and was aware of all the plans and schemes of the Opposers. In fairness to them she refused the specifics of their plans and recognized only the bare outlines. This would make their work more interesting for them. The folk from her domain

would not cross the boarder with her. This she must do alone.

In her own domain all along the path to the boarder, she met folk intent on doing the work of preparation for the Gathering. There was music everywhere as songs were the main tools the folk used to do their work. They danced and greeted her with welcoming songs as she passed by. It is not often that she walked about the domain. But each one knew where she was going and why. Often on her journey to the boarder a few folk would leave their task and walk with her for a while. They sang with her and everyone listened to the music. As she reached the boarder and looked over to the adjoining domain difference in the two was immediately observable.

After crossing the boarder she was again alone. She sang one last melody allowing the notes to form a cocoon around her frame and stepped over the line into the domain of the Opposers. The crystal notes of her song shimmered around her causing the rainbow of her majestic robe to glow even brighter. All her colors were needed to cross the domain of the Opposers.

Marita took two solitary steps before Mantu appeared. He was dressed in the rarest shades of red. His cloak draped casually over his shoulder as though he was merely strolling about his domain with no particular thing to do. She knew differently. He too knew this was the hour of the Gathering and was prepared to do everything in his power to stop or delay her as long as possible. His actions would be civilized and covert, but he would be ruthless. Graciously the two domain heads bowed greetings to each other.

“A fine day for a stroll, Marita,” Mantu purred, on his best behavior.

“That it is,” she replied, her understanding smile speaking volumes.

“And where are you off to my lovely neighbor?” queried Mantu in his most innocuous voice.

Marita smiled as she resisted with casual elegance his effort to nudge her off the path she had chosen as the quickest one through the domain of the Opposers. “I’m on my way to see She Whose Name Cannot Be Spoken,” was her soft and candid reply.

“And why is that?” he asked again with a subtle nudge to divert her feet from the path of her choice. Her resistance was firm enough to warn him this was not going to work. He knew that his opening foray would not cause her to change course, so he fell in step with her as she glided ahead of him without a reply to his question. Beneath her voice she hummed the notes which strengthened her shield of music. “Well?” he said as he raised his hand to beckon the Doubters to come to his aid.

“The hour of the Gathering is now,” she told him candidly, “and I go to notify She Whose Name Cannot Be Spoken.” They both knew that truth must always be spoken by everyone in her domain, and as leader of that domain she would never not tell the truth.

“I see,” Mantu was not bound by truth as she was, thus he could and did imply he did not

know this. Marita threw back her head and laughed, a merry and melodious sound that pushed back the cacophony of sounds the Doubters were making as they rushed in from all sides to surround the pair of leaders walking on the path, now side by side. The joyful sound of her laughter stopped the tiny folk who came as close to Marita and Mantu as they dared. They also ceased their discordant shrieks for an instant. The instant they brushed against the shield of shimmering music which protected Marita, they screamed even louder and backed away. All the tiny folk spoke at once in high whining voices which created a gaggle of sound loud enough to deafen any who was foolish enough to be in ear shot of them without a protective shield as Marita wore.

She did not slow her progress, but continued her glide along the path she had chosen. The cacophonous sounds of the Doubters all around her blended into a continuous wail as they skipped and pranced to get her attention, which she would not give. They chanted, in harmony for the first time, “she’s not real, you can’t touch her. She not real, you can’t touch her.” Over and over they chanted, their voices raising to an unbelievable shrill. Mantu waved his arms as though he were conducting an orchestra. This signal from their leader sent the Doubters into a frenzy of shrieking and prancing. Marita was unaffected. Her shield held protecting her from hearing them. Gazing steadily upon the path she was taking allowed her to see the Doubters only with her peripheral vision where they appeared as waving shrubs answering a friendly breeze, their stature being so small. She continued on her way not moving from the path which would take her to the border of the domain of She Whose Name Cannot Be Spoken.

So intent was Marita that she did not notice the wave with which Mantu dismissed the doubters. Suddenly she noticed that she and Mantu were again alone on the path. They would be punished for their failure to divert her, this she knew. Mantu was unforgiving in his role as leader in the domain of the Opposers. Himself he would forgive, for any and all failings, but the folks he led did not come under any such graciousness.

The Believers soon replaced the doubters. They rushed at Marita and tried to get her attention. At first they too emitted a babble of sounds as each one had something different to say. Mantu shook his head slowly, a signal for the Believers to commence a chant. They shouted, stomped and grunted until a rhythm was gained. Then one of them sang in a very guttural voice, “she’s so beautiful,” stomp, stomp, stomp. All the others responded, “make her our queen,” stomp, stomp, stomp. The guttural one repeated his line and the throng responded with theirs. Over and over they stomped and chanted, stomped and chanted. Marita allowed the rhythm of their chant to direct her steps, which quickened in response to it.

Seeing this Mantu dismissed the Believers with another wave of his hand. He had hoped the Believers would at least slow her down for a while, their work had the opposite effect. Now they had traveled a greater distance than they would have without the quickening chant from

the Believers. She turned full face to the dashing figure at her side and again laughter her melodious laugh. There was nothing malicious in her laughter, merely a full enjoyment of the moment. He returned her laughter with a conspiratorial chuckle of his own, implying they were engaged in a game and both knew the outcome. But to Mantu this was earnest and he fully intended to delay her past the hour of the gathering. He would give no quarter; this she knew.

Marita maintained the faster pace and Mantu kept up with her without effort. “Why don’t you join me in the glade up yonder for a spot of tea?” he asked her. “All this walking is making me thirsty? How about it?”

“Thank you, Mantu,” her smile never wavered, “but my mission is somewhat urgent and I may not delay.” This she said with a pleasant firmness in her voice. He tried his nudge again, without result. Mantu whistled a piercing sound which echoed in swirling patterns around the pair, bounced off the lifeless trees flanking the path and spread out in a sustained sound throughout his domain. The urgency of the sound froze everyone in the domain, except Marita. The folk rushed to the path in throngs. Marita walked on, undisturbed. However, she did hum a strengthening sound causing her cocoon of music to glow bright and firm around her.

The folk in the domain of the Opposers were afraid of the brightness of Marita’s shield, but their greater fear was of Mantu. They knew the punishment would be great if they failed to delay her. His choice was to keep her from crossing the boarder altogether, but they were unable to touch her, making this task very difficult. Those who came close to her shield felt it as a searing pain and blisters appeared on any part of their body the shield touched. They thronged the path ahead of her, but cringed and backed away as she came close. This slowed her steps somewhat as she did not like to see their pain, but she did not stop. Step by step she marched long the path, happy for the advantage gained by the faster pace while the Believers were there. A few brave Opposers linked arms and stood on the path directly in front of the pair. Mantu smiled his approval. But as she dauntlessly approached the glow from her shield shinned on them causing them to scream in extreme pain and fling themselves off the path, allowing her to continue on. This was repeated time and again with different ones, hoping for a different result, tried to block her path. It never came.

The boarder was in sight and Mantu and his folk had not yet delayed her progress. He, himself, would have to stop her. His last ploy was to appeal to her graciousness and sympathy. He clutched his stomach and pretended to stumble, falling right into her and causing her to place one foot off the path. She knew he was not hurting, so she ignored his attempt to appear in pain. Suddenly he darted in front of her raising himself to his full stature, which was awesome indeed.

“Stop, and stop now,” he shouted almost in a rage. For the first time since she entered the path, Marita stopped walking. She was very close to Mantu, so close their noses were inches

away from each other. The great understanding for which she was famous shone brightly in her eyes, and lit her beautiful face with a smile.

“That is not possible,” she said in a soft voice. “I must inform She Whose Name Cannot Be Spoken of the hour of the gathering. You have done a splendid job in your attempts to delay me. I commend you and your folk. They have done well. Now move or I will move you.” The firmness with which she said ‘I will move you,’ caused her shield to expand toward him and its light to wash over him. To his credit he did not scream or flinch in the presence of his folk, but he did step aside as he was compelled to do. In a few more steps, she was at the boarder, she turned and waved goodbye to the gathered folk behind her and stepped over the boarder.

The difference was night and day. Where the domain of the Opposers was dark and gray the vegetation dead or dying, here all was bright, cheerful, fragrant and vibrant. Colors were everywhere and the folk were dressed in the bright hues of cheerfulness. There was a welcoming throng to greet her and to sing and dance for her. A visit from She Who Need Not Be Told was very rare. Each domain had their own duties and areas of work, there were little or no overlap. Communications between the domains were done in the mysterious towers at the center of each domain. Those who did not work in the towers did not know how those communications were done. Thus they only knew to expect a visit at the entrance from the Opposers domain. They knew the hour the Gathering was at hand and had prepared for both events.

After acknowledging the welcoming folk and singing a brief song for them, Marita was escorted to the court of She Whose Name Cannot Be Spoken. The court was sparse and almost deserted as word of the hour caused the folk to leave for the various parts of the domain where they were needed. She Whose Name Cannot Be Spoken was standing in the center of the court, arms outstretched in welcome. The two leaders embraced, pushed gently away from each other, smiled and embraced again.

“Welcome Marita my love,” She Whose Name Cannot Be Spoken said with a soft smile in her voice, “welcome. Let us have tea, while you rest from your journey. Did Mantu give you much resistance?”

“Yes he did. He brought out all the stops; so I commended him and his folk for doing their duty well before I crossed the boarder. They were splendid, splendid indeed.” She chuckled softly at the memory.

The two women sat on soft cushioned chairs facing each other over a low table which glowed softly and sipped fragrant tea and chatted. To all appearances this was merely a friendly visit by two leaders of different domains with nothing urgent to accomplish. They were relaxed and comfortable, their laughter filling the court. The happiness they enjoyed overflowed and those who served in the court fairly danced as they brought the tea and crumpets to the table.

After they were thoroughly refreshed, Marita sang. All the folk who served in the court stilled their scurrying and sat on pillows to listen to her song. She sang of the hour of the Gathering. She sang of the ages of preparation which went into making the Gathering possible; she sang of the noble work performed by the Opposers which gave courage and strength to the workers over the ages as they were resisted the snares of the Opposers. She sang of those who would Gather and the changes that would come afterward; and lastly she sang of love and the joy of being in the world. Then she was finished.

In unison all rose and left the court. Each knew their own task and went to perform it; lightened by the song of Marita. The two leaders joined hands and left the court heading for the domain of The Silent One. Their path was through meandering meadows filled with flowers, tall grasses, gently streams and friendly folk preparing for the Gathering. They were greeted with joyful respect by all the folk along the way. Folk paused in their work to wave or sing or shout, however the joy of seeing the two leaders struck them. Before long they reached the border and crossed over into the domain of The Silent One.

As was fitting this was a subdued domain. There was silence over everything and everyone. It was not a somber silence, but a most restful and refreshing silence. It was a silence in which the folk worked and played with uncommon joy. The women basked in the stillness all around them. In lowered voices, so as not to disturb the silence, they greeted the welcoming party and were led with dignity to the court of The Silent One. They entered the richly carpeted court, their steps soundless, muffled into silence by the carpet. The Silent One was waiting for them. A group hug brought the three together in the center of the court. Softly, he held each one, smiling so warmly as to melt even dew. They rested for awhile in the plush and muffling center court as they told the Silent One of Marita's journey to inform She Whose Name Cannot Be Spoken, and their journey to him. The Silent One did not speak, he never spoke, but everyone with whom he had interaction knew what he needed them to know. Although words were used in his domain, as they were now by the two women, it was not often, nor were there many of them. The pictures he painted mind to mind were all that were necessary for him to communicate his intent. The women preferred words, thus they spoke while The Silent One communicated with them, and everyone, with mind pictures.

He rose and went to the huge fireplace almost covering the entire back wall of his court. From the mantle over the fireplace he removed a sheathed sword which had hung there for ages untold. He notched the sword to a place on his belt, but there was no clicking sound as one might expect. This was the signal. The activity in the court which had appeared leisurely while the trio chatted, became purposeful, swift and extremely focused. Everyone knew their duty and silently performed it. The three leaders left immediately heading for the Meadow of the Gathering. Opposers were not permitted in the domains of the three, but they had the freedom to roam everywhere else and oppose the work done by the folk from those domains. Thus it was known as soon as the trio crossed the border into the land of the Meadow of the Gathering they would encounter Opposers and perhaps Mantu himself.

Sure enough that was exactly what happened. They had not gone many steps into the land, when Mantu strolled up to them. He was as urbane and pleasant as was his usual demeanor, but he had a glint in his eyes and a hardness behind his smile which told them he meant to succeed in this work. That work in a nut shell was to prevent the Gathering from taking place altogether. All three leaders greeted him warmly, but did not stop to chat. That did not deter Mantu, who fell in step with them and started his own conversation.

“So, the hour of the Gathering is at hand I heard. I suppose that’s where you’re heading.” He did not wait for a reply. “The Gathering is slated to be a most interesting event. It has not happened in eons, so I do not want to miss it myself.” The chuckle with which he ended that sentence was meant to be menacing. The three did not glance his way, but continued their journey at a comfortable pace, with the two women flanking The Silent One. They walked as one being, now allowing Mantu to come between them, although that was his obvious intent. Mantu with graceful agility skipped from side to side and occasionally jumped in front of them to walk backwards facing them. All this he did in an attempt to interrupt their journey and cause them to delay.

His failure to wedge between them and cause a separation only spurred him on to greater effort. He dashed up the path several paces, turned around and faced the advancing trio.

“Be reasonable now,” he pleaded. “It is necessary for me to at least delay you, even though it is clear, I am not strong enough to stop you.” His voice was loaded with self pity, attempting to appeal to the sympathy he knew the women possessed. She Whose Name Cannot Be Spoken slowly shook her head and ruefully smiled at him.

For the first time since entering the land she spoke. Her voice quiet and penetrating, she told him how much he was respected; how he had performed nobly a task which went against the nature of the people of the land; how persistent he and his folk had been; and ended by telling him to take comfort that the hour of the Gathering was now. All that she said as the trio steadily advanced and Mantu walked backward facing them. At the end of her words, Marita sang a very lovely song, sending waves of light and sound ahead. The radiance reached and covered Mantu and he wept. Turning around he fled from them to the edge of the Meadow where the people of the land were gathering.

All the people from the land had come to the Meadow. Young and old, small and big, short and tall, all the people bar none were in the Meadow. The path on which the trio were traveling climbed upward to the hill overlooking the Meadow. It ended in a promontory forming a natural platform for the three leaders. Below the people were talking and their voices rose in waves of sound as they greeted and acknowledged one another. At the edges of the crowd the folk from the domain of the Opposers were attempting to get the people to turn around and leave the Gathering. Flanking the crowd and protecting them from the wiles of the Opposers were three rows of folk from the leaders’ domains. The first row were the folk from Marita’s domain, then stood the folk from the domain of She Whose Name Cannot Be

Spoken, and last of all between the Opposers and all the rest stood The Silent One's folk. These each held a sword, blue and shining, exact replicas of the sword the Silent One word at his side. The Opposers were agitated darting from place to place seeking the attention of the people to entice them to leave.

The trio on the promontory linked hands and a hush much like to the hush in the domain of The Silent One descended on the gathered crowd. All eyes turned to the hill on which the trio stood. She Whose Name Cannot Be Spoken spoke, a soft clear voice which everyone heard as being addressed to them personally.

"The hour of the Gathering is now." A great cheer rose from the crowd. Although each had their own version of what the Gathering would be, no one knew for sure what would happen. The stories of previous Gatherings had faded long ago. It had been long in the past that the idea of a Gathering was passed on to the people by the folk from the domain of She Whose Name Cannot Be Spoken. Those who had the visions of this event did not comprehend what it would be. All they could manage were glimpses, which they interrupted according to what they knew about life. Some spoke of it as the time when they would be no more people. They and those who followed them made elaborate plans to hide in caves so that the people may continue after the Gathering. Others had different visions, and still others dreamed of the Gathering as being something which would take all the people from the land to domains where each and everyone would become a leader. The Opposers were happy with the differences and used them to ferment strife among the people. It was all the folk from Marita's domain could do to prevent outright war and slaughter. Sometimes there were hostilities and many of the people gave their lives whenever this happened.

Nevertheless, all the people were there in the Meadow not quite sure how the event would unfold. They stopped cheering and the hush returned.

"Over the ages, there have been many Gatherings such as this one. Each held its own splendor; each accomplished according to the plan for its fulfillment. There has been many and varied ideas as to what this Gathering will do. No one had a completed version of this event. This is as it should be. With the glimpses you have been given, you have prepared for this hour. You have performed admirably and although it may have appeared you were making little or no progress, this hour would not be if you had not. I salute each and every one of you, and commend you for the excellent work you performed to make this Gathering possible. We could not be here without you and your wonderful efforts. The changes to follow are joyful ones, filled with the awesome glory you each bring to this occasion."

She Whose Name Cannot Be Spoken fell into silence. A radiance like unto liquid gold spread from the trio and enveloped the entire Meadow. The Silent One drew his sword from its sheath, and raised it above his head and held it pointing upward for a long moment. In one swift movement, he pointed it downward and held it steady again for a long moment. Then he raised it swiftly to his chest and pointed it to his right across the chest of She Whose Name

Cannot Be Spoken. He held it there for the same amount of time. Then with the same swiftness as before he swung the sword across his chest and Marita's and pointed to his left. On cue Marita sang. With the very first note of her song, The Silent One pointed the sword to the back of the crowd. All heads turned and bodies followed as the crowd turned to face the point the sword indicated.

Marita's song contained no words. Each one felt she was singing to them personally. The Opposers began to back away, slowly at first, then in a rush as they galloped from the Meadow seeking the shadow of the surrounding forest. Mantu was the only Opposers to remain. He knew the proceedings could no longer be halted, and felt a sense of failure. At the exact point where the sword aimed, colors began to form. The colors grew into the brightest rainbow any of the people had ever seen. It was a compact rainbow, framing an entrance that was not there before. On either side of the entrance the folk from The Silent One's domain stood, swords drawn and held before their faces. Those from Marita's domain joined in her song, a choral background supporting her clear ringing voice, which rode on top of their music a counterpoint and blending all at once. All of this majestic ceremony caused many of the people to weep tears of sheer joy.

Into the music, not as an interruption but as a punctuation, She Whose Name Cannot Be Spoken gave the command. "Go." The folk from her domain ushered the people in pairs through the rainbowed entrance into the land from which they had come. It was changed. The contours of the land remained the same as it was before but everything else was different. There was a brightness never before seen in the land. Every tree, every house, every garden hoe, every street, every farm, conveyance and shrub emitted a glow. There were flowers, butterflies, rainbows and darting lights. A joyous music filled the air, and there was a fragrance coming from all directions. The people were astonished and delighted. They darted from object to object and marveled at the beauty they felt coming from whatever they touched. Nothing was the same, yet all were familiar to the people. They looked at one another in awe as each one was beautiful beyond description.

When the last pair of the people had traveled through the rainbowed entrance to their new land, Marita and her folk ended the song. Mantu who witnessed everything from outside the folk holding the swords by the entrance, sighed and made his way with slow weary steps to the promontory to stand with bowed head before the trio. She Whose Name Cannot Be Spoken took a step towards the humbled figure. All three of them embraced him and helped him relieve his sorrow. The folk from his domain drifted back from the shadows of the forest and milled around the promontory where all the folk had gathered.

Everyone relaxed a bit. The Opposers did not oppose, the singers did not sing. Instead each Opposers stood next to a folk from the domain of The Silent One. Marita's folk paired off with the folk from the domain of She Whose Name Cannot Be Spoken. Casual and friendly the folk conversed with their partners. All spoke except the folk from the domain of The Silent

One, they merely smiled.

Moments passed in this friendly way. Then Marita sang a note which caused all the folk to turn as one to the trio and Mantu standing on the promontory. The Silent One stood directly in front of Mantu, his sword held before his face. She Whose Name Cannot Be Spoken on his right, and Marita on his left. He bowed slowly to Mantu who bowed in return. When the two male leaders straightened their frames to the upright positions, The Silent One extended the hilt of the sword to Mantu with both hands. Mantu received the sword in silence and the two female leaders moved to his side, Marita on his right and She Whose Name Cannot Be Spoken on his left. Nothing was spoken. The folk now knew what to do. The folk from the domain of The Silent One handed their swords to the Opposers by their sides. An awesome silence descended on the meadow. It clung to the folk and their leaders. She Whose Name Cannot Be Spoken sang a note of beginning, and movement returned to the gathered folk.

“Let us begin again,” said The Silent One in a voice with the Menace of the leader of the Opposers.